

From the Sir Henry Royce Foundation Archives
The Barr Smiths and their Proper Motor Cars
 Gilbert M Ralph Hon. Archivist SHRF

Readers will have read Ian Irwin's fascinating history of Barr Smith's Rolls-Royce, 1388, in the last edition of *æ*. By coincidence I have been researching the Rolls-Royce and Bentley cars owned by this family and it may surprise readers to learn that over three generations they had at least 24 such cars which may well place them in the category of the most prolific users of Rolls-Royce and Bentley cars in Australia (with the possible exception on the O'Neil family). Sir Tom Barr Smith joined the South Australian Branch of the Rolls-Royce Owners' Club of Australia in 1963 and his son, Tom, a year later. Tom, the younger, was a frequent participant in Club events until 1994. Recently I have had some discussions with Tom and he has been very helpful in preparing this account of the cars he and the family owned.

The Barr Smith dynasty had its beginnings with Robert Barr Smith, the son of Rev Dr Robert Smith and his wife Marjory, nee Barr, hence the unhyphenated name, Barr Smith. Robert was educated at Glasgow University and migrated to Melbourne in 1854 as a partner in Hamilton, Smith & Co. In the following year Robert moved to Adelaide to join A L Elder & Co and in 1856 he married (Sir) Thomas Elder's sister, Joanna. Eight years later he and (Sir) Thomas Elder became the sole proprietors of Elder Smith & Co, owned two thirds of Adelaide Steamship Company and held extensive commercial and pastoral interests. The partnership flourished bringing substantial wealth to both families.

Barr Smith, lived in *Torrens Park*, a stately home which later became Scotch College. Sir Thomas Elder, who never married, lived in *Birksgate* at Glen Osmond and on his death in 1897 it passed to his nephew, Tom Elder Barr Smith and it remained in the family for many years. (Pic 1)

Elder and Barr Smith were both noted for their business acumen and philanthropy and were generous in their support of the University and many charitable organisations in South Australia. Both were patrons of the arts and keen on breeding race horses. Robert's son, Tom Elder Barr Smith (1st), succeeded Robert in his pastoral and business interests. In 1886 Tom had married Mary Isobel Mitchell and she bore six children, including Tom Elder Barr Smith (2nd) and it was he



above: Pic 1: *Birksgate* the Barr Smith family mansion at Glen Osmond (State Library of SA)

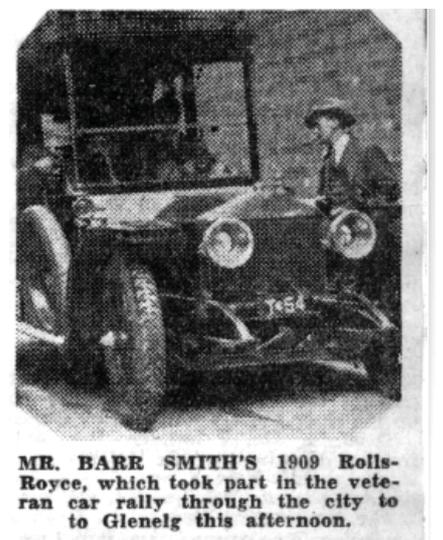
right: Pics 2 & 3: The South Australian Railways 500 Class 4-8-2 locomotive named after Tom Barr Smith (Author)

bottom: Pic 4: 1911 Silver Ghost 1388 in the 1935 Sporting Car Club of SA Rally from Adelaide to Glenelg driven by James Gosse, Barr Smith's nephew. (*The Mail*, Adelaide 30 March 1935)



who took an interest in motoring at the turn of the 20th Century. He became President of the South Australian Automobile Club in 1907. He was a highly respected individual in Adelaide community and among others things donated funds for the building of the Barr Smith Library at the University and a South Australian Railways locomotive was named in his honour in the 1926 (Pics 2 & 3). He died in 1941 by which time his 37 year old son, Tom Barr Smith (2nd), held directorships in all the family enterprises.

