

# Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia

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## Early Days of the RROCA

### Conception, Birth and First Year

*Barrie & Margaret Gillings are the only husband and wife Foundation Members of the Club. Their carefully preserved early records of the Club, and powers of recollection that are obviously better than they give themselves credit for, have enabled them to piece together this account of the Club's first year. This article was written in 1996 for the NSW Branch's 40th Anniversary.*

In keeping with Rolls-Royce tradition, the formation of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia was unobtrusive, dignified and sedate. The first suggestions that a common bond of interest in Rolls-Royce cars might exist began to emerge in 1955, when several young owners were in the process of restoring vehicles. As was bound to happen, they met or heard of each other from their regular visits to Mr Bert Ward, service manager at the old York Motors Rolls-Royce Service Division in Devonshire Street, Surry Hills, Sydney, and Mr George Sevenoaks, the second-hand Rolls-Royce dealer at Crows Nest, Sydney. Both gentlemen could rightly be called the catalysts for the events which were to follow.

In early 1956, Mr Des Collings-Power and Mr Paul Samuels conceived the idea of forming a club catering exclusively to Rolls-Royce cars and the suggestion was made, by letter and word of mouth, that a meeting be held to organise the formation of a club. The suggestion came at a most opportune time, as by now there were about a dozen owners of widely differing backgrounds who were on a first name basis, having met, one way or another and anxious to give and receive advice and assistance in restoring and servicing their vehicles. Many were already members of other clubs such as the Veteran Car Club, the Vintage Sports Car Club and the Vintage Motor Club.

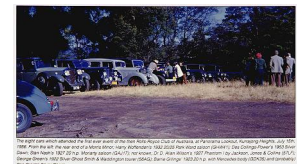
The first meeting was held in Des Collings-Power's office, Suite 30, 3rd floor, O'Connell Street, Sydney, on June 20, 1956. This location was ideal for the purpose. The office, which was sumptuously appointed, held the twenty who attended without too much crowding, and contributed significantly to the friendly and informal atmosphere. The office also had an air conditioner, a rarity in those days. This made almost as much impression on those attending as did Des Collings-Power's secretary, Fleur Robinson (later Mrs Paul Samuels) who acted as hostess and secretary for the occasion. Des Collings-Power was the chairman at the first meeting.

As is usual on these occasions, most of this first meeting was devoted to agreeing formally that the formation of the club was an excellent idea and that another meeting should be called to formulate and adopt a constitution and elect office bearers. It was agreed that this subsequent meeting would be chaired by Edward Lester Septimus (Sep) Hall, who, because of his legal and local government experience, offered to prepare a draft constitution. Paul Samuels undertook the job of Secretary, with Fleur Robinson as secretarial assistant.

Those who attended this meeting were deemed to be Foundation Members and were: Geoff Chandler, Des Collings-Power, Ron Ferguson, Barrie Gillings, Ron Grant, Terry Hunt, Sep Hall, Kevon Kemp, Sue Kemp, John McNamara, Stan Nash, John Nevell, William Nevell, Tony Purchase, Paul Samuels, George Sevenoaks, Margaret Tingle, (now Margaret Gillings), and D. Allan Wilson. George Green, who was unable to be present at this first meeting because he was chairing a Veteran Car Club meeting in the same building on the same night, was included in this list by a special resolution passed at a R.R.O.C. meeting in 1966, in recognition of his defacto presence and his continuous support of the Club since its inception.

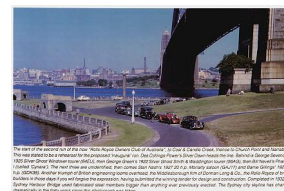
The second meeting of the Club was announced by its now official Honorary Secretary, Paul Samuels, to held at the same address on July 4, 1956. Paul's typed notice was headed "The Rolls-Royce Club of Australia" and invited Foundation members to invite other Rolls-Royce owners to attend. Sep Hall was Chairman. George Sevenoaks and Barrie Gillings were appointed as Vice Presidents, Tony Purchase as Treasurer and Sue Kemp as Registrar. It was at this meeting that the Club welcomed its first 'ordinary' member, John Andrew, then the owner of a 1910 Silver Ghost.

It was decided to hold an inaugural rally when the time seemed opportune. In the meantime, a run to Panorama Lookout, Kurrajong Heights, followed by a picnic lunch, was planned for Sunday, July 15, 1956. This event took place in weather so unseasonably warm that two vehicles boiled on the ascent. Eight cars and 30 members and friends attended.



