

# The Provenance of Bentley MkVI, B365GT

## Greg Johnston (Vic)

### 1. An Adventurer's Choice.

Bentley Mark VI (B365GT) with a Standard Steel Saloon body No 3351 was delivered to the Rolls-Royce service depot at Lillie Hall, Seagrave Rd, Fulham on 29 June 1950. Communication of this information to the car's eager purchaser would have certainly elicited a sigh of relief for the simple reason that demand for the company's first post-war model was such that by the time of the Earls Court motor show in 1948 delivery times were at least 24 months from time of order to delivery of the car to Australia.

While the customer is listed in the Order Book as Amalgamated Wireless (Australia) Ltd of 47 York St Sydney, the car was made to the specification of its Managing Director, **Sir Lionel Hooke**, who ordered it via York Motors, the Company's Authorised Dealer of William Street, Sydney.



above: Lionel George Alfred Hooke (1895-1974)

Lionel George Alfred Hooke (1895-1974) had an exciting life, best summarized as: Antarctic adventurer, Naval commander, airship aviator, telecommunications pioneer and business titan who in 1913 joined Marconi Company as a marine-wireless operator. That same year saw the amalgamation of the Marconi and Telefunken companies in Australia to form Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia) Ltd and he was a foundation member of the firm he later led as Chairman of Directors. In 1914 he was sent to accompany Sir Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Antarctic Expedition to the South Pole as radio operator on board the support ship Aurora, where he survived the grim experience of being marooned and cut off from the outside world for six months. During that time the Aurora's radio antenna became severely damaged and the 18 year old Lionel won high praise for not only repairing the equipment, but also

increasing its transmission range from 200 to 900 miles. In recognition of his outstanding contribution he was awarded the Polar Medal and made member of the famous Antarctic Club.

On his return from Antarctic in 1915 he was commissioned in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve and sent to England where he served as a deck officer on a submarine chaser. Subsequently he was appointed to command of armed rescue patrol tugs in the Irish Sea and later he became a pilot for the Royal Naval, having the distinction of being one of a handful of pilots to fly an airship.

Returning to Melbourne in 1919 the 24 year old Lionel Hooke was appointed AWA's Melbourne manager and promptly showed himself to be a true innovator in the field of international telecommunications being responsible for, among other things, the establishment of live parliamentary broadcasts, mobile police telephones and international wireless communications.

By 1926 he was in Sydney as Deputy General Manager and within 20 years, having guided AWA through the war years, he was appointed Managing Director. During the post-war years his vision and drive cemented AWA as an Australian household name, being at the front of the full spectrum of telecommunications in Australia including television, printed circuit boards and space tracking technology. He was knighted in 1957 for his services to the telecommunications industry and made Chairman of AWA in 1962, remaining in that position until his death.



Whilst the purchase of B365GT was Sir Lionel's first purchase of a motor car from the famous factory at Crewe, it was not his last. B365GT was replaced in October 1956 by a Bentley S, B151CM, with power steering in Shell Grey over Black. This was then replaced in 1966 by one of the first Bentley T series, SBH1288. In 1973



above: Sir Lionel Hooke's "office" - the AWA headquarters and tower at 47 York St in Sydney. When constructed, this Art Deco masterpiece was Australia's tallest building, and it dominated the Sydney skyline from 1939 until the 1960s. B365GT would have certainly looked at home parked in front of such a landmark building.

Sir Lionel augmented his collection of company products through the purchase from Sydney dealer George Sevenoaks (NSW) of his first Rolls-Royce - a magnificently-restored 1936 Phantom III, chassis 3AZ56.

Sir Lionel requested that B365GT be finished in the non-standard colour of Lime Green with a single red line and grey upholstery. When the author contacted the family in 2000 to inform them that he had acquired the car after it had disappeared from view for 20 years, the first question asked was "has it been repainted?" One

above: Lionel Hooke's 1936 Phantom III, (3AZ56), sadly no longer resident in Australia. can presume from the question that Sir Lionel's choice of colour was not met with enthusiasm by his family.

As one would expect in a car ordered for the chairman of Australia's largest telecommunications company, a high-

specification radio was fitted at the owner's instruction. Unlike the standard Radiomobile fitment, the radio "J13 7448" noted on the chassis card is a Radiomobile Model 4050 which offered 7 short wave bands and one medium wave band. This particular model did not have an integrated speaker like its standard cousin but instead had a separate speaker which was mounted in the right-hand cubby of the dashboard.