Tom Elder Barr Smith (2nd) was well educated in Australia and England. He joined the Militia in 1930 and became a Captain when aide-de-camp to Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven, South Australia's Governor. Tom married Nancy Greene in Victoria in 1936 and moved into *Birksgate*. He held directorships in many notable Adelaide based companies. He served on the



MR. BARR SMITH'S 1909 Rolls-Royce, which took part in the veteran car rally through the city to Glenelg this afternoon.

Adelaide City Council and his involvement in community affairs, sporting activities and philanthropy are legendary. He was knighted in 1959 and died nine years later.

Sir Tom's son, Tom Elder Barr Smith (3rd) grew up in Adelaide and he too became an enthusiastic motorist and participated in the activities of the RROCA attending at least three Federal Rallies. It was he who retained much of the family motoring memorabilia and recently donated an interesting assortment of Rolls-Royce and Bentley related material to the Sir Henry Royce Foundation Archive in Melbourne.

The first Rolls-Royce bought by Tom Barr Smith (1st) was a Silver Ghost, 1388 described at length by Ian Irwin in the last edition of *Præclarvm*. It was no doubt the most prestigious motor car in Adelaide at the time. The car remained in the family and was used by his son Robert and later his grandson, Jim Gosse, who drove it in the Adelaide to Glenelg car rallies in 1934 and 1935. (Pic 4 see previous page)

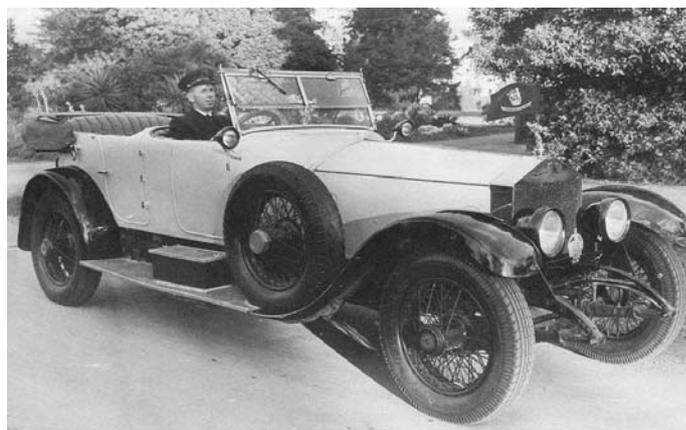
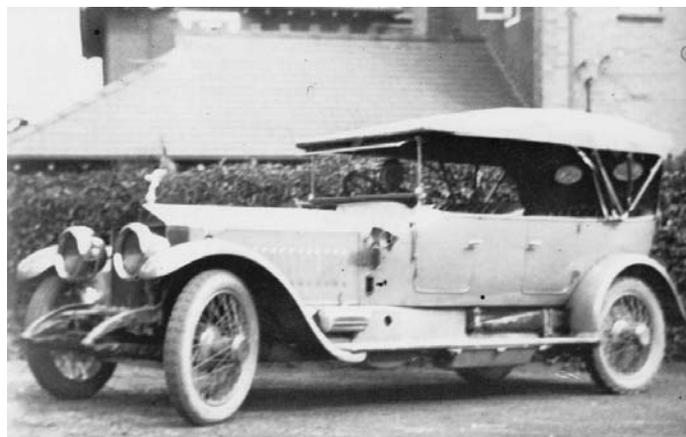
This important car was finally rescued in June 1958 by Laurie E Vinall of Adelaide and he spent several years restoring it and fitting a Roi des Belges body. Laurie, and subsequently his son, David, successfully participated in many RROCA events in South Australia and interstate. More recently it has been owned by RROCA members Bill and Jacqui Hall in Sydney. Ian Irwin recorded a more complete history of this car in his book, *Silver Ghosts of Australia and New Zealand*.

