

Rolls-Royce Twenty Owner in Sydney's Long Bay Gaol

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It is rare that we find both a photograph of the original coachwork on a Rolls-Royce from the 1920s and a fine contemporary description of the craftsmanship that went into the body and its fittings. This is fortunately the case for 1923 Rolls-Royce Twenty chassis 83K7 with the rakish California top tourer by the Sydney firm of Missenden Road Motor Body Works managed by Fred Hack a masterful motor body builder. The photograph is from a motoring journal and the description from a newspaper via the National Library's remarkable Trove website. What's more unusual is that we also have a physical description of the original owner, Archibald Graham Chapman (1885-1962) - from a totally surprising source.

"A BEAUTIFUL ROLLS-ROYCE DE LUXE" was the heading in 'The Richmond River Herald and Northern Districts Advertiser', NSW, on 22 August 1924. "A 20 h.p. Rolls-Royce, with California top, has been prepared by a city firm for Mr. A. G. Chapman, proprietor of the Sydney Bag Stores. The body, mud-guards, and valances are made with English hand-rolled aluminium. The cushions, seats and lining of the hood are upholstered in Velmo plush. An ice-chest is fitted in the back of the front seat. It has polished maple doors. There is also a washing basin, and spirit decanters, photographic appliances, and tools which are fitted into the doors. There is a two-corner and roof lamp with holophane globes and a cigar lighter and smoker's companion on the dash. There is a specially embossed sun vizor and bevel-plate side deflectors. Flower vases in cut glass are fitted in the hood. The steps are finished with turn-over valances to the edges. The grids and mats are nickel plated. The luggage carrier at the rear is fitted with spring catches. The bevel plate glass windows have brown silk blinds to match the upholstery. Bumper bars are fitted to the front and rear of the car." This appears to be part of a promotion as it came just before the car was delivered to Chapman. A photograph of the car was also used in an advertisement for Missenden Road Motor Body Works.

Top: The 1923 Rolls-Royce Twenty chassis 83K7 with the California top tourer by Missenden Road Motor Body Works for Archibald Chapman. ['Motor Life' 22 November 1924.]



*Archibald Graham Chapman
(1885-1962). [Ancestry.]*

The physical descriptions of Archibald Chapman come from warrants issued for his arrest! He was described in 1930 in the New South Wales Police Gazette as, "5 feet 11 inches high, medium build, sallow complexion, dark hair turning grey, grey eyes, Roman nose, teeth in front gold filled; usually dressed in a double-breasted suit, bow tie, and a grey felt or bowler hat; a merchant; suffers from asthma, and coughs continuously when speaking." A warrant was issued on 26 February 1930, for alimony and maintenance of his wife and three children with £62 due. He was subsequently arrested by Detective-Constable Gilbert and Constable Turner, Sydney Police and discharged after the full amount was paid. However, a further warrant was issued on 15 October 1930 by the Children's Court Bench for his arrest charged with disobeying a magisterial order for the support of his children with £137 10s. and 8d. cost due." These were only part of the extraordinary legal battles waged between husband and wife that started ten years earlier in 1920.

Archibald Chapman, in common with his seven siblings, had Graham as his middle name after their mother's maiden name, Christina Matilda Graham (1846-1928). Archibald married Agnes Cecelia Ellen O'Reilly (1882-1949) on 28 February 1912 at Sydney's St Mary's Cathedral. Agnes's family came from Goulburn in NSW and the 'Goulburn Evening Penny Post' on 6 April 1912 reported on the wedding in the detail typical of those times, "The bride wore a handsome gown of ivory charmeuse satin, veiled with ivory ninon, and trimmed with duchesse lace and pearl embroidery. The long square Court train was handsomely trimmed with lace, and hand-embroidered with seed pearls. Her embroidered tulle veil was worn with a wreath of orange blossom and lilies of the valley. The bridegroom's gifts were a diamond and ruby ring and a bouquet with tulle streamers.... Later Mr. and Mrs. Archibald Chapman left for the Mountains, the bride wearing grey silk voile with hat to match." The Chapmans had three children born in 1917, 1920 and 1921.

