

From the Sir Henry Royce Foundation Archives Do you have an Australian Body?

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Hon. Archivist

If you are one of the lucky owners of a body built by one of the 83 known Australian coachbuilders who have built bodies on Rolls-Royce or Bentley motors cars in Australia and you want to know more about the firm in question we have something of interest to you in the Foundation's Archive.

The ever active and enthusiastic researcher, David Neely, has spent hundreds of hours researching Australian enterprises involved in handcrafting motor bodies for imported chassis and he has donated his well documented files to the Foundation. You may have read the 47 page account of the growth and development of motor body building in *Rolls-Royce and Bentley in a Sunburnt Country* by Tom Clarke and David Neely or one or other of the numerous articles on this subject which David has contributed to *Præclarvm*. Well, the Foundation's Archive has received all of the research material David has collected on this subject over many years and it could be of special interest to those of you who own an Australian built body.

Most of the earlier firms engaged in motor body building were former horse-drawn coach and below & right:Rolls-Royce New Phantom 35MC arrived in Australia in 1926 as a Hooper Landaulette for A J Cobcroft of Castlefield, Sydney. A Diskon & Molyneau saloon body was fitted in 1935 and after more owners it was acquired by Nelson Bros as a mourning coach in 1945. In 1957 it was sold and had numerous owners until RROCA Vic Branch member, Theo Nelson, bought it in 1990s for sentimental reasons and had Vintage Motor Garage in Sydney build a replica cabriolet body on the chassis. The interior woodwork is of a very high standard. (G M Ralph)



carriage builders who recognised the opportunity to broaden their activities into these "new fangled horseless carriages". Initially many of the bodies were made entirely of wood but later they began to cover the wooden frames with sheet metal thus introducing new skills into the body building trade – metal forming and fabric panelling.

David's research resulted in comprehensive files on many of the most significant firms engaged in motor body building including; EE Agate, Burlington, Cramp Bros, Cheetham & Borwick, Damyon Bros, Diskon & Molyneux, Holden's, Hopes, Jackson, Jones and Collins, James Flood, Kellow-Falkiner, Martin & King, Melbourne Body, Propert's, Richards, Roger Fry, Smith & Waddington, Sphinx, Supreme, Surrey, Waring Bros, Williams and dozens of smaller firms. All of these organisations built bodies on Rolls-Royce and Bentley chassis particularly between the

above:Richard Knight's 1923 Silver Ghost 97LK is one of the most elegant touring bodies built by the Melbourne firm of Waring Bros. They made 12 bodies for Silver Ghosts, two for New Phantoms and nine for 20hp cars. Richard has owned this car for about 50 years. (G M Ralph)

Wars and more recently many have been engaged in fashioning new bodies for earlier cars.

Australian motor body builders had a significant incentive to expand their activities towards the end of World War I when on 17th August 1917 the Government embargoed imports of fully assembled motor cars in an effort to reduce the overall cost of imports into Australia and conserve shipping space for war purposes. The resulting outcry from the motor car importers led to an amendment in November when the restriction was relaxed to allow one complete car to be imported for every three chassis imported. This situation provided a unique opportunity for the Australian body building industry. Within a few years the major suppliers of motor vehicles to the Australian market sought out local body builders to replicate bodies similar to their overseas





above: Julian Walter of Perth had Australia's most prolific current body builder, R Fry & Son, build this breathtaking coupe body on Phantom III 3CM49. It was fully designed and crafted by Roger Fry to meet Julian's extraordinary challenging requirements. It was presented at the MotorClassic in Melbourne earlier this year where this photograph was taken. (Roger Fry)

models. Holdens Body Works in Adelaide were best equipped to respond to this opportunity and apart from the contracted range of General Motors cars they were already building, Holdens began to produce bodies and assemble cars for Ford, Dodge, Hudson, Austin, Swift, Hupmobile, Morris, Nash, Chrysler, Rover, Vauxhall, Willys and several other makes. However, Holdens only produced six bodies for Rolls-Royce motor cars one being on a 20hp (GCK10) for Lady Holden. RROCA member Bob Clarke from the ACT Branch currently owns this car.