Tom Clarke and David Neely in *Rolls-Royce and Bentley in a Sunburnt Country* record that a 1914 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost came to Australia in 1914 where it was fitted with a tourer body by Angus & Son in Sydney and delivered to Tom Barr Smith, at *Birksgate*, where it registered as SA-6773 in April 1916. It was a four-speed Colonial chassis Silver Ghost, 47YB. John Fasal and Bryan Goodman in their definitive work *The Edwardian Rolls-Royce* record that this chassis came off test on 28th May 1914 and was fitted with Landalette coachwork by Regent Carriage Co for George Wills & Co in London. Fasal & Goodman then record that it was owned by T E Barr Smith in South Australia then R H Meares, of *Buyuma* in Sydney in 1916. Ian Irwin in *Silver Ghosts in Australia and New Zealand* says it was reputed to be owned by Barr Smith but, more likely went to Sydney where it was owned by Richard Meares. In 1929 it was rebodied by Properts as a saloon. All three researchers agree it was owned by T Mulvey of Beecroft, NSW in 1936. Irwin states that it was destroyed in a bushfire in January 1939. Tom Barr Smith (3rd) has no evidence of the family owning this car. (Pic 5)

Jean Barr Smith married Tom O'Halloran Giles, who in 1923 purchased Silver Ghost 33KG, a short chassis 'speed model'. They lived in Brougham Place, North Adelaide, where two near neighbors also owned Rolls-Royces. It was intended that this car was to be used by the Governor General, HRH Duke of Gloucester as part of the Victory celebrations in Adelaide in May 1945 but he was required to return to Canberra urgently. The car was sold soon after and passed through many owners, the last of whom was T M Tennant, an American teaching in Saudi Arabia. (Pic 6)

When Tom Barr Smith (1st) and his family visited England in the 1926 they hired a car and driver for their tour on the Continent. The car was a 1909 Silver Ghost, 1187, which had originally been a Barker Limousine but had been converted to an ambulance during WW1 and subsequently fitted with a tourer body in 1919. (Pics 7 & 8)

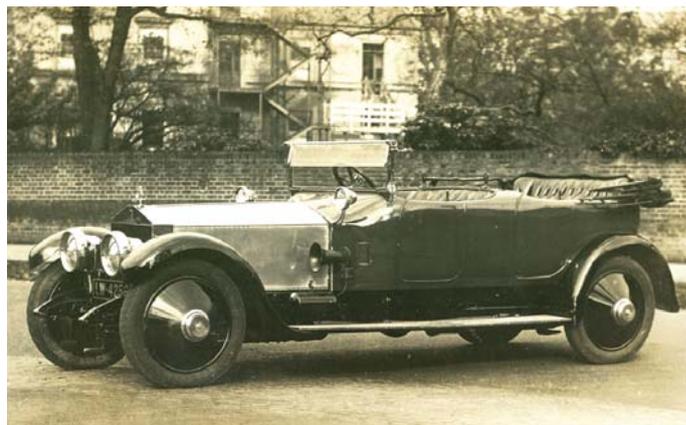
Tom Barr Smith (1st) was in London again in March 1928 to take delivery of a long chassis New Phantom, 40EH, which had come off test in January. It was fitted with a Park Ward V-screen limousine coachwork. After using the car in United Kingdom, and possibly the Continent, the car was shipped to Adelaide where it became the formal car for the Barr Smith