At the following meeting, on 19 July 1956, the Club welcomed George Green, Elizabeth Griffin, Frank Morphett, and John Partridge as members. It was decided that meetings would be held on the first and third Thursday of each month. At this time a badge design was discussed, and Barrie Gillings and Kevon Kemp were appointed to solicit designs and arrange production. The firm of K.G. Luke, who prepared the 1956 Olympic Games medals, was selected to make the badges. The original design was to incorporate an octagon shape representing a wheel hub, with a Rolls-Royce shield which had a car badge in the middle, the whole being surrounded by olive branches, and surmounted by the lion from the Rolls-Royce crest.

Rolls-Royce Ltd were not in favour of the use of the intertwined RR on the badge, so this was replaced by a side view of the Spirit of Ecstasy. The octagon shape would have required special dies to be made. This would have been too expensive, so a simpler round design was adopted by the Club several meetings later. The various suggested designs have been published in an earlier edition of PRAECLARUM. One resembled the badge of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of America. It was at the July 19, 1956, meeting that the second outing was proposed. This was a run to Coal and Candle Creek, on July 29, 1956. The event started at the north pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and was attended by 13 cars and about 30 members and friends. This run, identified as a rehearsal for the 'inaugural' run, generated several press reports concerning Rolls-Royce cars seen travelling in convoy up the Pacific Highway to Gordon, Coal and Candle Creek, Church Point and Narrabeen. The lunch stop at Church Point created considerable local interest. However, the Club made no official announcements, before or after this event.



The Club continued to grow at a rapid rate. The next meeting, on August 2, 1956, welcomed Jane Fry (who later became Mrs John Nevell), Gordon Pennington and Eric Roberts as members. By now, most of the details of the constitution had been discussed, and had been supplied to all members in draft form. One important matter was the change in the name of the Club, from Rolls-Royce Club of Australia to Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia. At the meeting on August 16, 1956, the constitution was officially adopted. Paul Shellshear was welcomed as a member. September 23 was tentatively selected as the date of the 'inaugural' run. Already the Club Registrar was experiencing difficulty in obtaining information of Club vehicles and their histories, a tradition which has continued to the present day!

Robert Willis was accepted as a member on the meeting of September 6, 1956. At this meeting, copies of the constitution were distributed, and movies of motoring interest were

shown by George Green. In those days this was a sensation, as very few people owned 16 mm sound projectors. It was announced that the Club was able to offer car insurance discounts with Manufacturers Mutual Insurance. It was also announced that a meeting of the committee was held with Peter Birch, Director of Rolls-Royce of Australia, concerning the use of the Company's name, our badge design, and Club policies. The presentation of a wall plaque to the Company to signify the relationship between the Company and the Club was discussed, at this and on many other occasions, but nothing ever came of it.

Robert Williams was welcomed as a member at the meeting held on September 20, 1956. Two important discussions took place at this meeting. The first and most vexatious was the motion that Bentley owners be admitted to full membership. The matter that had been discussed for some time was now debated at length and it was resolved that Bentley owners not be admitted to full membership. (This was, of course, reversed many years ago for Bentleys of Rolls-Royce design and manufacture. - Ed.) The second matter was lack of space at meetings. It was clear that we needed a larger venue, and the Broadway Community Centre was selected. At this meeting it was also resolved to have a Christmas party in early December and a picnic day on Sunday, September 23, 1956, at the Colo River Bridge on the Windsor-Singleton road, at which seven cars attended. The inaugural rally was still being discussed.

On October 4, 1956, four new members were welcomed, Blanch and Vince Brown, Norman Cran and Robert white. The Browns, especially 'Granny' Brown were well known as the owners of the Phantom I which had participated and acquitted itself well in a Redex Around Australia Trial. At this first meeting in the new rooms some members had difficulty finding the location, and others thought the walls needed painting, so a working bee was organised for October 27. At the October 18 meeting, Len Partridge and a Mr G. Cambridge joined the Club.

At the November 1 meeting a notice of motion was received from Paul Samuels proposing an amendment to the constitution to permit associate membership.

