

Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia

1910 Silver Ghost

Chassis No.1404

The Montagu Ghost - The Recovery and Restoration of 1404

Ian Irwin, 1988

Introduction

The production of the 6-cylinder 7,046 c.c. Rolls-Royce 40/50 h.p. commenced at the Manchester factory of the Company in 1906. The polished chassis of the car No.60551 was exhibited at the November 1906 Olympia Motor Show. The success of the 40/50 h.p. Rolls-Royce, shortly to be known as the "Silver Ghost" after the Olympia Motor Show display car, was assured. In fact, so successful was the model that many hundreds were produced and sold to the upper classes of Britain and the world in the first several years of production.

Chassis No.1404 was around the five hundredth 40/50 h.p. chassis laid at the Company. The plant had moved to the new Derby factory which had been opened in July 1908 by Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, motoring pioneer and publisher of the journal "Car Illustrated." This magazine had set itself the task of introducing the motor vehicle to the wealthy society of Britain, and in no small way contributed to the success of the 40/50 h.p. Rolls-Royce.

Lord Montagu acquired his first Silver Ghost model Rolls-Royce in 1908, Chassis No. 60751, one of only five 70 h.p. experimental models. This car he had named "Dragonfly" and it was widely used in the New Forest countryside and throughout England. It must have impressed Lord Montagu greatly, for he ordered another Rolls-Royce, chassis 1404 in mid-1910.

Construction of Chassis 1404

The introduction of the 1400 series Silver Ghost in 1910 saw the movement of the controls from the bulkhead to the top of the steering column, the introduction of a new larger diameter inlet manifold, and an improved braking system. Chassis 1401 was prepared for the London Motor Show and delivered on 20 October 1910. (This car was later recalled to the factory in January 1921, and its fate beyond that date is unknown).

Chassis 1404, the oldest surviving 1400 series chassis, was laid as a Long Wheelbase frame on 18 August 1910 and the Woodhead springs were fitted to the frame on 26 August.

Presumably the gearbox presented some initial problems having been road tested and rebuilt on 12 occasions from 19 September to 20 October before being designated on the chassis cards as "V Good all round". The dynamometer test was completed on 14 November 1910.

In many respects Chassis 1404 was unique. It was one of the very few Silver Ghosts to be factory-fitted with 7" Palmer Cord tyres. Perhaps little wonder few were so equipped, since the chassis cost £550.0.0 ready for the coachbuilders, and the five 7" Palmers cost an extra £73.1 4.0 over the cost of the normal 895 x 135 tyres as usually fitted to these cars!

The car was commissioned with C.A.V. lighting equipment and dynamo, fitted at the factory on 18 November 1910 thus being certainly one of the earliest (perhaps the first) Rolls-Royce to be factory fitted with electric lighting. The engine is fitted with the external harmonic balancer on the front of the crankshaft designed to prevent the whip in the long shaft. It is the earliest known surviving example and could perhaps have been experimental in this regard also.

The body was constructed by Barker & Company (Coachbuilders) Ltd at their factory at Shepherds Bush, London, under instructions to be "...similar to Lord H. Scott's..." equipped with low wooden side doors, Auster windscreen and rear seat screen, cape cart hood with curtains and extensions to be fitted by Barkers. Aluminium was to be fitted to the platform steps (or running boards as we now know them) "instead of India rubber", and cocoa mats strapped to these at a cost of £1.2.6. An Elliott speedo was fitted at a cost of Eighteen Guineas.

The completed car with 5« cwt body fitted weighed 36 cwt 2 qrs 9 lbs. The beautifully proportioned touring body was designed to carry "2 passengers in the front seat and 3 in the rear".

1404 was delivered to Lord Montagu on 14 December 1910 at a total cost of £1,155.00.

1404 and the Spirit of Ecstasy

It is extensively documented that by late 1910 the Managing Director of Rolls-Royce Limited, Mr Claude Johnson had become appalled by the proliferation of cheap and unsightly mascots being fitted to the Rolls-Royce by some of the Company's customers. Johnson called upon Lord Montagu, whom he had consistently used as an adviser to the firm. As Lord Montagu was the patron of a young artist and sculptor whom he employed on the staff of his journal "*Car Illustrated*", it was logical for him to seek the advice of this talented young man. Johnson accompanied Lord Montagu's recommendation and Charles Sykes was commissioned to create a statuette mascot suitable for the Rolls-Royce radiator cap.

Sykes had already been commissioned by Rolls-Royce in 1909-10 and had completed his famous set of oil paintings for the 1910 Catalogue of Rolls-Royce Cars. His work had been exceptional.

