



I promised you a nautical flavour last time and by the time you have caught up you might well wonder if we are running a garage or a marina!

As with all these tirades it is difficult finding the initial moment to start. So hooning around our canal network up to the Shropshire Union to Chester, (meeting up with daughter and 9 month old grandson – full of smiles) across the Middlewich, down the Trent and Mersey. Having just completed the major challenge of thirty one locks, twelve and a half miles and culminating in travelling through the one and three quarter mile Harecastle tunnel – a busy day! That's a long tunnel in the pitch dark; imagine the poor souls digging it out in the first place; you would be worn out just walking to the face. It has to be even more impressive than cross-rail is to us today. No lasers but it is almost straight.

After yesterday's exploits thought we might have a quiet morning and so time to grab pencil and paper.

Boyhood interest in boats and models were rekindled when a World War II motor torpedo boat appeared in Torquay harbour. Gaping in wonderment I am invited on board and become even more awe-struck. Having been moored in Watchet harbour it had just come around Cornwall to join in the D-Day celebrations last year.

The owner Paul explains that his life ambition was to own a torpedo boat and finding a wreck on the river Weaver, sells his house to buy it and gives himself two years to rebuild it. His understanding wife and two hard working sons all slaved and achieved. This story was so inspiring I persuaded him he had to come to Bruton and tell a wider audience.

Thinking of a room at home I soon had to find another venue for 40 + interested folk. Gratefully The Chapel loaned me their club room. The enthusiasm was electrifying and had to curtail the questions so we could get to bed! If that wasn't enough he is rebuilding a second one in Bridgwater docks. Our contribution is to supply the gun turret for the two browning machine guns and the torpedo tube sub frames.





The items we thought were original were a bodge, so original parts had to be sourced or made. Propeller re-machined, instruments made, jigs made for both instrument panel and windscreen. At least the engine (being a BMC 1622 cc) parts were available and we knew enough to rebuild that. The gearbox continues to be a problem. Once you have passed through the pain barrier you just have to complete. I am pleased to report that this was achieved culminating in being asked to take it to the classic car show at the Bath and West showground in November. Among much interest and acclaim we won "The most interesting vehicle in show" award. Many comments were made all saying the same "Far too nice to put in the water – You might scratch it ". Being too large to go on my mantelpiece it must have a launch. We finally put it into the canal at Trowbridge and it did not go down with all hands but neither did it want to speed (transmission problems) so we are getting there and hopefully one day soon you may see us at Henley or inadvertently in next year's boat race (it does have emergency oars!)

Forty years on and an owner of an Austin Healey and an admirer of the Healey family led me completely astray when a fellow driver advises me of a Healey boat in the Isle of West Mersea. A visit made with my nautical advisor in tow. It didn't look too bad and much of the original equipment looked like it was in place. Eventually a difficult deal was conducted. We were looking for a project (that would be a fall back job should we be quiet) and we reckoned that upon completion the American market would pay a price that would at least cover our costs. Contacting two previous owners with technical questions like "does it leak? Does the engine go?" – "Of course it does I am a classic boat restorer!"

We remove the engine etc. (no way had that ever run for years and not being able to find enough water to float it (the Brue not being in spate!) We filled the boat with water and hey presto it leaked like a sieve. Turned it upside down we paint stripped the hull – what a mess covered by copious amount of paint. More rot than wood but cleverly disguised by some very poor grafting.

A customer of old having owned a cabinet making firm next door said he would take a look and subsequently took the job on in our workshop. It got worse so his talented instrument maker friend came to give a hand. Thus the "Vietnamese boat people" partnership was formed: (remember the boat people?). Grief, heartache and headaches followed and if it hadn't been for the beautiful shape and some early photographs we would have given up and burnt it!

Brian Healey lived in Perranporth and I eventually managed to get an appointment to see him, so armed with photographs and limited facts we met up. After a very convivial lunch and plenty of white wine he expounded and being the man in charge of the "Boat Division" he verified our boat as being one of the first batch of twenty five to be built in Bridport.

My promise to bring the completed boat down for him to see never materialised as a) It took us forever to rebuild, b) he sadly suddenly died a year ago.

Anything else.... Oh yes the new offices! Last newsletter regaled you as to the magnificent planning and execution of our project on the last day of May. We moved in, a little later than planned on the 30th November. The panic, hassle and general grief you can all imagine. But we made it!

An effort had to be made for an opening and we persuaded David Shepherd (Steam buff and wildlife artist) his wife and secretary to join us for a brief stay. To add a little interest we managed to get a few whizzo local model engineers to bring their amazing working models from an aero engine to a traction engine, threshing outfit, main line steam engines and trucks. A good turnout crammed the building and the



weather was kind enough to allow us outside for the unveiling and a wander to my signal box for sustenance. (Thanks to Pam for the catering) Next morning David insisted on a spin in the Matador WW2 army truck. So we all went to keep him company!