Both Archibald and Agnes had retail experience. He was a shop assistant at McCathie's in Pitt Street Sydney and she was a saleswoman. Archibald remained with McCathie's until 1917. Agnes started the American Bag Store in 1913 in Oxford Street and this developed into a large string of shops. Their business model was based on the astute premise that no woman goes out without a handbag. Despite the young family, by 1920 the marriage was in trouble and Agnes took legal action to prevent Archibald from disposing of the businesses listed as, "39 Oxford-street, Sydney; George-street West, Sydney; 237 King-street, Newtown; and at the corner of Oxford-street and Crown streets, Sydney, under the name of The Sydney Bag Store." as reported in 'The Sydney Morning Herald' 3 September 1920. Other stores included one at 93/95 Liverpool Street Sydney and one in Brisbane in 1925.



Above: One of The American Bag Stores shops from the view looking south-west from the corner of Pitt and Liverpool Streets, Sydney. [City of Sydney Archives & History Resources.]

Archibald subsequently took every possible action to dispose of and hide assets to avoid or minimise support for his wife and children. One asset which was highly visible because of the press reports that it was valued at £2,500 was the Rolls-Royce.

The Sydney "Truth" newspaper had a reputation as a scandal sheet. The legal machinations between Archibald and Agnes were perfect for sensational

headlines from 1920 to 1940: "Wife and Husband in Litigation", September 1920; "Chapman v Chapman", September 1929; "Alimony Granted Chapman v Chapman", November 1929; "Amazing Liaison With Employer Pitt Street Girl Tells Story of Week-ends at Leura 'He Made Me Fake Cash Register Tapes' She Said Rolls-Royce Fit for King Worth Only £2500!", December 1930; "Chased Her Husband with Writs Fled in Her Nighdress Chapman Couple Sue Each Other for Thousands Former Lady-Love's Dramatic Evidence", June 1930; "Husbands, Wives, Brothers, Lovers! Tales of Money Matters and Drink Hidden in Dirty boxes Girl Discharged On Two Counts", June 1930; "Wife Loses Jury Finds for Chapman", June 1930; "Bag King Again Chapman's Estate Dispute Miss Hudson's Claim", December 1930; "'I Carried £900 In My Hip Pocket' Huge Sums Mentioned in Alimony Appeal Chapman Case Application", August 1938; "Bank Account Wanted - Chapman's £900 in Tasmania", September 1938; "Woman's Claim - Chapman Case Sequel - Claim for Damages", August 1931; "One-Time King of the Bag-Stores Now without a Legal Wife", September 1940.

Right: A newspaper headline about the Chapmans. [The Sun' Sydney 19 June 1930.]

BIG CLAIMS

£5000 AND £3000

HUSBAND v. WIFE



In 1931 Archibald left Sydney and lived in Tasmania and Victoria under a number of assumed names. It was not until February 1938 that he was located in Mornington in Victoria, arrested for the non-payment of permanent alimony and maintenance, and sentenced to 365 days gaol. It appeared that he had the means to pay but instead elected to spend the year in Sydney's Long Bay Gaol. In 1940 after twenty years of acrimonious legal battles Agnes secured a dissolution of her marriage on the ground of Archibald's association with Winifred Cox, who had earlier joined him in Tasmania. Archibald and Winifred later married. Archibald died at his home at Palm Beach one of Sydney's northern beaches in 1962.



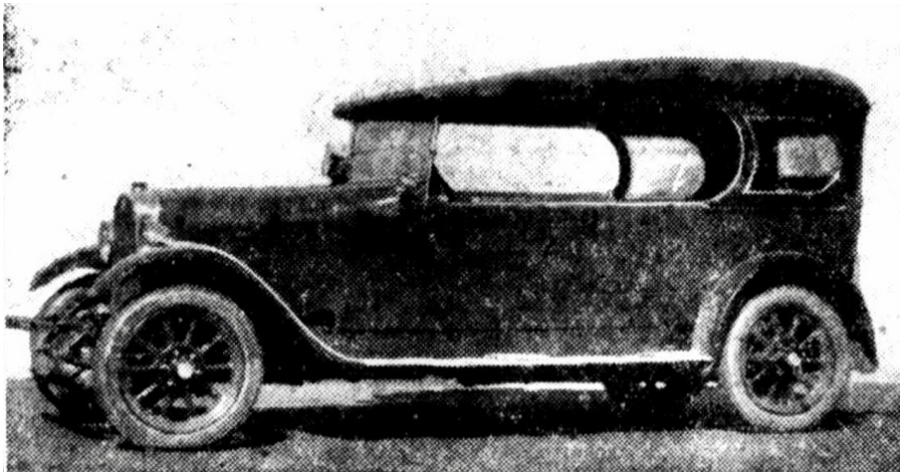
*Frederick Theodore Hack (1877-1939)
Adelaide and Sydney motor body
builder and South Australian
representative cricketer. [The Express
and Telegraph' Adelaide 3 November
1911.]*