Using the current RROCA *Chassis Plate* David Kenway was able to collate a list of cars fitted with Australian bodies owned by members of the Club. Further research into records collated by Fred English in 1976, membership records for the 20 Ghost Club and

the extensive records collected by David Neely and Tom Clarke have resulted in a comprehensive listing of all known Australian bodied R-R and Bentley motor cars owned by members of the Club. The list is too long to be published here in detail but there are some interesting observations that can be made on this subject. For example there are at least 83 organisations or individuals who collectively have produced 510 bodies for R-R and Bentley cars owned by members of the RROC in Australia. The most prolific maker was Martin & King of Melbourne with 156 followed by Smith & Waddington of Sydney with 50. Other major suppliers were, Jackson, Jones & Collins 35, Waring Bros 22, Kellow-Falkiner 15, EE Agate 13, Cheetham & Borwick 12, Diskon & Molyneaux 10 and Properts 10. Of the remaining builders forty

below: This 1924 long-wheel base Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost 15RM was shown at the All British Motor Show in Melbourne in 1924 as a chassis and was then fitted with a locally built Limousine for Oliver Gilpin. It had a varied history until acquired by Jim Cooper in 1956 for \$60 and in the latter part of the 1950s he fitted this Melbourne built Vale & Pretty tourer body from a Voison. Richard Shenfield bought the car in the 1980s and has spent several years restoring this car. (G M Ralph)



five produced only one body each.

Amongst the RROCA members' cars there were 194 Silver Ghosts with Australian coachwork followed in order by 20hp with 146 then 90 New Phantoms, 20 were 20/25s, 17 Phantom IIs, 13 Bentley 3½s, 10 were 25/30s, 9 were 4¼ Bentleys, 3 Wraiths, 2 Phantom IIIs, two S1 Bentleys and one of each of a Silver Cloud, Bentley MKVI, R Type, S, and an S3 being a total of 510. Some of the more recent models were conversions from four-door saloons to two-door convertibles – a challenging task for any body builder.

There are some unusual situations which have occurred; for example in 1925 Smith & Waddington produced a neat two door coupe body for Eric Walton of Sydney on 20 hp Chassis GNK8. Walton bought a new R-R 20 HP (GGK69) in 1928 and transferred the coupe body to the new chassis and had a new body built by Smith & Waddington to fit on GNK8 for his son. Soon after the 20/25 was introduced Walton bought GGP19 and transferred the Coupe body to the new chassis. In 1936 he purchased a new 25/30 chassis (GMO10) and had his much loved coupe body fitted to it. The latter car was subsequently owned by RROCA NSW member, Len Partridge, and he won the Branch Overall Concours de Elegance in 1956 and again in 1964 plus several Class awards. Where is this car now?

The most significant post-WWII body builder in Australia is Roger Fry & Son in Perth. From a small beginning in 1981 Roger has built up his business to include the whole family. His wife Christine does the bookwork, his son Aaron is the metal shaper, his son Jason does the body prep and painting and his daughter does the upholstery. Roger attends to the design and woodwork. His family business has designed and built replica and/or remodeled bodies for 38 Rolls-Royce and Bentley cars to meet the requests of clients all over Australia. Many of his creations have been concours winners at rallies and events around the country.

If you have a motor car with an Australian coach builder's plate and want further information about the coachbuilder to add to your collection contact Gilbert M Ralph, Hon Archivist, 2/52 Glen Iris Rd, Glen Iris, Victoria 3146 or gilralph@bigpond.net.au for details of what is in the Archive files donated by David Neely. Alternatively if you have information you wish to share with the Foundation about your body we would be happy to hear from you.