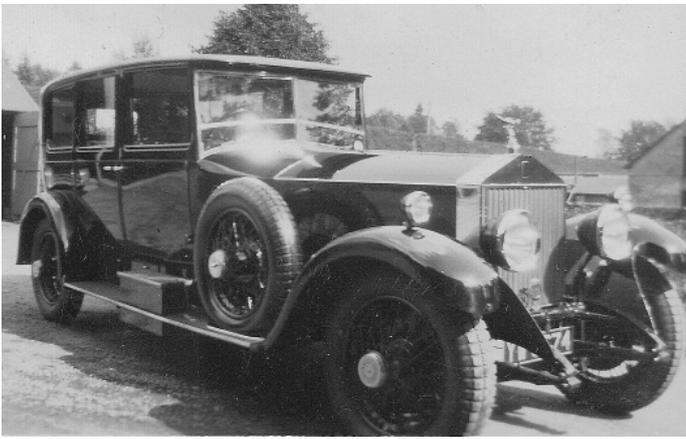


above top: Pic 5: Silver Ghost 47YB was thought to have been owned by the Barr Smith family. (Ian Irwin)

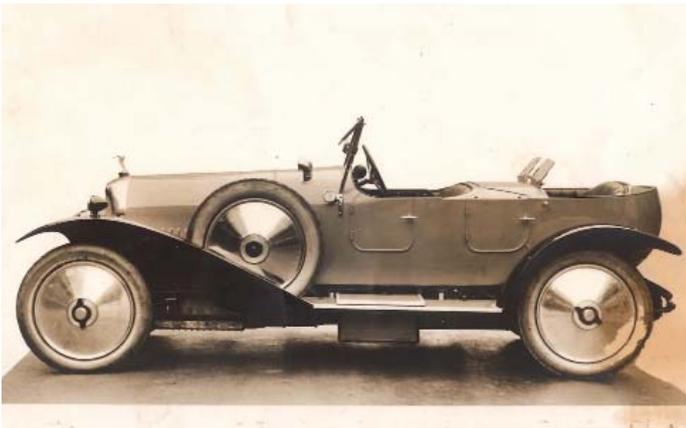
above: Pic 6: Jean Barr Smith married Tom O'Halloran Giles and they owned this handsome 1922 Silver Ghost, 33KG with H J Mulliner coachwork. (*Rolls-Royce and Bentley in a Sunburnt Country*)

below: Pics 7 & 8: The rebodied 1909 Silver Ghost, 1187, used by the Barr Smith Family while touring Europe in 1926. Ursula Barr Smith in Pic 7 (TE Barr Smith)





above top: Pic 9: New Phantom, 40EH at *Birksgate* (TE Barr Smith)



above: Pic 10: a 3litre Bentley owned by Tom Barr Smith (2nd) (TE Barr Smith)

below: Pic 11: 1933 Phantom II 26MY currently owned by Peter Willcox in Victoria (Peter Willcox)

below lower: Pic 12: 1927 Phantom 69EF now owned by Mark Babidge with its Roger Fry tourer body. (Author)



family until 1950. Tom Barr Smith (3rd) recalls this car and refers to it as 'the flying bedstead'. He told me the story about travelling in this car to farewell a relative at Parafield aerodrome when a young boy and he asked the driver to wait on Main North Road (which is parallel with the runway) until the DC3 took-off with instructions to try and outpace the aircraft. He says the car was also fitted with an exhaust cut-out. 40EH was sold to Bill Hayes of Dependable Motors in Adelaide in 1950. In 1953 it was in Perth and it passed through the hands of several dealers and owners until it was acquired by Paul Terry and exhibited in his Albany car museum in the 1980s. It participated in the 1985 RROCA Federal Rally in Perth. Later it was bought by Tan Ah Ee in Kelmescott. Its current whereabouts is uncertain. (Pic 9)

Tom Barr Smith's son, Captain Tom Elder Barr Smith (2nd), was an enthusiastic motorist, having had an assortment of large cars during the 1920s including a 3 litre Bentley. (Pic 10) His first Rolls-Royce was a second-hand Phantom I, a 1925 short chassis H J Mulliner-bodied tourer on chassis 44RC. It had been used as a demonstrator car by Napier Birks, manager of Motors Ltd, the Adelaide R-R agents. Clarke and Neely in their book, *Rolls Royce and Bentley in a Sunburnt Country*, record that Capt T E Barr Smith owned this car in 1933 but that it was badly damaged. An article I found in the *Adelaide News* reported that it had overturned when a front tyre blew-out on Glen Osmond Road and that Barr Smith sustained a broken leg and concussion. He is reported to have taken the car to England for repairs costing £1500. What happened to it after is not known.