An elegant solution: the speaker for Radiomobile Model 4050 seamlessly



**above:** The better installation for the speaker of the Radiomobile Model 4050, behind a grille in B365GT to the right of the steering wheel.

integrated into the dashboard of B365GT in lieu of the normal right-hand cubby.

Another departure from standard specification is the order of "Extra kit of tools and spares". This refers to the very rare Isolated Territories Touring Kit which sadly is no longer with the car. Where will the author find another?

Apart from these features, the rest of the specification is as expected for an Export Model, Mark VI Bentley being shipped to Sydney.

On 10 July 1950 the **SS Arawa** (Maori for "Big Canoe") departed London for Sydney with B365GT safely stowed on board. The invoice to York Motors shows that the cost of delivery and freight to Sydney was £173/8/0 - halcyon days!

**Arawa** docked in Sydney with B365GT on 7 September 1950 and York Motors eventually delivered the car to Sir Lionel on 20 October, with the guarantee issued on 11th November.

On 3 January, 1951 with the odometer showing 538 miles, B365GT was given a full 1000 mile service. Then on 10th October, 1951 with 2426 miles showing, York motors collected the car from Sir Lionel's home and it was given a full service and most significantly the records show "fit petrol pump switch". This innocuous entry is a reference to the 3 way petrol pump switch so beloved of owners of pre-War Phantom IIIs, Wraiths and 4¼ litre Bentleys. With the resumption of production after the War, these were deleted from the specification of the company's cars, but after protests was reinstated as a "chargeable item" (to use the company's endearing

terminology). Service Bulletin #68 was issued containing detailed instructions for the location and fitment of the switch and B365GT remains the only known example of this retrospective fitting to a Mark VI exported to Australia.



**above:** Petrol pump switch as fitted by York Motors in 1951. To the right is the radio speaker in matching veneer, occupying the right-hand cubby space. Below is the charging socket with original plug in position.

Over the next 5½ years York Motors

cared for B365GT on a regular basis. Apart from the scheduled services, attention was given to the brakes, rear axle (twice), gearbox, clutch, valves and tappets. On

two occasions (1952 & 1953) the car was in the hands of Kellow-Falkiner, the Rolls-Royce agents in Melbourne, where Lionel Hooke's parents and in-laws lived. In June 1956 Sir Lionel disposed of B365GT to take delivery of a new Bentley S and the car is shown as having an odometer reading of 15,627 miles on 11 June, 1956.

## 2. In which our Hero's Fortunes fall Very Low.

York Motors sold B365GT to Amalgamated Timbers Pty Ltd of Mascot for the use of its Managing Director, Mr Woods.

He obviously relished using his new purchase as York Motors did not see the car until they serviced it over a year later on 14 August 1957 by which time it had covered 28,108 miles – some 12,481 miles in 14 months. The car remained in constant use and 12 months later on 22nd September 1958 it was time for more than just a routine service. A new clutch was installed twice before being handed back to Mr Woods and there was attention given to the gearbox as well. By this time the car's odometer was showing 39,563 miles.

By October 1959 the car was in need of a major overhaul, unsurprising given its irregular servicing and high mileage. So with 47,212 miles York Motors did a top-end engine rebuild and carburettor overhaul. The sobering (and dare one say expensive) experience of having such a major engine overhaul does not appear to have daunted our intrepid Mr Woods who continued to rack up the miles without troubling the York Motors service department. Naturally there were consequences: May 1962 (65,141 miles) saw new timing gears and in July 1963 (70,803 miles) no4 bearing was replaced and the flywheel was dressed up, a complete new clutch assembly installed

and gearbox mounting rubbers and the ride control pipe replaced.

All of the foregoing however was merely the prelude for the service records of 2 April 1965 (78,703): "Car towed to workshop. Sump cracked (!), ran without engine oil. Remove engine from chassis frame....." This time barely an item in the entire engine bay escaped the attention of the York Motors mechanics. Another ominous entry read: "Weld engine mounting brackets to chassis frame..." The circumstances which led to this repair being deemed necessary do not bear thinking about. On the other hand, the opportunity was taken to replace the original (and ineffective) "bypass" oil filtration system with the vastly improved "full-flow" system which had been introduced at the time of the launch of the Mark VI 4 ½ Litre in 1951.

