



E. E. Agate Coach and Motor Body Builder Summer Hill, Sydney

by
David Neely (NSW)

1927 20HP, GOK74, E. E. Agate saloon when new, being delivered to Maurice Shmith. A Milton Kent photograph courtesy of David Shmith.

In 1889 Ernest Edwin Agate (1861-1930), in partnership with Thomas Dean, commenced business as Dean and Agate, coach and buggy builders and blacksmiths in Junction Road, Summer Hill, Sydney. The firm was located on the north side of Junction Road, between Henson and Bartlett Streets. Dean, who was the Mayor of Ashfield in 1888, continued to operate from these premises in 1891, while Agate formed a new partnership with Earner.

Agate was an English tradesman, who served his apprenticeship in the coachbuilding trade in a small town near Lewes, Sussex, England. He moved to Brighton after his apprenticeship, and there worked for one of the leading firms of coachbuilders, Messrs. Mercer Bros.

At the age of 25, Agate arrived in Sydney in 1886. His first job was with the Clyde Engineering Works at Granville, west of Sydney, near Parramatta. A few months later the contract on which he was employed was completed. However, a day or two later he found work in body-building with the Sydney Omnibus Company. He subsequently returned to the Clyde Engineering works where he was promoted to foreman of their

coachbuilding department, the position he held until he went into partnership with Dean.



This portrait of E. E. Agate was published in the 15 August, 1904 issue of *The Australasian Coachbuilder and Wheelwright*.

Earner and Agate established their business in the next block along Junction Road, between Bartlett and Moonbie Streets, on the corner of Bartlett Street. This partnership was also short-lived and by 1892, E. E. Agate, coach and buggy builder, was conducting his own business at this address. Dean continued trading until 1899, when McGregor and Sweeny, coachbuilders, took over what was by then 8 Junction Street. In 1900 Henry Sweeny was in business at 6 Junction Street.

Agate, who was now living at Summer Hill, married Catherine Richie of Granville. They would have met when Agate worked in that district. In anticipation of the marriage, a Marriage Settlement was drawn up on 17 December 1889 giving Catherine the use of land owned by Agate at Granville and Summerhill, as it was spelled, the latter of which was mortgaged for £250. The marriage took place in 1890 at Granville where Catherine's family lived. Her father, William Duff Richie, was in business as an agricultural implement maker in the Clyde siding near Clyde railway station. Shortly after their marriage, the Agates sold the Granville property for £70 in November 1890.

The Agate premises were extended in 1895 by the erection of a large and roomy shed for wood and smith's shops. Around this time Agate was said to have built several good jobs, including a low front sulky, a style that had by then become popular. Street numbering commenced about 1896 when Agate's address became 10 Junction Road and Dean's, number 8. The Agates lived on the site of the factory at 10 Junction Road in the early to mid 1900s.

The 1890s were economically depressed times and Agate did well to



E. E. Agate successfully spanned the coachbuilding and motor body building eras.

Left: A Drop-Front Phaeton exhibited by E. E. Agate at the 1905 Sydney Show. Right: The body on this 12/16 hp Star was built by E. E. Agate. Dr James Hollywood, of High Street, Maitland, is at the wheel. Photograph from *Parade From the Past*, compiled and written by John Hughes, published by The Veteran Car Club of Australia (NSW).



establish and expand his firm in this inhospitable business climate. Other coachbuilding operations did not survive this period. Agate exhibited a double phaeton on three springs and a single seat curved side cart at the Sydney Show in 1901. This work was said to have been plainly made and finished.

In 1902 Agate paid £212 for land at Granville. His parents-in-law, William and Jean Ritchie owned the land and they had defaulted on a mortgage of £200 to the Bank of New South Wales. Part of this Agate sold for £30 the following year and the remainder for £300 in 1911.

Agate was involved with the Master Coachbuilders and Wheelwrights' Association from its formation, and in September 1904 was appointed Secretary. He maintained a close association with the trade bodies throughout his career.

By 1909 motor car work had been added to the coach and buggy building business. There is a listing in 1911 for Ernest E. Agate in Junction Street, between Henson and Bartlett Streets, the area of his first business with Dean. This property, named 'Brundah' in 1912, appears to be the family home, while the factory was at 10 Junction Street in 1917, when the street was re-numbered. The street number of the factory site was not listed, though following the sequence of the street numbering, it would have been 47-55 Junction Road. Indeed, 55 Junction Road is given in the 1925-26 Motor Trade Directory. The last listing for Agate in Junction Road, Summer



This advertisement is from *Motor Life*, April 1923. It shows the firm had been in business for 34 years, confirming it commenced in 1889. The telephone number shown here as U 1288 was originally Ashfield 228 when it was connected in 1900.

Hill is in 1930. 'Brundah' survives, though houses now occupy the site of the former factory.

In the proceedings of the Tariff Investigation of 1916, Agate reported that in 1911 the business was reasonably profitable, but there was not as much profit in 1912 when output was down by £2,000. In 1913 he said was up on 1912 and in 1914 Agate employed about 35 hands.

Agate successfully steered his business over four decades from the coach and buggy trade through to the manufacture of motor car bodies. Known at the outset as a coachbuilder, his description of himself in 1916 to the Tariff enquiry as a coach and motor body builder reflected his work

spanning the two eras. Finally, in the 1920s his occupation was that of a motor body builder.

Ernest and Catherine Agate had three children, Athlee J. born 1891, Norman L. born 1893 and Dorith F. born 1899. Ernest Edwin Agate died aged 69 years on Wednesday 24 September 1930 at his residence, Braemar Flats in Kensington Road, Summer Hill. He had re-married and his widow Isabel and his three children survived him. Motor Funerals Ltd officiated at his funeral, which departed from his residence at 2:15 pm on Friday 26 September 1930 for the Church of England Cemetery at Waverley.

It is thought that E. E. Agate built eight bodies on new Rolls-Royce chassis: one Silver Ghost, 24LG; two Phantom Is, 29EF and 34LF; and, five 20HPs, GA79, GCK50, GOK36, GOK63 and GOK74. The only surviving E. E. Agate coachwork on a Rolls-Royce chassis is believed to be the saloon body on 1923 20HP, GA79.

References and acknowledgements: Tom Clarke, 'Sand's Directory', 'The Australasian Coachbuilder and Wheelwright', Electoral Roll, 'The Motor Trade Journal', 'The Sydney Morning Herald' and the invaluable assistance of the late Geoff Boscoe with searches from the Land Titles Office, NSW.

Ernest Edwin Agate.

Agate's signature in 1903.



The only surviving E. E. Agate coachwork on its original Rolls-Royce chassis is this saloon body on 1923 20HP, GA79, seen here at Bobbin Head in September 2002 on a NSW Branch event, photographed by David Neely. Note it is identical to the saloon body on GOK74, top of the opposite page. (A photograph of an E. E. Agate body during construction on page 140 and a drawing on page 141 of *Rolls-Royce and Bentley in the Sunburnt Country* by Clarke and Neely was incorrectly identified as GA79.)