When Capt Tom Barr Smith was in London in 1933 he took delivery of a new Phantom II Continental, 26MY, with Thrupp & Maberly saloon coachwork. After touring the Continent it was shipped to Adelaide where it was greatly admired. Barr Smith was a prominent member of the Sporting Car Club of South Australia and he was present at a Club event in 1935 which was reported in the *Adelaide Advertiser* on 29th January; 'In the other race - between Mr R H Dutton's 57 h.p. V12 Packard and Captain T E Barr Smith's 40-50 Rolls-Royce - the cars raced against the wind. From a standing start, the Rolls-Royce quickly overtook and passed the Packard, which had gained an early lead, but the heavy going retarded the Rolls-Royce's speed, and the Packard passed over the finishing line about a car length in front'.

The Phantom Continental was in the *Adelaide News* again on 13th March 1937, 'when it was taken by two men and used on a joy ride during which a speed of between 80 and 100 m.p.h. was reached' before it crashed. 'The two men were subsequently convicted and sent to goal'. Barr Smith explained that he took the car to England with him on the *Strathnaver* on 25th March, 'because the guarantee given by him by the Rolls-Royce Co stipulated that repairs to the car should be done in the Company's factory at Derby, England.' Obviously the car was returned to Adelaide and during the Second World War Captain Barr Smith made the car over to the Australian Army.

26MY was later returned to the Barr Smith family and Tom (3rd) says it became known as 'Grannies car' until it was sold and subsequently owned by several Victorians before returning to Adelaide in the 1970s when acquired by Frank Hannan and later by Brian Hallo. More recently it was bought by RROCA member Peter Crauford at Moyston. He sold it to Peter Willcox a well known collector in Melbourne in 2013. (Pic 11)

Capt Barr Smith's sister, Ursula, also had a new Rolls-Royce in 1933. It was a 20/25 H.P. fixed head coupé body by H J Mulliner on chassis GRW67. It was shipped to Adelaide where she used it regularly. In 1935 Ursula married Edward (later Sir Edward) Haywood, one time Chairman and Managing Director of John Martins Ltd and they moved into *Carrick Hill*, a delightful Jacobethan style house at Springfield on 100



above top: **Pic 13:** David Kenway and Andrew Brownell in GRW67 about the time it won the RROCA Restoration Trophy in Perth (SHRF Archive)

above: **Pic 14:** The 1937 Bentley 4 ¼ litre Park Ward pillarless saloon, B47KU, owned by two generations of Barr Smiths. (SHRF Archive)

below: **Pics 15:** Bentley B110MR when acquired by Tom Barr Smith in UK when at College (TE Barr Smith)

below lower: **Pic 16:** Bentley B110MR after colliding with a pole in UK with an unhappy but uninjured Tom Barr Smith standing alongside. (TE Barr Smith))



acres which was given to them by her father. The Haywards had no children and on Sir Edward's death in 1983 the entire property was bequeathed to the State. In about 1934 Sir Edward had purchased a second-hand, long wheel-based 1927 Rolls-Royce Phantom I, 69EF, which originally had a Gill Landaulette body but was later re-bodied in Australia. After numerous owners, it was acquired by Mark Babidge in Perth and he had Roger Fry fit a replica Barker tourer in 1995. (**Pic 12** - see previous page)

Later GRW67 had a succession of owners in SA, VIC, NSW and ACT. (**Pic 13**) It passed through Sydney R-R dealer George Sevenoaks in 1956 when it was sold for \$1000. It was later owned by David Kenway in Victoria and he undertook an extensive refurbishment in 1973-4 and it won the Restoration Trophy at the RROCA Federal Rally in Perth in 1974. He sold it to Ursula's nephew, Tom Barr Smith (3rd) but he only held it for a short time remarking to me that, 'It was too pristine for me - besides it was not fast enough'. It was last known to be in the vicinity of Canberra.

