

## Official Newsletter

No. 1 2020

### Welcome from the RSLC

Thank you for reading the first *Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire Newsletter*, and for your interest in our Society. The RSLC – established in 1878 – is a registered charity which aims to promote understanding of, and public interest in, the history of Lancashire and Cheshire – including Manchester, Liverpool, Chester and Preston – through the publication of historical records and other activities.

If you are a member of the Society, we are very grateful for your support. If not, you can find out more about the RSLC, including details about how to join (and receive annual volumes at the members' price of £20), at <http://rslc.org.uk/>. Alternatively, you can write to Diana Dunn, East Manley Hall, Manley Lane, Manley, Frodsham, WA6 9JE or [d.dunn@chester.ac.uk](mailto:d.dunn@chester.ac.uk)

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### The RSLC Digitisation project

We are pleased to announce that many of our past publications are now available in digital format, **free to users**. A full list of digitised volumes, and links to access them, can be found on our website: <http://rslc.org.uk/publications/>. This digital library – comprising 140 (searchable) volumes, and covering a wide range of topics and historical periods from the eleventh to the twentieth century – provides a valuable resource for all those interested in the history of Lancashire and Cheshire. RSLC editions published within the last ten years are not available online, but can be purchased via our website.

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## Professor Alan Harding and Dr Colin Phillips

During 2019, two former Presidents of the RSLC sadly passed away. Alan Harding and Colin Phillips contributed enormously to the Society over many years, and both will be greatly missed.

Alan Harding served as President of the Society for seventeen years between 1981 and 1998: the second longest Presidential term in our 141-year history. During his years of distinguished service, he oversaw the publication of fifteen RSLC volumes, covering a wide range of topics from the middle ages to the twentieth century. He was Professor of Medieval History at the University of Liverpool between 1980 and 1996.

Colin Phillips was President of the Society between 2013 and 2018, following over 25 years' service as a council member. As President, Colin drove forward a number of important initiatives. These included new procedures for an Annual General Meeting, featuring a public talk on some aspect of the history of Lancashire and/or Cheshire; the organisation of the Society's archives; regular book launches to promote and celebrate its publications; the much-needed creation of a website for the Society; and the initiation of a major project for the digitisation of its past volumes. He was formerly a Senior Lecturer in Economic and Social History at the University of Manchester.



Liverpool Central Library



The Athenaeum, Liverpool

## Annual General Meeting 2020

Our AGM will take place in Meetings Rooms 1&2, Liverpool Central Library (William Brown St, Liverpool, L3 8EW), on **Wednesday 8 April**, beginning at 1.45pm. It will be followed at 2pm by the inaugural Colin Phillips Memorial Lecture, to be delivered this year by Professor Mark Towsey and Mr David Brazendale. They will introduce their forthcoming (2020) RSLC volume: *'An Ornament to the Town': The First Minute Book of the Athenaeum, Liverpool, 1797-1806*, and shed light on the fascinating development of public libraries in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England. **ALL ARE WELCOME.**



*DR CRAIG HORNER, Senior Lecturer in History at Manchester Metropolitan University, tells us about the research and the inspiration behind his new RSLC edition, The Cheshire Motor Vehicle Registrations, 1904-07*

**What is your background and area of expertise as a researcher?**

I had a background in computing before doing a History degree as a mature student, and then a PhD on society in eighteenth-century Manchester. At that time I transcribed the diary of an eighteenth-century wigmaker who was living in Manchester, and that was an excellent grounding in getting used to handwriting. I moved over to the history of cycling and motoring about ten years ago because I was intrigued to understand why the motor car ever caught on in the first place.

**What first drew you to the Cheshire motor vehicle registration records?**

The motor vehicle registrations for pre-First World War Cheshire were a bit of a gold mine, and would help me work out who was driving what. Having a full transcript would help me answer some key research questions. I had no idea of the enormity of the project ahead, though, and the whole project has taken about eight years in all.

**What can these records tell us about the history of early twentieth-century Cheshire that is not yet widely known?**

It tells us the extent of the motoring experience for Cheshire and how many ordinary people were buying second-hand cars and motor bikes. We now know that about 180 or so motor cars and motor cycles were on the roads in Cheshire prior to 1904, because that number were immediately registered when the 1903 Motor Car Act came into force. That's quite a lot compared with some other counties – I'm thinking of Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, for which similar work has been done and published.

**What was the biggest challenge you faced in producing this edition?**

Several issues: the enormity of the transcription project; the legibility of some of the squeezed-in records; and devising a method which enabled me to create the indexes.

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**What is the most surprising material you've uncovered in these records?**

It would be the sheer extent of motoring across the social spectrum. I'm seeing an experience which isn't just a 'Downton Abbey' kind of view, where the wealthy buy new and expensive cars, probably chauffeur-driven. That happened, of course, but it's what happened to those vehicles when they stopped being 'this year's model'. I'm finding, say, a car bought new for £400 for a smart address in a Cheshire town, is still in use six, eight, even ten years later, now registered to an address in an inner-city working-class area. It wasn't just cars either, but motor cycles as well. And there were a fair few home-built cars and motor cycles too. Women do not feature much in the records, but I think this greatly underplays their contribution – it's likely that a vehicle was registered in the name of the male 'head of the household', but was probably used by others in the house, including women.