Having been given a new lease of life B365GT continued to visit York Motors on an irregular basis although being used a little less harshly. By 17 October 1966 it had covered only 5149 miles in the 18 months since its last adventure when it came in with a reading of 83,852 miles for a front wheel alignment but no service! Much to the surprise of the Repair Department the car returned 5 months later (84,547 miles) and the entire front end and steering mechanism were completely overhauled. Having rebuilt most of the car forward of the windscreen whilst racking up no less than 69,000 miles in 11 years of ownership. Mr Woods sold B365GT in the May-June period of 1967.

## 3. B365GT takes a Breather.

Mr **Louis Cahn** was a gentleman dealer of Bellevue Hill who acquired B365GT for \$1500. In his hands the car covered only 500 miles during his 12 month ownership, but he still managed to lavish some attention on his new purchase, with a York Motors Repair Invoice (21st December, 1967) reading: "Remove and refit 4 door, sunshine roof, rear glass and windscreen wood mouldings. Repair and polish mouldings." The car was given a check-over and service at the same time.

In May 1968 Mr Cahn sold B365GT to its next keeper and recalled the transaction thus in a note to me in 2000:

"Mr Johnston Enclosures as mentioned. Bentley purchased for \$1500 - Sold for \$2000 "The Deal of the Decade."  
Regards and best wishes for continued enjoyable motoring.  
Louis Cahn".

#### 4. In the hands of another Adventurer.

Mr Julian Thirlwall MBE (1938-2001) of Mosman, New South Wales was the next custodian, purchasing the car from Louis



above: A youthful Julian Thirlwall pictured whilst on duty as a groomsman in 1963

Cahn in 1968 with the odometer reading 85,556. Thirlwall had migrated to Australia after spending decades practising law in Papua New Guinea He counted Papua New Guinea Prime Minister, Sir Julian Chan, amongst his more prominent clients and was awarded an MBE in 1993.

He did not keep B365GT long, selling it in less than 12 months after almost 9,000 miles had been added and the car's stolen mascot replaced. As a footnote, it is interesting to note that Thirlwall's final experience as a Mark VI owner, was when he purchased B213JN in 1998, three years before his untimely death from cancer.

#### 5. Yet another larger than life Owner.

Dr Colin Russell-Jones (1925-1985) was in General Practice in Canberra when he purchased B365GT just as it was serviced by York Motors on 18 April 1969. This occasion also recorded the colour of the car as being light blue. It appears that the car had acquired yet another larger than life custodian as Dr Russell-Jones had previously served with the Royal Flying Doctor Service before settling down to

below: The picture above shows Dr Russell-Jones and his wife being presented to The Queen and Prince Phillip at Broken Hill in 1954.



above: Colin and Peggy Russell-Jones pictured together in 1974, the last year of custodianship of B365GT.

the more pedestrian life of a Canberra GP.

Having settled down in Canberra after service with the RFDS, Dr Russell-Jones and his wife Peggy quickly acclimatised themselves to life in the capital, with its conferences, balls and galas - a colourful change after life in the Outback.

In Canberra, B365GT was notable for its rarity, with a contemporary report in the Canberra Times by its social columnist Gang Gang (!) noting: "...there are five Bentleys - the Prime Minister's; a Mark VI belonging to Dr Russell-Jones; Dr Paterson has one; and Ian McKillop the estate agent has one. The other is the magnificent white steed driven by Group Captain Carey the Rolls-Royce representative in Canberra...."

Although B365GT certainly worked for its living, covering 50,000 miles in 5 1/2 years of motoring with Dr Russell-Jones, it was regularly serviced and a sheaf of invoices reflect attention being paid to almost every major component of the running gear including one-shot, exhaust, front suspension, steering, braking system, gearbox and servo.

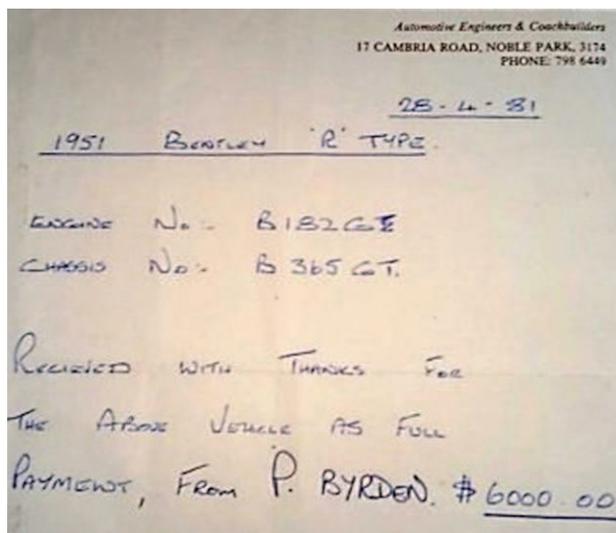
#### 6. The Mystery Years - and another colourful Owner!