Clarke and Neely in *Rolls-Royce and Bentley in a Sunburnt Country* record that Capt Barr Smith bought a second-hand 1936 4¼ litre Bentley B172HK with Park Ward drop-head coupé coachwork which had previously been owned by J R Adams, British Trade Commissioner in Sydney. They record that Barr Smith sold this after the Second World War and it passed to other owners including Lady Cynthia Gengoult-Smith in Melbourne in 1956 but Tom Barr Smith (3rd) has no recollection of this car.

1936 was an auspicious year for Capt Tom Barr Smith. In March he married Nancy Leyland Greene of Melbourne and they moved into *Birksgate* where their four children were born. When they were in London in August 1937 they took delivery of what was to become their 'family car'; a new 4¼ litre Bentley, B47KU, with Park Ward pillarless saloon coachwork. It was shipped to Adelaide a month or two later. This car was sold in about 1950 but was for sentimental reasons was later repurchased by Tom Barr Smith (3rd) who used it when participating in RROCA Federal Rallies at Mildura in 1965 and again in 1968. It won the Pre-War Trophy in 1965 and the Gymkhana Trophy in 1968 in the hands of Tom Barr Smith (3rd). He and the car appeared again at the 1978 Federal Rally in the Barossa Valley. It was subsequently owned by Club members William Hodder and Charles Lloyd-Jones but it is no longer listed in the Club Register. (**Pic 14**)

As a young man Tom Barr Smith (3rd) went to England in about 1958 to attend the Royal Agricultural College near Cirencester and being familiar with Bentleys bought a second-hand 1939 Bentley 4¼ litre, B110MR, with an H J Mulliner saloon body. It bore the registration number FLH-6. Tom recalls this car well and said, 'It was unusual in that it had a central gear change, beautiful Marchal headlamps with a small green lens on top to indicate high beam and an ebonised dashboard'. (**Pic 15**)

Tom had an unfortunate mishap in 1960 when avoiding a passing lorry he swerved and crashed into a pole. (**Pic 16**) Luckily he was not seriously injured but the car was a write-off and he salvaged some parts from the wreck including the switch box which is one of the items Tom donated to the SHRF Archive.

To replace B110MR Tom bought another 1939 4¼ litre Bentley, B101MX, which was fitted with an overdrive top gear and Hooper Saloon coachwork. Considering the poor condition of this car he replaced the engine and some other components with what he had salvaged from B110MR. He used B101MX for the remainder of his stay at College and sold it in England before he returned to Adelaide. (**Pic 17** - see next page)

In 1951-2 Sir Tom acquired two MKVI Bentleys - a two-door Clubman by James Young and a four-door saloon body by H J Mulliner. The specifications and drawings of these

cars, together with some related memorabilia, are amongst the material recently donated to the SHRF Archive by Tom Barr Smith (3rd). Tom remarked that, 'the story behind the two-door James Young car is that Mother lamented Father selling the pillar-less Bentley, B47KU, and he agreed to buy her a car of her choice. Subsequently Charlie Ellis, from Motors Ltd in Adelaide, called into *Birksgate* and presented sketches of various coachbuilders' designs and Mother chose the James Young two-door Clubman saloon. In 1952 it (B260MD) arrived much to Mother's delight and it became her favourite car for many years. Its registration number was SA 8260.' B260MD was later sold to Tony Nelson, Austrian Consul in Adelaide and subsequently to Cyril Gove of *Kinloch* near Deniliquin, NSW. Several other RROCA members owned this car including, David Wilkie in NSW, Gerard Burkhardt in WA, Owen Bailey in Victoria and Peter Shellard in Victoria. It is no longer listed in *Chassis Plate*.