**How would you hope your volume would be useful for researchers in the future?**

Lots of uses could be made of this material. It isn't just the 'mobility' historians who will find this volume useful, but also local historians and genealogists, who can now learn, possibly for the first time, that their ancestors were driving. Having added occupations to the registrations information also means that social and economic historians can learn more about Edwardian society too.

**What kinds of people owned cars in early twentieth-century Cheshire?**

All sorts of people owned cars and motor cycles. Most were from engineering or motor/cycle-trade backgrounds, but there were quite a few manufacturers and merchants too. As we know address and occupation, this helps us map the spread of the motor car, and it's the sheer range that is surprising here.



*Pictured: The  
Sunbeam-Mabley  
motor car*

*Source: Wikimedia  
Commons*

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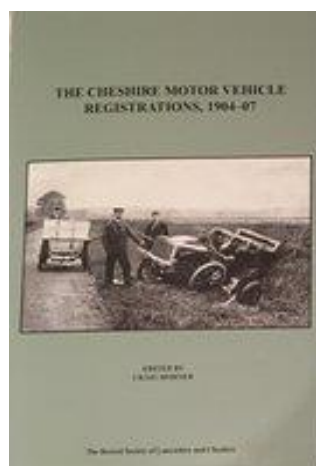
### **How much has the new and used car market changed since the early 1900s?**

The market has changed out of all recognition. It was difficult to find petrol in the earliest days – until specialist distributors emerged, petrol was generally bought by the pint from the chemist. There were no garages or agents at first, and belonging to a club was essential. Even the ‘experts’ knew very little about the motor cars then. A lovely story, which admittedly predates our period, but gives you an idea of what would now be called ‘after-sales service’ was when an owner took delivery of a car, arriving in a packing crate. A ‘man’ was sent a few days later to instruct the owner on how to start it and so on, but he was completely unable to get it going, saying the sea air must have got into the works!

### **What is your favourite car from this period?**

There are some wonderful ‘oddballs’ – there was a four-wheeled car called the Sunbeam-Mabley (see above), with its wheels in diamond formation, and the driver sitting at 90 degrees to the direction of travel. They were quite popular – a few hundred sold when it was in production around 1903 – but no one in Cheshire had one, unfortunately! I also like the ‘tri-cars’, which were essentially motor cycles with the front wheel replaced by a bath-chair on wheels. The lady would sit at the front in the chair, and the man ride it from behind. In the event of a crash, the lady passenger would be launched forwards out of the seat – all rather undignified.

*To purchase this volume for a special price of £35 (+ £5 p&p), please send a cheque for £40 – payable to ‘Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire’ – to Dr Fiona Pogson, Department of History and Politics, Liverpool Hope University, Hope Park, Liverpool, L16 9JD.*



### ***RSLC volume 156:***

*The Cheshire Motor Vehicle Registrations, 1904-1907, edited by Dr Craig Horner*



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*STEPHEN ROBERTS has recently submitted a PhD thesis at Manchester Metropolitan University on 'The Great War and the People of Wirral in Cheshire, c.1911-1925'. He reflects on the experience of his research, and on some of the fascinating original records he discovered during the course of his project.*



I wanted to do a PhD about Wirral in the Great War because it is a microcosm of the UK. When thinking about primary sources for the Great War, the first type to come to mind is personal letters. Unfortunately, despite the millions that were written, very few such letters are extant. But there is a priceless collection in the Imperial War Museum written to Eva Grandison (née McGuire), who was then living in Massachusetts, by her sisters and mother in Wallasey. I found them to be quirky, tragi-comic, poignant, informative and highly worthy of publication, since they are likely to be of great interest to local readers.

Four collections of officers' letters then caught my imagination – those of the Sellars family of Meols Drive in Hoylake (sent to me by a very generous descendant, currently living in Australia); the Blackburn collection, written by a wealthy West Kirby family with two sons in uniform and transcribed by a volunteer at West Kirby Museum; and the published letters of Billy Bloor and Alec Herron, held by the Imperial War Museum and West Kirby Museum respectively.

Sound recordings of interviews with veterans were also invaluable, particularly that of Raymond Mallalieu – a grand old man I had once met and who told me his story using one or two phrases that were to recur in his interview, to which I did not listen until about three years ago. Diaries are similarly uncommon, but Wirral Archives hold a truly remarkable collection of papers generated by sometime curator of the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight, Andrew Carlyle Tait, who served as a private with the Army Service Corps.

Local newspapers are another incredibly valuable resource. Not only did they print hundreds of soldiers' letters, but they reported, in scrupulous detail, on a huge range of local events and meetings. These reports supply a multitude of names, dates, places, developments and ideas and give spine-tingling insights into a world which seems at once so familiar and yet so different from our own. I supplemented these sources with the service papers of over a thousand Wirral soldiers, which are available online and which yield often surprising details about contemporary life. In order to find out what these findings are, you will have to read my thesis or the book which will emerge from it...