B365GT was first registered in Victoria with the plate ITC192. According to AOMC records, this would date the car's first registration in January 1977 so there is a two year provenance gap if the car had been sold in 1975. The owner was registered at the time as Luke 's Gourmet Barbeque Pty Ltd and the registration lapsed in January 1980.

The author recalls that in the 1970s Luke's Gourmet Barbeque was a prolific advertiser in The Age, so it was only a moment's work to access the archives of The Age with the following result:

Readers of the Age Epicurean section were frequently regaled with advertisements such as that for The Great Clambake and Reef and Beef extravaganzas. In August 1979, renowned Age food critic Stephen Downes - clearly unable to resist such exuberant advertising - visited the establishment with his family with very poor service and food on offer and as one can imagine, the end followed swiftly:

A notice in the paper, dated 5 April, 1980. Announces that a liquidation sale of had been arranged distributed among the creditors. B365GT probably escaped such



above: Pat Byrden's receipt - wrong year, wrong model, but chassis and engine numbers are correct. Note the purchase price.

an ignominious fate as it was already at a restorer's premises.

#### 7. A Rescue from an Uncertain Fate.

Mr Pat Byrden acquired B365GT in 1981 in a most unusual way: his brother owned a small factory in Dandenong and its tenant, a car restorer, leased the premises. The restorer fell into substantial arrears with the rent and eventually Pat acquired the car to settle the arrears of rent owing to his brother. The car had been involved in a minor accident and had been purchased by the restorer who had subsequently repaired the accident damage at the time of the transaction.

Pat had left the car with the restorer to finish the repaint but soon received a call from his brother warning him that the Sheriff was on his way to change the locks on the factory doors! In Victoria if your car is on a premises when the locks are changed by the Sheriff, you lose possession of it until all debts owed by the business proprietor are settled, hence the need for frantic activity.

Pat arrived at the premises with a truck where a chaotic scene greeted him, with owners running around trying to gather up parts of several cars. No time was wasted in loading the still-intact B365GT and removing it to Pat's home where it stayed for the next nineteen years with Pat carefully tending to it, until my arrival on the scene.



I arrived at the owner's house to be greeted by an extraordinary sight. Instead of yet another neglected bucket of trouble, I found a carefully-stored and preserved later-series 4 $\frac{3}{4}$  litre Mark VI (immediately distinguishable by its wheel trims). First task was to inspect all the

and to conduct a more thorough inspection of my purchase. Firstly an inspection of the firewall-mounted chassis number B365GT, showing it to be a 1950 model and close to my B102HR of many years' ownership.

Most importantly, this chassis number denoted the fact that the car was fitted with the Company's most significant chassis improvement since the Mark VI was first produced – a completely revised front suspension geometry. Secondly, a number of intriguing and delightful features, which had escaped my notice during my initial awestruck inspection, now presented themselves. First to catch my eye was the fact that the right-hand cubby was filled in with a beautiful walnut veneer speaker grille which matched the rest of the dashboard perfectly. Now I had seen this before as it was identical to my B102HR and signified the installation of a higher-specification radio by the Company. Whilst not a common fitment to UK delivered cars, it was occasionally seen on cars sent to Australia and the author knows of a Silver Dawn in Victoria boasting the same specification.

The second charming addition was the discovery of the 3-position fuel switch referred to previously – a rare fitment indeed.

The third item was the presence of the trusty Smiths, 8 day mechanical clock fitted to the glovebox lid rather than the unreliable electric version which superseded it in the HR series of cars.

It didn't take long to figure out that whilst the 200 cars in the GT series were the first to have the revised front suspension, they were the last to be fitted with the 8 day clock, so I had purchased one of the very few!

The recesses of the boot yielded more riches in the form of the original radio and oil bath filter assembly, whilst under the spare tyre were a full set of tyre levers,

**above:** A beaming purchaser holding his treasured Smiths 8 day clock, removed for a service and still giving perfect performance many years later.



**above top** Pat Bryden, now 95, reunited with B365GT in 2019. Back behind the wheel of B365GT after almost two decades, Pat was thrilled at the car's transformation.