Tom went on to say that, 'Father disliked two-door cars and bought the H J Mulliner four-door saloon, B330MD, after it had been on display at the Melbourne Motor show in 1952. It was registered SA 17. He did a fair amount of travel in the outback and was disappointed that the car was not adequately dust-proofed. The car was returned to H J Mulliners for remedial works. They attended to the door seals and even put key-hole covers on the locks but to no avail. Mulliners just didn't understand the dust problems existing on Australian country roads. Mother also liked this car because it was very comfortable to drive at high speed – she once drove from Melbourne to Adelaide in less than eight hours.'

Tom related a further story that, 'Such was Dad's dislike of two-door cars that Colonel Manning of Jack Barclays told me that it was because of Dad's persistence that the four-door Continental was produced. I can recall being taken on a test drive up the M1 Motorway in a Fastback Bentley Continental which he rejected only on the grounds of having two-doors. By now he had a bee in his bonnet about two-door cars.'

B330MD, was sold to Doug Jarvis of Taperoo Industries Ltd and later it passed to several other South Australian owners including Bob Burnett-Reid. (Pic 18)

Tom Clarke and David Neely in *Rolls-Royce and Bentley in a Sunburnt Country*, list a 1953-4 Bentley R Type, B2UM, as having been owned by Tom Barr Smith (2nd) and registered SA RLK- 033, but Tom Barr Smith (3rd) believes that the 1953-4 R Type Bentley, B230UM, attributed to the Barr Smith family (and currently owned by Bill and Barbara Busby in WA) might be an error. He does however confirm that Eda A Barr Smith bought a Silver Dawn, SVJ15 in 1955. (Pic 19)

Probably the most impressive car at the 1955 Melbourne Motor Show was a 1954 Bentley Continental, BC30D, with a two-door light-weight saloon by H J Mulliner capable of 120mph. It had arrived in November 1954 for Mrs Dorothea Lewis of Toorak and she allowed the Agents, Kellow-Falkiner to exhibit it on their stand at the 1955 Motor Show. In 1970 it was acquired by Tom Barr Smith (3rd) but it appears that he held it for less than a year after which it returned to Victoria and was owned by M P Reid, D Reid then J L Townsend until 1977 when it was bought by Graeme McK Miller in Victoria. (Pic 20)

Tom Barr Smith (3rd) relates the circumstances which prompted his father to buy a Rolls-Royce when in London in the late 1950s. 'On one of the occasions he didn't take a car with him on a trip to UK there was a taxi strike so Dad bought a Harold Radford "Countryman" version of the Silver Cloud I and he liked it so much that he brought it back to Adelaide, rust and all. It had the full treatment – the Wabasto sunshine roof, picnic basket, table, padded seats on the rear bumpers etc'. It was chassis SHF187 and bore the registration number SA-1072. It proved popular with the family for visits to their various rural properties. It was later owned by RROCA member Ronald Hunter in NSW. A little



above top: Pic 17: The attractive Bentley 4 ¼ Hooper saloon, B101MX, used by Tom Barr Smith in UK. (TE Barr Smith)



above: Pic 18: The two Mk VI Bentleys acquired by Barr Smiths in 1952, B260MD, left and B330MD (SHRF Archive)

below: Pics 19: A 1955 long-boot Silver Dawn believed to be SVJ15. (SHRF Archive)



below lower: Pic 20: The 1955 Bentley BC30D at Tom Barr Smith's home, *Beachwood* at Stirling. (TE Barr Smith)



earlier he had bought a second-hand silver grey Bentley S2 which had belonged to Sir Ellerton Becker – possibly in the name of Lake Victoria Properties.’ (Pic 21)