British author Paul Tritton in his work "John Montagu of Beaulieu, Motoring Pioneer and Prophet" (1985) has personally inscribed in my copy:

"If any car inspired Charles Sykes to create the Spirit of Ecstasy, it must have been 1404."

Certainly 1404, with its imposing Barker coachwork, and the Palmer Cord tyres at 50 lbs psi. would have provided as comfortable and quiet a ride in a motor vehicle as had ever been possible. Legend has it that the concept of the Spirit of Ecstasy came to Charles Sykes while he was riding in the Beaulieu countryside in 1404 with Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, and that Lord Montagu's personal secretary Eleanor Thornton was the model for the sculpture.

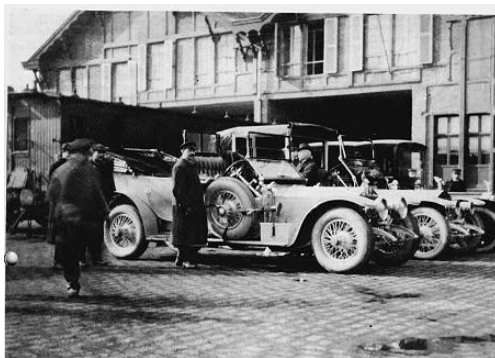


One photograph of 1404 depicts Eleanor Thornton on the running boards of 1404, and the photographer has carefully framed both her and the Spirit of Ecstasy, as if to say, in Paul Tritton's words, "This is the mascot, and here is the lady who inspired it." 1404 was certainly the first Rolls-Royce to carry the Spirit of Ecstasy mascot, soon to be made available for purchase as an accessory from 1911 onwards. It was not until 1921 that the Spirit of Ecstasy was fitted as factory equipment with every Rolls-Royce.

As Melbourne Brindle pointed out in his famous book "Twenty Silver Ghosts" a tradition had been established which has carried through to the present day. Together with the Grecian style radiator, and the entwined initials of Rolls and Royce on the radiator badge, the Spirit of Ecstasy formed the third of the now legendary symbols of Rolls-Royce.

1404 The Grand Tourer

Carrying the now famous registration plate AA 19, 1404 embarked upon a series of tours and adventures from 1911 to 1925.



This photo depicts 1404 at the Hotel at Auxerres in South Central France in 1911. Note that while the two accompanying Ghosts each carry the Spirit of Ecstasy mascot, 1404's mascot has not been removed. Teddy Stephens, chauffeur to Lord Montagu of Beaulieu stands beside the car. It is interesting to also observe the difference between the normal 885x135 tyres fitted to the two other Ghosts, and the 915 x 135 Palmer Cord Tyres on 1404. (Photo courtesy of the National Motor Museum and Lord Montagu of Beaulieu.)

Early in her life 1404 travelled to France on several occasions at least. One of these involved a party of three Rolls-Royce 40/50 h.p. cars. The photograph taken at Auxerres in 1911-12 shows the accompanying vehicles to be carrying their Spirit of Ecstasy mascots proudly atop the radiator, while 1404 has reverted to carrying the Life Membership badge of the Royal Automobile Club of which Lord Montagu was

President. Note in the accompanying photograph the difference between the 7" Palmer Cord tyres (915 x 135) and the conventional tyres (895 x 135) fitted to the other two Ghosts. Note too, the Boa Constrictor brand conventional horn, the huge C.A.V. headlamps and the unusually high profile of the rear of the front seat.

In the summer of 1911, Lord Montagu hosted Prince Henry of Prussia when the British component of the Prince Henry Trials came to the U.K. These trials were held in two stages, the first in Europe, and the closing stages in Britain. Several very clear photos survive depicting Prince Henry in 1404 and serve well to illustrate much of the unique character of the coachwork of 1404.

Around 1915, 1404 was taken on a longer journey, this time to far away India to serve as one of two cars held by Lord Montagu whilst there. Lord Montagu had been seconded to India from 1913 to undertake an assignment to assist the Indian Government to plan and construct highways to serve the nation. During the Great War period, and until 1919, Lord Montagu supervised the construction of over 7,000 miles of roads in difficult terrain. At the end of this period, 1404 returned to England and underwent a series of minor modifications including the replacement of the wheels and tyres with conventional artillery wheels and 895 x 135 tyres. It is interesting to note that with his new Ghost Lord Montagu undertook a road survey of Great Britain and his car was equipped with Palmer Cord tyres. It is quite probable that they were transferred from 1404 due to their success.



Subsequent Owners

Page 29 of the Rolls-Royce Guarantee Book reveals that 1404 subsequently went into the possession of T. Gibson-Bowles of Fawley, Hampshire in 1919, and later in the same year passed on to that well renowned automotive enthusiast and dealer Mr Graham White of The Aerodrome, Hendon.

