

A Dozen Rolls-Royce Owners in South Australia in 1926

“T. Tait, Oaklands”

1910 Silver Ghost, Chassis 1425, John Dawson & Sons, Adelaide, Tourer (1922).

David Neely, Historical Consultant, Sir Henry Royce Foundation, Australia, 2022

“Rolls-Royce Owners – Twelve in State” was the heading of an article in the 26 January 1926 edition of the Adelaide newspaper ‘News’, which was published from 1923 to 1954.

It continued: “There are 12 owners of Rolls-Royce cars in this State so far as can be ascertained from records. On account of this rather small number casual observers usually look twice if they happen to see a Rolls-Royce purring along. Among those who are stated to own one of these cars, which are regarded as the aristocrats of the road so far as the British automobile industry is concerned are Messrs T. E. Barr Smith, Glen Osmond: T. Tait, Oaklands: C. H. Angas, Angaston: G. Milne, Brougham Place, North Adelaide: J. M. Reid, Victoria Avenue, Unley Park: J. P. Lewis, Nelyambo Station, Wilcannia: Napier Birks, Park Terrace, Parkside: Mesdames W. T. Mortlock, Martindale Hall, Mintaro: L. Hughes, Lee Lodge, Strangways Terrace, North Adelaide: M Symons, Walkerville: T.R. Scarfe, Eden Park, Marryatville: and Miss M. F. Simms, Moseley Street, Glenelg.”

Thomas Currie Tait was born in Dalkeith, Scotland in 1855. In the early 1880s he migrated to South Africa and worked as a carpenter and joiner. It was in South Africa that he met Catherine Curtis Johnson (1865-1930), who was born in Edinburgh. They married in 1882 in Cape Town. In 1884 they travelled to Australia and made their way to Silverton outside Broken Hill when it was in its hey-day following the discovery of rich silver deposits. However, by the mid 1920s Silverton was reported as “defunct and decayed”. Tait then had building contracts in Broken Hill. He built and conducted the Masonic Hotel and later the Royal Hotel. About 1910 they left Broken Hill. Tait had purchased ‘Oaklands’ estate at Marion south of Adelaide in December 1906 for £15,000, equivalent to about ten Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost limousines at the time, and established a stud for breeding racehorses. In 1923 he sold ‘Oaklands’ and bought a fine residential property in Moseley Street, Glenelg, next to the Methodist Church. Catherine died in 1930 aged 65.

The car was 1910 Silver Ghost, chassis 1425 and in 1926 Tait was the fourth owner. The first was William Kither, a prominent Adelaide butcher, who purchased it from Midland Counties Garage in Leicester while on a visit to London. Midland ordered a Rolls-Royce chassis and was assigned 1425 which was off test in September 1910. Barker constructed a landaulette body and the car was delivered to Midland on 21 November 1910.

Right: *The first owner of 1910 Silver Ghost 1425 was William Kither. [Adelaide City Council Archives.]*

