

The Rolls Statue Re-sited: MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

THE RE-DEDICATION

TERRY SUTTON & JACK WOOLFORD

(We are indebted to Vanessa Jupp of Dover Harbour Board for the use of the video she so skilfully produced.)

On Friday 2 June 1995, the re-dedication of the Memorial to Charles Stewart Rolls, attended by very many of our members, took place on the sea front. Jonathan Sloggett, Registrar and General Manager of Dover Harbour Board, began the proceedings by thanking Impact and the Rolls Royce Enthusiasts Club for their help.

L - R: Councillor P. T. Wilson, Chairman D. D.C., Gordon Bruce, -the world expert on the aviation exploits of the Hon. Charles Rolls, A. F. (Budge) Adams, Dover Society, Michael Evans, Chairman of the Rolls-Royce Heritage Trust, Air Commodore J. C. Atkinson, C.B.E., Director of the Air League and Jonathan Sloggett, Managing Director and Register of the Dover Harbour Board..



80 They had become aware a year or more ago through Budge Adams and the Dover Society of the need for removal of the statue to its original 1912 site on the Guilford Lawn. During War the statue had suffered bomb damage and was later moved further along the promenade but it was thought that the original site would be more appropriate. The Harbour Board was pleased to have taken part in the move.

The Reverend Graham Batten, Vicar of St. Mary's & Chaplain to the Port, dedicated the Memorial.

Mike Evans, Chairman of the Rolls Royce Heritage Trust, said that as a life-long employee of Rolls-Royce he was honoured by the invitation to unveil the statue. He paid tribute to the work of the Dover Society, the initiative and persistence of Budge Adams' campaign and the help of John Gerrard, Dover Harbour Board's Services General Manager, unfortunately unable to attend, and to Impact and the Dover District Council which made the site available. He also thanked the Rolls-Royce owners who had graced the occasion with their cars.

Charlie Rolls was a co-founder of the Rolls Royce Company which set up in business in 1902 with the aim of selling motor cars to fellow-members of the military and gentry. Cars at that time were foreign made, mostly from France and Belgium. Being patriotic, Rolls always wanted to sell cars which were best, yet British. That came about through the medium of Henry Edmond who introduced him to Henry Royce an engineer in Manchester.

On 4 May, 1904 a meeting took place there at the Midland Hotel, and on his way from London he told Mr Edmond he had a vision of a car with which he hoped his name would be associated in the same way that "Chubb's" were famous for safes and "Broadwoods" for pianos. Rolls and Royce met over lunch and a friendship rapidly developed despite the difference of age.

Royce had produced a prototype two-cylinder, two horse-power car. The meeting led to the production of a range of motor cars, with two, three, four and six cylinders, which were made in Manchester and sold exclusively by Rolls in Mayfair. They were called Rolls-Royce. Their success was immense and after some two years it was decided to consolidate the parentage of the cars by creating a Rolls-Royce Company which was formed on 15 March, 1906. The Memorandum of Association declared the intent to manufacture motor vehicles "on land sea and in the air". This was less than two years after Wilbur and Orville Wright in 1903 had proved that an aeroplane could fly. This was vision, if you like, and largely due to Charlie Rolls.

Already by the time Rolls-Royce Ltd was formed, the motoring press was claiming that the six-cylinder RR was the best motor vehicle in the world. The Silver Ghost completed a 16,000 mile run without problems and cost only £2 2s 7d (£2. 12p) to restore to its original condition. This car consolidated the reputation of RR as making the best car in the world, which it remained to this day (he said).

Charlie Rolls was born at 35 Hill St., Mayfair on 27 August, 1877, the youngest son of John Alan and Georgina Rolls, who later became Lord and Lady Llangattock. He was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge where, unlike many in

his era, he read "Mechanical Sciences", as engineering was then known. He was later employed by the London and North Western Railway at Crewe where RR engines are still produced. For a man of his breeding he was certainly something of a scientist as well as an engineer. He devoted all his life to new forms of transport. At Cambridge it was the push-bike, and he obtained a half-blue for cycling against Oxford University. He turned to motor cars from there and was the first car Cambridge undergraduate to own a car, in 1895. He was active in promoting the cause of the car, notably in the 1,000 mile trials of 1900, which sought to prove to chief constables and magistrates that the car was a suitable alternative to the horse. In continental road racing he also held the land speed record - though this was never confirmed as the land on which he drove was not flat enough to meet the rules. In 1906 he was the winner of the second Tourist Trophy race on the Isle of Man.

From motor cars it was only a step to ballooning. In 1898 he took his first flight and in 1901, with Frank Hedges Butler and his daughter Vera, became co-founder of the Aero Club, now the Royal Aero Club. Charlie Rolls quite deliberately set out to meet the Wright brothers in 1906. He went to New York at the very time that RR floated its shares on the market.

On 7 December, 1906 he met the Wright brothers but some time was to elapse before he made his first flight, in France on 8 October 1908, with Wilbur demonstrating their capabilities. The experience changed the rest of his life. From then on he was dedicated to aviation.

He learned to fly with gliders before owning his own powered machine, and was the second Briton to gain a pilot's licence, following Lord Brabazon of Tara. He made several significant flights in a Wright machine and his greatest achievement was on 2 June, 1910 when he made the first two-way non-stop English Channel flight, a flight of great significance, only a year after the Frenchman Louis Bleriot's pioneer Channel flight. These flights opened a number of eyes in Britain, including Lord Northcliffe's, whose "Daily Mail" declared "Britain is no longer an Island." Newspapers pointed out that the Royal Navy could no longer protect Britain's insularity.

The Statue in 1940: on its original site in Guilford Lawn.
Staff of the East Kent bus garage checking for bomb damage



The concept of the statue in Dover, and another at the family seat in Monmouth, was to commemorate the cross-Channel flight but sadly, five weeks later, he was killed on 12 July, 1910 in a flying accident at Bournemouth. As result this statue became a Memorial rather than a tribute. It was sculpted by Kathleen Scott, named on the plinth, whose husband Captain Peter Scott, R.N, had perished in the Antarctic, although unknown to her, just four weeks previously.

The loss of Charlie Rolls was a tragedy to his family, to Rolls-Royce, to his friends and to this nation of ours. He was a great schoolboy hero of a past era, yet his heroism and achievement remain today. The nation owed him a very great debt. He gave his time, money, study and, eventually, his life because he saw the danger of indifference and the folly of delay in the matter of the loss of our insularity and the danger to our Empire. He forced Britain to wake up to the danger of air power from a potential enemy, as was proved in two world wars.

Miss May Jones gives a lively spectator's view:-

At 10.40 am on Friday, June 2nd, the first arrivals of the Rolls Royce Enthusiasts' Club were gliding effortlessly eastwards along Marine Parade. Fifteen minutes later a convoy of more than twenty vintage Rolls-Royces appeared, in close formation behind their official police escort, from the opposite end of the sea front. From here they were marshalled, with due solemnity, on to the promenade facing the sea with their backs to the railings, which allowed the gathering crowd of Dovorians and visitors to admire their well kept exteriors and chat to their owners.

One of the Rolls-Royce vintage cars that helped to grace the occasion