In 1957 Sir Tom Barr Smith collected a Bentley S1 Continental, BC7DJ, with an H J Mulliner four-door Flying Spur coachwork painted in what became known in the factory as ‘Barr Smith cream’, from Jack Barclay in London and soon after he and his wife, Nancy, began a tour of Europe. The S1 was fitted with a three-band radio. Barr Smiths travelled about 50,000 miles in this car before selling it to Clem Ryan in Adelaide in 1961. Clem had the car for about 40 years and covered another 50,000 miles before selling it to Rolls-Royce enthusiast, Peter Cox in 1990. In 2006 Peter won the Conservation Class Award with this car at the RROCA South Australian Annual Concours de Elegance. (Pic 22)

Barr Smiths also had a Bentley S3 Standard Steel Saloon which was purchased in the name of Lake Victoria Pty Ltd and Registered SA 5884.

During the 1960s another Rolls-Royce appeared in the garage at *Birksgate*. Christine Barr Smith had married Dr Christopher Laurie and he shared the family’s interest in Rolls-Royce. He purchased an old Silver Ghost, 3PP, a short chassis which came off test in October 1919. Originally it was delivered to Sydney as Barker tourer. After a succession of owners Christopher purchased the car and with the encouragement of Tom Barr Smith (3rd) undertook its restoration and had it registered as SA 1919. It later passed to his son Hamish. Where is it now? (Pic 23)

The last new Bentley bought by Sir Tom was B30FG, a 1964 Bentley S3, with H J Mulliner Flying Spur coachwork which her and Lady Barr Smith used when touring the Continent that year. For this adventure he had a Touring Kit in the boot but found no need to use it and it is now in the SHFRA Collection at Bill Allsep House. This was the last Bentley bought by Sir Tom before he died in 1968. (Pic 24)

Tom Barr Smith (3rd) bought a Rolls-Royce standard steel saloon, chassis SRH18981 from Edward Godfrey at Motors Ltd in Adelaide in 1974 and it was registered SAN 111. This car currently belongs to Henry and Helen Slater in Heathpool, SA. Tom also told me he owned a Bentley Turbo R which he bought from Lance O’Neil. This was the last Bentley owned by Tom Barr Smith (3rd). His interest in motoring however continued and he has had an eclectic collection of exotic cars over the years and has been involved with numerous motoring clubs and at one time was proprietor of the Healey Workshop in Melbourne. Currently he has two Bristols, an Austin Healey and an AC in his garage at Flinders where he and his wife, Jenny, now live in retirement. Their son, Tom Elder Barr Smith (4th) lives nearby at Flinders but whilst he has an interest in sporty cars he has never owned a Rolls-Royce or a Bentley.

It would seem that the Barr Smith family tradition of owning Rolls-Royce and Bentley motor cars has come to an end after nearly a century.

I would like to acknowledge the valuable input into this account by Tom Barr Smith (3rd) and for access to his collection of family memorabilia and photographs. I have drawn heavily on Tom Clarke and David Neely’s book *Rolls Royce and Bentley in a Sunburnt Country* and David Neely’s comprehensive history of the Rolls-Royce Owners’ Club of Australia, *In the Rear-View Mirror*. John Fasal and Bryan Goodman’s book, *The Edwardian Rolls-Royce*, was helpful in respect to the early Silver Ghosts as was Ian Irwin’s book, *Silver Ghosts of Australia and New Zealand*. Tom Clarke reviewed the draft and gave some helpful advice. I found *The Australian Dictionary of Biography* useful and appreciate access to photographs from the State Library of South Australia. I also drew on the records and photographs in the Sir Henry Royce Foundation Archive in Melbourne.



above top: Pic 21: The Radford ‘Countryman’ Silver Cloud I at *Birksgate* with Sir Tom seated on right. (TE Barr Smith)

above: Pic 22: 1957 Bentley Flying Spur, BC7DJ, when owned by P Cox in Adelaide. (P Cox)

below: Pics 23: The 1919 Silver Ghost 3PP at *Birksgate* in the 1960s (TE Barr Smith)

below lower: Pic 24: The Touring Kit No 15 used by Sir Tom Barr Smith while touring in Europe. (Author)