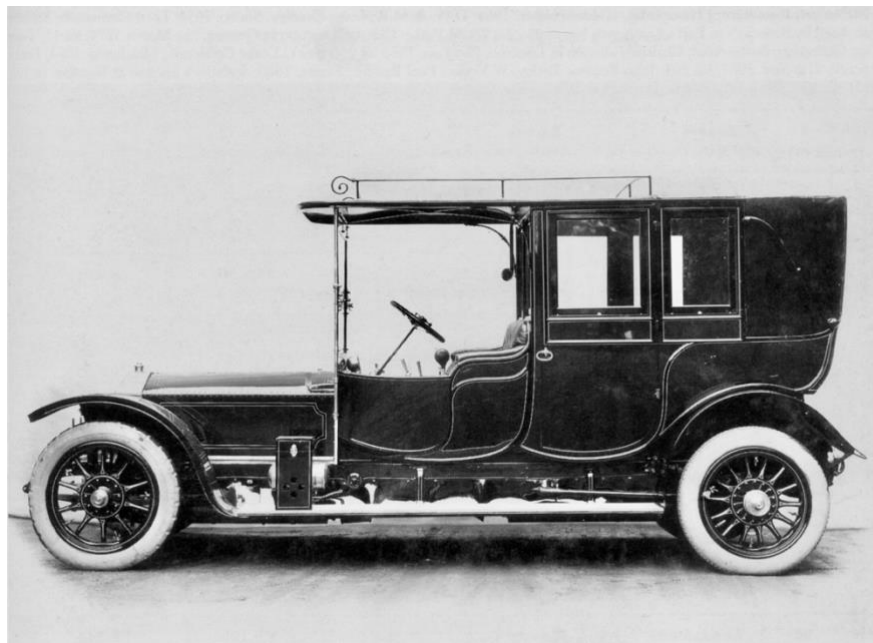


Mr and Mrs Kither had arrived in England from Adelaide on 26 March 1910. It was a homecoming in part. William Kither was born in Bromley, London, in 1843. Elizabeth Jane Morcomb was born in Cornwall, England, in 1842. They married in Adelaide in 1867. William was by now in poor health and was accompanied by a nurse. His health deteriorated and he died on 23 January 1911 in Knightsbridge. His body was taken back to Adelaide and was buried on 19 March 1911. Elizabeth returned to 'Morden', Mount Lofty, and proceeded with the plan to bring the car to Adelaide. 1425 arrived in February 1912. 'Morden', set in four acres of gardens, was sold in 1923 and Elizabeth died in 1936.



Left: Elizabeth Kither was a member of the Ladies' Committee of the Blind, Deaf & Dumb Institution of South Australia. She is pictured here in 1923 seated in the front row second from the right. [State Library of South Australia.]

Below: William and Elizabeth Kither's new Rolls-Royce would have looked like this when it was delivered to them in Knightsbridge, London, at the end of 1910. [Captioned "1910 landaulette by Barker" page 329 Volume I in John Fasal & Brvan Goodman's. 'The Edwardian Rolls-Royce'.]



Silver Ghost 1425 was next owned by W Mills, Adelaide, then Joseph Timms in Victoria in 1915. It returned to Adelaide and was owned by Mrs V A Zed by 1920. When 1425 was put up for auction on behalf of Vincent A Zed, 'Sunnyside,' Glen Osmond on 6 and 7 December 1921 it was listed, "18-H.P. (sic, typo for 48 h.p.) ROLLS ROYCE LIMOUSINE" so it still had the original Barker body. Vincent Anthony Zed (1885-1930), born in South Australia, was the son of a Syrian hawker. Zed had "an unusually picturesque career successively coach builder, business speculator, racecourse owner and buyer of valuable homes." The country home of Dame Nellie Melba, Lilydale, Victoria, was only one of his property speculations.



Above: This advertisement in 'The Mail', 2 July 1921, indicated 1425 still had the Barker landaulette body.



Above: The Tait family gathered here for afternoon tea on their Oaklands Estate. [State Library of South Australia.]

Inset: 'Oaklands' pictured in 1880. [State Library of South Australia.]

Tait bought 1425 and had it registered in March 1922. He commissioned a tourer body believed by the motor body building firm of John Dawson & Sons in the period 1922-24 as Tait died in 1924 in Glenelg. It was kept by the family for some time after Tait's death as it is recorded in his name two years later in the January 1926 newspaper article.

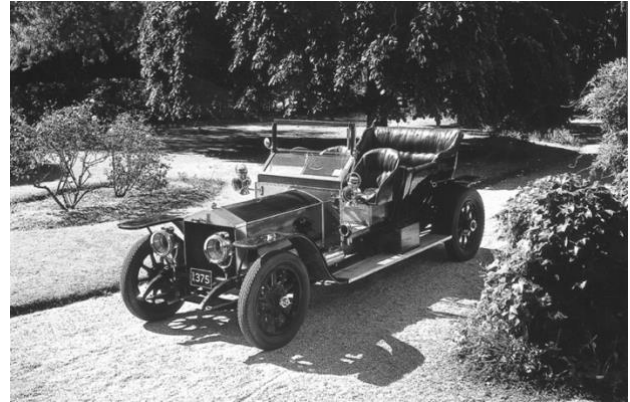
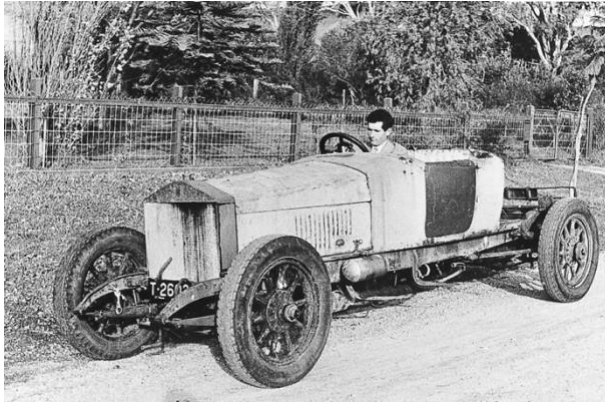


Above: 1910 Silver Ghost 1425 was rebodied as a tourer for Thomas Tait about 1922 believed by the Adelaide motor body building firm of John Dawson & Sons. [Courtesy of Margaret Messenger.]