By June 1920, Mr Carr of Coventry was the proud owner, but again not for long. It had been purchased by Mr Lionel Wright of Clapham, London by September 1921. A further sale took place by 6 August 1925 but the Guarantee Book omits to identify the new buyer.

From this point onwards, movements are obscure indeed, there being suggestions that the car was still in England in 1928 and even as late as 1931.

Australian Escapades of 1404

How, when, where and why this famous car came to Australia is indeed very much a mystery. Its whereabouts between 1925 and its demise in Australia in the 1930s have been the subject of much research, so far to no avail. Suffice to say that we believe that 1404 came to Australia in the late 1920s. The only thing that can be said with any certainty is that during this period it was rebodied with a conventional vintage touring body with nothing to recommend it.

We know that 1404 was owned in the Riverina, a rich irrigation and orcharding district of southwestern New South Wales, and most probably by a doctor. At one stage we believed that 1404 was purchased by inventor and agriculturalist Hugh Victor McKay, although research in this area has shown that he owned a similar car, Chassis 1500, originally owned by Dame Nellie Melba and delivered to her at the Ritz, London in early 1911. H.V. McKay Jnr confirms that his father only ever owned one Rolls-Royce before the Second World War. (Of course, I have also pursued 1500 and it appears that only one small component of that vehicle has survived.)

The facts which surround the demise and breakup of the vehicle are however much clearer. In 1937 a minor accident in which 1404 suffered a cart axle through the radiator core brought about the premature demise of the car. Low values on big powerful cars, remoteness from service agencies and the age of the vehicle were most probably factors which led to it failing to attract interest in a used car yard in Griffith for quite a while. The eventual buyer saw in this vehicle the possibility of blending the proven Rolls-Royce six-cylinder engine and transmission with the four-wheel brake frame and more modern body of a late vintage Packard. The blend could have been, in the eyes of the buyer, the ultimate car.

Once purchased, the car was removed to the rear of the town's cinema, where its body was removed and thrown away. The motor was carefully removed with its engine mounts all intact, and then placed into a cradle frame specially welded up to support and transport it to Queensland. The gearbox, drive train, steering column, box and wheel, radiator and bulkhead with instruments and the bonnet were all removed and transported along with other lesser components such as gear and brake levers and the foot pedals.

The chassis frame of 1404 remained for several years a neglected object at the rear of the theatre until, with the scarcity of steel it became of considerable interest to a Griffith farmer. Around mid-1941 the chassis of 1404 was removed to a farm not far distant from the town where it remained (more or less) until 1961. The frame was now to be converted for agricultural purposes. What better than a Rolls-Royce framed water cart, and a superphosphate spreader with Silver Ghost axles!

In the process of the conversion, the farm blacksmith meticulously stored many of the original Rolls-Royce components under the bench. Others were recycled to form various service and agricultural roles around the farm. The half-elliptic springs all survived, but the quarter elliptic rear springs were unfortunately thrown out in a clean-up in recent years, not being recognised for what they were. Over the years various bits had been assessed for other uses, and a search of several adjacent properties resulted in the retrieval of the brake cross-shaft

The rear axle of 1404 under the Riverina superphosphate cart in 1991. Note the modern steel disc wheels welded to the hubs.



complete with the equaliser gearbox and the set of original square headed Rolls-Royce mounting bolts at both ends intact.

The frame was cut down in length, and other structural additions made to hold a tank with several hundreds of gallons capacity to service field machinery. The former tractor axle used on the cart was welded direct to the frame. It was unrecognisable to most but the Ghost enthusiast. The axles were reasonably intact. While all four original artillery wheel caps fitted in 1919 were there, and in fine shape, the stub axles had been welded up, and the crown wheel and pinion had been removed from the rear axle housing and the axle half-shafts removed. Pieces of one only survived.

The wheels had all had their rims and spokes removed, and steel disc wheels from a Ford V8 welded onto the hubs. Shame, you might say but had the wheels not been serviceable in this manner, the chances are both axles might have been rejected long ago. These two farm carts provided yeoman service on the farm for forty years - no doubt the envy of those who saw them.

The story

Around 1958, a Queensland member of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club, while searching in northern New South Wales for the remains of a Brush car of circa 1908 manufacture near Inverell, was given directions to an owner of a Rolls-Royce who perhaps might have been able to help. This person, enthusiastic about the breed, had noted an old Rolls-Royce engine on another property some forty miles distant. The subsequent drive over revealed the engine of 1404, still in the cradle mounting, under a power pole in the open, with the bonnet now being used as a dog kennel!