Testing of Rolls-Royce chassis 83K7 was completed in September 1923 and imported by Dalgety. It went to the Missenden Road Motor Body Works in Missenden Road, Camperdown. The firm was located opposite St John's College which is within the grounds of the University of Sydney. The completed California top tourer was delivered to Archibald Chapman in September 1924.

California top tourers were popular from the early 1920s. The type originated in San Francisco in early 1920. They had the appearance of a tourer with the hood raised but the rigid top was permanently fixed. It allowed for more luxurious interior fittings. The open sides could be closed with glass panels but usually the normal side curtains for wet weather were fitted and stowed for example in a panel behind the back seat, which hinged forward. As well as Missenden Road Motor Body Works, the Sydney firms of Smith & Waddington and Jackson, Jones & Collins built California top tourers on Rolls-Royce chassis.

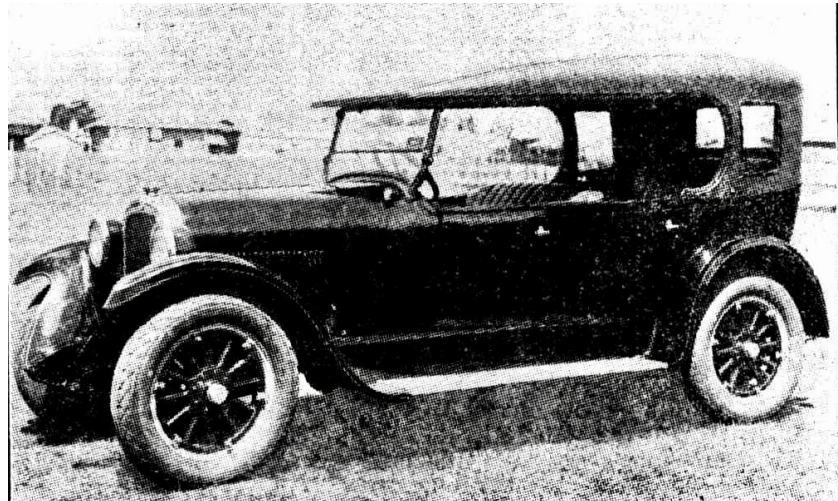
Missenden Road Motor Body Works, Ltd. was registered on 18 February 1920 and the first directors were Joseph Neal Grace, Frederick Theodore Hack and Harold Raymond Cush. Frederick Theodore Hack (1877-1939) was the only motor body builder amongst the three directors. In fact, Joseph Neal Grace (1859-1931) was not connected to the motor trade. He was a retailer and with his brother Albert Edward Grace (c1863-1938) founded the famous Sydney department store of Grace Bros in nearby Broadway, Sydney. The director Harold Raymond Cush (1892-1934) was the secretary and public officer of Grace Bros Ltd. It may be that Grace owned or leased the property though the streets in this area have changed significantly in the intervening period and current attempts to discover the land titles have so far been unsuccessful. It is also possible that Hack who had sold his very profitable business in Adelaide and Grace were financial partners in the venture.

Fred Hack grew up in Aldinga south of Adelaide in South Australia. He served his apprenticeship with the long-established firm of Thomas Barlow and Sons, carriage builders. He built a hugely successful motor body building business in Adelaide and sold out to Holden in 1917 when he decided to move to Sydney. Hack was also a talented cricketer and played for South Australia in interstate matches. He continued to play grade cricket in Sydney.

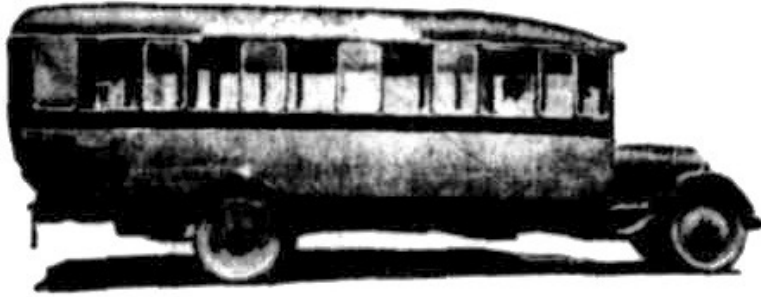


Left: An Austin 20 with a California top for Larke, Hoskins and Co. Ltd. distributors for NSW by Missenden Road Motor Body Works. [‘The Sun’ Sydney 18 August 1923.]