Below: The premises of John Dawson & Sons, Limited, Motor Body Builders, Wakefield Street, Adelaide, in about 1927. The firm began business in 1900. [State Library of South Australia.]



The 1910 Silver Ghost 1425 passed from the Tait family and during successive owners it served, like 1910 Silver Ghost chassis 1338, as a farm utility until it came into the hands of an Adelaide veteran car enthusiast. The enthusiast was Gavin Sandford-Morgan (1925-2012) who in 1955 acquired 1425 with the remains of the tourer body. He undertook a magnificent restoration of the chassis. He then enlisted Cooper Motor Body Works to assist in constructing a period Roi des Belges style body – the first restoration of a veteran Silver Ghost in Australia.



Left: This is how 1910 Silver Ghost 1425 looked when driven home in 1955 by Gavin Sandford-Morgan. It had been converted to a farm vehicle but the bonnet, scuttle and front doors of the 1922 tourer were still intact. [Courtesy of Gavin Sandford-Morgan.]

Right: Gavin Sandford-Morgan's magnificent restoration of 1910 Silver Ghost 1425 with its Roi-des-Belges style body. [Courtesy of Gavin Sandford-Morgan.]

Sandford-Morgan's magnificent restoration of 1425 took the emerging Australian veteran car enthusiasts by storm. It amazed other entrants in the 1956 Golden Fleece Veteran Car Rally, the same year as the Melbourne Olympic Games. The rally went from Melbourne to Ballarat and return in November 1956. The 1910 Silver Ghost 1425 stood out for the standard of its restoration and performance. It won three sections of the rally, Elegance, Acceleration and the Hill Climb. As the first veteran Silver Ghost restored in Australia it inspired other veteran car enthusiasts around the country to embark on Silver Ghost restorations.

Sandford-Morgan with the Rev Lionel Renfrey founded the South Australia Branch, which first met in 1958. Both became Honorary Life Members of the RROCA, Lionel in 1967 and Gavin in 1975.

In 1958 Sandford-Morgan sold 1425 to Reginald R H Hunt (1923-2022) who had joined the newly-formed RROCA Victoria Branch in 1957.

Sandford-Morgan recounted the transaction with Hunt over 1425 when he wrote in the August 1988 issue of 'PRÆCLARVM', the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club magazine, "I was lucky enough to enjoy the ownership of 1425 for several years... most importantly, being the car in which I courted the young lady who was subsequently to become my wife... Unfortunately, the financial commitments of married life indicated that, when I received a tempting offer from Reg Hunt for

the car, it would be prudent to relinquish it to him. My wife always said that I swapped a Rolls-Royce for her, but I was completely non-committal on that subject!" Sandford-Morgan and Hunt were re-acquainted at the June 1962 Federal Rally in Mildura when Hunt attended in 1425.

Sandford-Morgan writing in 1988 paid tribute to Hunt, "It was nice to know that Reg Hunt kept and enjoyed the car for some 30 years after he bought it from me, and was a loyal and attentive custodian." In fact, Hunt was an attentive custodian of 1425 for 40 years.

In 1998 Hunt sold the 1910 Silver Ghost 1425 to John Kennedy, UK, though the car has been kept in Australia, in the custodianships of RROCA Club members. It is over sixty years since Gavin Sandford-Morgan restored it and 1425 is still regularly seen at Club events.



Above: Silver Ghost 1425 at the 1978 RROCA Federal Rally in the Barossa Valley. There is no Rolls-Royce mascot because this 1910 chassis predates Eric Sykes's Spirit of Ecstasy designed in 1911. [Cover of 'PRÆCLARVM' No. 78, 3 and 4, August, 1978.]

[Recommended reading: The complete story of 1425 and its restoration can be found at <https://praeclarum.info/> in 'PRÆCLARVM' No. 4-88 August 1988.]