It was announced that the Club had purchased a duplicating machine (a Gestetner, called much later by David Davis a 'Gestapo') as by now the task of hand typing the circulars using carbon paper was too much for our hard-working secretarial assistant, Fleur. It was decided at this meeting to conduct a gymkhana on Sunday, December 9, 1956, at Pitt Town airstrip. By now more benefits of Club membership were becoming apparent. Margaret Tingle (who became Margaret Gillings on November 10, 1956) organised a 10 per cent discount on books purchased at the Grahame Book Company. The meeting of November 15, 1956, marked a significant day in the development of the Club. Jack Vidler, Regional Representative of Rolls-Royce Australia was welcomed as a guest and the first official representative of the Company at a Club meeting. The proposed constitutional amendments were discussed but carried over to the next meeting. The President presented a report explaining the delay in holding the Inaugural





Run, as by now members felt that it was time to publicise the Club's formation.

At the December 6, 1956, meeting the Club rejected the proposed amendment admitting associate members, but accepted an amendment permitting the election of honorary members. The arrangements for the Club's first sporting event, the Pitt Town Airstrip gymkhana, were announced and the organisation finalised. This event was

held on Sunday December 9 and was a great success. Twelve cars attended, with Geoff Chandler winning the driving event, and Len Partridge winning the concours.

A Christmas dinner was organised for December 15, 1956, and subsequently held at El Rancho, a function centre on Epping Road at North Ryde, Sydney (now a large hotel complex). This function was very well attended by over 50 Club members and friends.

Secretary Paul did very well to include the December 9 Gymkhana and the December 15 Christmas dinner report in the December 17 newsletter. He did even better by recording the following, which is quoted in full:

"The first Annual Christmas Dinner, which was held at El Rancho, Epping, will be memorable for many and varied reasons, though the scene in which our President starred takes the cake. Entitled 'Sep's Tats', the film has no story or moral, but centres on our hero, E. L. S. doing a song and dance routine and showing off his false plate to the assembled company of 'extras'. Fifty Members and Friends witnessed this and other performances of note in the course of the evening, whilst imbibing this and that. A decrepit Phantom discovered Resting In Peace in the grounds of El Rancho created much furore; at least a dozen members resolving to acquire same".

The last meeting of 1956 was held on December 20, at which Sandra Green (daughter of George Green) was welcomed as a member. A draft of further amendments to the constitution was presented for consideration of members before the first meeting of 1957, which was held on January 17. These amendments covered Honorary Life Members, Foundation Members and membership fees. It was at this meeting that the first interclub activity was organised, an invitation to participate in a Vintage Motor Club All-Night Trial. This was won by B. Gillings and M. Tingle in their 1923 20 h.p. (GDK35).

*These are three of the large horsepower cars at the Pitt Town gymkhana. The one closest to the camera is Allan Wilson's 1927 Jackson, Jones & Collins Phantom I (57LF). The next is Geoffrey Chandler's 1926 Phantom I by Barker (84DC). The last car is a Silver Ghost, probably George Green's 1922 Smith & Waddington tourer (56AG).*



*These are the small horsepower cars that attended the Pitt Town gymkhana. The one nearest the camera is the oldest in the group, Bernie Gillings' 1923 20 h.p. with Mercedes body (GDK35). There are two 25/30s at the other end of the line — Len Partridge's 1938 coupé (GMO10) and Gordon Pennington's 1937 Thrupp and Maberly (GRP74). The others are 20/25s owned by John Nevell, Tony Purchase, Geoff Cambridge, and R. Williams, plus an unidentified car.*

Thus ended a most enjoyable and extremely active first six months of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia. Meetings, despite their being held twice monthly, were well attended and a great deal was accomplished in a short period. A badge was designed and put into production, a constitution was adopted, then amended twice, and six functions and two working bees were held. The Club received the blessing of the two most important representatives of Rolls-Royce in Australia. Club membership doubled, from the original 18 members to 36 and the foundations were laid for an annual Christmas dinner. However, the most significant annual event in the eyes of many members, the Commemoration Run, (which commemorates both the formation of the Club and the running of the first Royce car), did not take place until 1957.

Some of the Foundation Members still attend meetings and rallies. Three of them married people associated with the Club in those early days. But it is unlikely that any of them imagined in those early days how the Club would spread to all states of Australia, how much the membership would increase, how much liaison there would be between similar clubs in the United States and the United Kingdom, how much technical information would be assembled, how Foundations would be formed and how overseas enthusiasts would actually bring their cars to Australia to participate in R.R.O.C. of Australia events. It is a tribute to the quality of the cars we preserve and restore that they engender such enthusiasm. It is up to us, as custodians of these remarkable vehicles, to ensure that they continue as unique examples of motoring excellence.

*Photographs by Barrie Gillings.*