**above:** Love at first sight: a grainy photo showing B365GT sitting on blocks blinking in the morning sun in April 2000, clean and amazingly sound and complete. The eagle-eyed will spot the brass horn grille casting.

## 8. Phoenix Arises.

By the time an article celebrating the 50th birthday of my first Bentley Mark VI, B102HR, appeared in a Melbourne daily newspaper in December 1999, I had already been a happy custodian for 21 years during which time - and many readers will relate to this - I had rebuilt most mechanical components at vast expense, usually owing to decades of neglect from previous owners. One day in early April 2000 I received a phone call from an elderly gentleman who had obviously kept a copy of the article and had tracked me down. He told me that he had a Mark VI Bentley which had lain in storage for many years and was wondering whether I could spare the time to look at the car and give an idea of its value. Over the years since my purchase of B102HR I had seen many Mark VIs for sale, unsurprising given that Australia had been the Company's largest export market for the model. I can also say that they were as sad a collection of unloved/flogged-out/moth-eaten/rusty old bangers as one was ever likely to see, As most I had seen were in very poor condition so I barely raised an eyebrow given the numerous disappointments and dead ends that had wasted my time.

usual trouble spots: completely rust-free, no slop in the brass door slides, all 1-shot points looking reassuringly moist, no evidence of accident damage, all fixtures and fittings present and correct.

An article by well-known motoring journalist Chris de Fraga and published in the October 2000 edition of the RACV monthly *Royalauto* completes the narrative: "What impressed Greg even more was that, despite the fact that the car had been on blocks for 22 years, it took a minimum of work to get the car running well enough for him to take off up the coast to Sydney. Greg said: "You can imagine my surprise to find the car on blocks with tyres pumped up, sound bodywork, and in a spacious and well-ventilated garage."The fuel tank had been drained and filled with oil to prevent corrosion, the cooling system had been drained and the engine was turned over by hand monthly."The rarity of the find still has Greg impressed. "It was an enthusiast's dream. It was all there, the lot."

It will not surprise those readers who have had or have dreamed of a similar experience that I bought the car on the spot.

I returned later to complete the transaction



jack and handle, tyre pump and wheel disc spanner. All was present and correct too under the bonnet, with torch, crank handle, grease gun, oil gun and large oil syringe all clipped into their correct positions.

A stern reality check appeared when inspecting the interior: whilst the door cards and seat backs remained in their original Connolly Vaumol hide, all seat facings had shed their original leather now bore the hardest, most lurid heavy, industrial-grade grey vinyl imaginable. Donning my rose-coloured enthusiast-issue spectacles, I decided that this optical affront would be temporary and I imagined a day when all would be put right in this department.

The reality turned out to be a little different and for eight long years the interior shouted at me every time I opened a door. However, fate and timing intervened to deliver a complete leather and matching Wilton carpet interior from a very low-mileage 1950 Mark VI.

Following its recommissioning in April 2000, that great enthusiast of all things Rolls-Royce and Bentley, Denis Deasey (Vic), accompanied me on the car's trouble-free maiden excursion to Sydney and back for the Olympics, the story behind that journey will be found in *Præclarvm* 5-20, page 3618.

The intervening years have seen a program of steady improvement to B365GT with the objective of returning the car as close as possible to that which was delivered to Sir Lionel Hooke. Many years have been spent in tracking down the contents of the envelope which was handed over to every owner upon delivery by the company.

After the trip to the Barossa for the 2001 Federal Rally the car was treated



to a top-end rebuild to remedy damage caused by a broken piston ring. Since that time attention has been given to a new crankshaft vibration damper, new radiator core, braking system and shock absorber reconditioning, electronic ignition and a new clutch as the old one, whilst perfectly serviceable, had not been installed correctly, resulting in an irritating judder felt when reversing.

By far the most important improvement has been the fitting of a 14:41 crown wheel and pinion (one tooth taller than the fabled R Type Continental!) in 2009 which has ensured totally relaxed cruising at the maximum legal speed: the car is now what it should always have been to capitalise on modern Australian road conditions, ensuring that the Mark VI Bentley, as embodied by B365GT, remains a car for the ages.

**above:** 60mph at 2000rpm, a near-empty road somewhere near Gunnamatta with Bass Strait providing an evocative backdrop. Mark VI owners live for days like this.

**right** B365GT with its gorgeous new/old interior looking as it should. The rear blind now works too!

**below:** B365GT ready for the next 70 years.