To cut this quite long story short, contact was made with the owner at Buderim in Queensland, the brother-in-law of the property owner. A deal was soon made and the engine traded off for a matter of a few pounds. Upon returning to Brisbane a message was received that more of the car was available in Buderim and was of course duly collected. The car had been spread over more than a thousand miles for more than twenty years, and in 1960 or so, it came together in two places, Brisbane and Griffith.

A very close friend at the time advised me in 1975 of the whereabouts of the chassis in the Riverina, or what had once been a chassis! So, it all began. Due largely to the health of the owner six more years were to pass before we were able to secure the remains. Neither the Queensland owner of the motor and parts, nor the Riverina farmer knew of the other's existence. Forming the link between these two made the bringing back together of 1404 a possibility. Over 95% of the original Rolls-Royce mechanicals survive today, with only minor components missing. Most of these have been recovered by a network spread around the globe, during the last seven years. The acquisition of the trailer-based Ghost parts required two new trailer setups to be manufactured to achieve the same roles on the farm. This was achieved inside two weeks in 1981.

Now 1404's engine had been acquired to assist in the restoration of a 1909 Ghost, Chassis 1122. It had been intended to cannibalise the inlet manifold and the carburettor for 1122, although these were not the correct components as originally fitted to 1909 models. A lucky break in Sydney yielded a 1909 carburettor incomplete but basically there. The missing components were made up, and the final product exchanged to keep 1404's carburettor with the car. Neither 1404 nor 1122 had their magnetos with them, but we have achieved the impossible and found two of these and they have been rebuilt. 1909 instruments have been acquired to exchange for those from 1404, which have now been returned to the chassis after 50 years apart.

The Accessories

With the breakup of 1404, all the original accessory fittings have been lost from the car. A scavenger hunt began immediately in 1981 when we acquired the frame parts, and almost everything has been replaced. As the car will be rebuilt exactly as it was originally, it was important to locate examples of the same equipment. We have acquired the C.A.V. side lamps, large C.A.V. head lamps, the C.A.V. Diver's Helmet tail lamps and switchbox components. We have similarly acquired an Elliott speedometer, a clock, and a full set of Rudge 100 wire wheels and of course, an original 1911 Spirit of Ecstasy mascot.

The Restoration

Chassis 1404 has come back together under the one roof for the first time in more than 50 years. The task of the restoration of this most significant car has been made possible by valuable club contacts both within Australia and overseas, a substantial bank overdraft, a good measure of luck, and a heck of a lot of dedication and understanding on the part of the whole family. Many wives would have walked out under lesser circumstances!

In 1962 I acquired a Hooper limousine body originally fitted to the 57 h.p. Daimler of King George V in 1912. It was the intention then to make the minor adaptations to fit this body to 1404. Within a short space of time after its acquisition I began to come across photographs of 1404, and it wasn't long before I was convinced by Lord Montagu of Beaulieu and by Michael Ware, Curator of the British National Motor Museum that to have fitted that magnificent limousine body to 1404 would have netted a result where neither of the famous vehicles would have materialised again, but something of a blend of the two. The decision was finally made when we received additional excellent photos of 1404 taken in 1915, and when we acquired the set of wire wheels so important to the rebuild of the car. The recreation of the original Barker



The engine of chassis 1404 being inspected by H.R.H. Prince Michael of Kent (right), the present Lord Montagu of Beaulieu (left) and the owner during the Australian Bicentennial Castrol World Rally in March, 1988. Photo courtesy of "The Canberra Times."

coachwork was the only way to go, so the Hooper limousine was offered for sale to assist the expensive restoration. In all, we now have nine different original photos of 1404 showing that magnificent coachwork from different angles and with various vital bits of information.

Until the 1988 Australian Bicentennial Castrol World Rally is over, I simply cannot see my way clear to spend time on the restoration. What is being achieved is being done stealthily to keep the feeling of some achievement, and to avoid absolute frustration. It was never my intention to write up 1404 until it was completed, but pressure from many people to do so has caused me to yield.

I believe that nothing can now impede the restoration of 1404, but I would be pleased to hear from anyone who might have information about Ghosts in the Riverina in the 1930s, and from anyone who may be able to help with Auster front screen pillars, transmission brake drum parts, 1910 axle half-shafts, and a six-bow hood folding mechanism of this era.

It is sincerely hoped that 1404 can be completed in time for the 80th Anniversary of the Spirit of Ecstasy in 1991. Donations of folding matter will be gratefully received!

Acknowledgments

The story to date would not be complete without acknowledgment to a vast number of persons without whose support the rebuild of 1404 would never be a possibility. For their support, advice, assistance, and the provision of information and/or parts, I most sincerely acknowledge the following persons. The list is in alphabetical order, and I trust I have not overlooked anyone. Please let me know if I have, it certainly is not intentional.

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