Right: A Dodge Bros tourer with a California top by Holden’s Motor Body Builders Ltd of Adelaide, the company that followed on from the former F T Hack & Co. [‘The Telegraph’ Brisbane 15 December 1925.]



In the 5 June 1924 edition of the ‘The Sydney Morning Herald’ it was reported, “The Missenden-road Body Works, Ltd., of which a former inter-state cricketer (Mr. F. T. Hack) is the manager, exhibited some very fine handsome examples of motor charabanc construction at the Royal Easter Show, part of the finish being a new idea introduced during the past few years of covering the body in fabrikoid instead of painting it.” Fabrikoid is an imitation leather composed of cotton coated with nitrocellulose patented in 1915 by Du Pont. Missenden Road Motor Body Works Ltd was wound up on 4 January 1928 and a liquidator was appointed on 25 June 1928. Hack went on to operate as a duco paint specialist at 555-7 Parramatta Road, Leichhardt. It is believed he returned to Adelaide in the 1930s.



The 32-passenger Limousine De Luxe 'Bus Body, with California Top, is fitted to a 50 A. White Chassis to order of Dalgety and Co., Ltd., for H. F. Aarsen, Newcastle.

Leather upholstery, motor springs, squabs and cushions, patent electric destination boards on sides and front, 6 roof and 2 step lights, bevel plate-glass windows with nickel frames, nickel-plated roof rails and ascension handles, ventilators to roof, special lining to hood.

LIGHTEST 'BUS BODY IN AUSTRALIA

MISSENDEN ROAD MOTOR BODY WORKS LTD.

(Fred. T. Hack, Manager.)

MISSENDEN ROAD, CAMPERDOWN

Ph. L.1283 (opp. St. John's College, near Parramatta Road)

A Missenden Road Motor Body Works advertisement illustrating a California top on a bus. ['Evening News' Sydney 2 January 1925.]

As might be expected from the disputes about money between Archibald and Agnes the Twenty was put up for sale and purchased in March 1929 by Maurice Shmith, St Kilda, Melbourne. Subsequent owners were A J Webb, Caulfield, Melbourne August 1930; E F Ablitt, Brighton, Melbourne November 1930; J Askew, South Yarra 1930s; J J Denton, 'Dentonville' Ivanhoe, NSW 1932; now with a sedan body Autoterms, Melbourne 1942, Oswald Gratton 'Strathmore' Heidelberg, Melbourne 1942; via Autoterms to Wm. Paterson, Edithvale, Victoria 1942; Arron Brain, Shepparton, Victoria 1945; Arthur R Cooper, Yarra and Oakleigh, Victoria 1946; via Club

Motor Insurance Agency to John W Fleming, Glen Iris, Victoria 1948; Wallace J Raeburn, Beaumaris and Caulfield Victoria 1949. Tourer fitted Terence Bruce, Westgate St, Oakleigh 1950s. William G R Fleming, Coburg, Victoria about 1959; sold by H N Halford, Victoria to Helsham H Wheeler, Euroa Vic. as a chassis 1964; George N Edwards, Albury, NSW as chassis 1968. A tourer body from an Alvis was fitted in 1989 and in 1990 travelled to Cape York and return. It went to the UK in 2018. This car history comes from 'Rolls-Royce and Bentley in the Sunburnt Country' by Tom Clarke and David Neely supplemented by Australian Twenty authority Bob Clarke. Terry Bruce, Bill Fleming, Helsham Wheeler and George Edwards are all listed as members of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia in 'Rolls-Royce and Bentley in the Rear-View Mirror – A History of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia' by David Neely. Both books were published by The Sir Henry Royce Foundation, Australia.



Bob Clarke sent this photo of Twenty 83K7 to 'Praeclarum' the national magazine of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia. Owner George Edwards is successfully fording the Wenlock River on the way to Cape York in 1990. ['Praeclarum' October 1998.]

Acknowledgement: Norm Darwin, 'Early Australian Automotive Design The first fifty years', H@ND Publishing, 2017.