A memorable occasion, the plaque and photos a lovely reminder. The building has created a lot of interest and favourable comments not least that from a Great Western driver who wrote to say. – “Thank you for not erecting yet another dreary flat packed building. It’s a building of character which receives compliments from other drivers in the rest room at Westbury and Paddington”.

We have not had as many visitors as our new art gallery. Opening last July and topping 120,000 visitors by May, that’s an awful lot of folk visiting little old Bruton!

There has been a lot of interest, by your good selves in our barn find Mini pickup. No progress as yet but a master plan is in place. Parts ordered and hopefully by year end a completed restoration, so maybe a cover for a Christmas card?

Back to Work

A busy frustrating time, lots of jobs but reduced margins (a bit like Tesco). More staff and gearing up for the future. Trying to ignore the setbacks like the General election and believing life/business may survive into the future. Father always maintained that the country should be run by business men and let the politicians shout and dance on the side-lines and world stage.

We were blessed with a stable staff situation and have now effected quite a few changes. We have taken on another Charlie but this one is slightly different being 6ft 4inches, 18 stone and curly hair. He is our latest apprentice and being built for trucks has slotted in well and he is interested in old vehicles! His timing coincided with Clayton completing his apprenticeship. Now a fully-fledged member of the team and Ryan not far behind him.

With the unusual attribute of two sets of brothers we really are a “family firm” I often have a Deja-Vue moment and we have welcomed back a previous employee Aaron to our body shop. Tony (Barney) Bolton has left the front desk to pursue his interests in the rebuilding of older vehicles but we remain in constant touch as he continues to help us with our projects and of late become an “Arms dealer” (more of that next time!)



In addition to all this excitement we have employed Jon Wise to our front desk alongside Natasha. Thirty years ago Jon came to work for us as a mechanic and recovery man. Working in his own business for fifteen years he is back with us. I told you DeJa-Vue! With his wealth of experience he should be a great help to our customers and staff alike. Other self-employed trade folk help us in times of stress and high demand and having been previous employees (so obviously well trained) makes it feels like an old boy’s reunion!

Many of you ask how Charlie is doing. Well she does keep in touch by lengthy e-mails and appears to be enjoying the good life in Portugal doing barely enough to earn some ‘sweetie money’ and spend more time in the sunshine. Now a vegan I suppose she can live on grass! Sometimes a tinge of jealousy creeps in but then I couldn’t sit still in the sunshine for weeks/months so it is a good job we are all different. Besides I would miss you all too much!

Work itself has been busy and challenging with a huge variety of different jobs. Our big green trucks have since Christmas become small green and plentiful but clouds on the horizon question what the future holds as our MOD at Warminster has been taken over by Babcock Defence so what happens next – annihilation or over subscription? Only time will answer that one. So we hang onto our seats.

Car/van and truck accident work seems to increase year on year which by refusing to play the Insurance company game of lets swamp you with work at a below cost rate and then pull the rug on you seems hard to believe.

A bit like dairy farming driven into the ground by below costs and demanding customers they are selling up faster than we realise. I keep on saying it “we will run out of food one day” and then we will want all the farmers we can find.



Mind you that's assuming we haven't covered the ground with solar panels. (Don't get me going wasting prime farmland what ever happened to common sense?) Not to mention the constant building of houses everywhere across the country.

I always thought that "points make prizes" but attending a speed awareness course the tutor pointed out that doesn't always apply! I was surprised to find that out of twenty two of us eleven were ladies. Apparently school run time is the most stressful for the mum and the most lucrative for the camera!

Mind you several were of the more modern female (no longer the rep in his ford Cortina/Mondeo but the executive type young lady powering between appointments!) It was an interesting and educational day but how I am ever going to keep to 20MPH when Bruton downgrades Heaven only knows (walk/cycle or go by canal boat)?

I was honored to be asked to an award ceremony of "The Heavies". Not quite sure how to take it and whilst being overweight I didn't think I was too obese.

I was however relieved to find out it was the annual dinner and award ceremony for those involved in the "heavy" end of the haulage industry. We had been entered for the "Team Prize" which related to the operating company who organized the rebuilding of the

Oshkosh tank transporters (memory test.... Did you pay attention in previous newsletter?) – These were the trucks blown up in Iraq and subsequently rebuilt by two companies.

One 'up north' and t'other down south (us!) So it was a surprise to go and collect the award and proves that someone somewhere loves us.

So what does the summer have in store for us? Continuation of lovely weather, election promises (whatever that will translate into) holidays, endless hours lounging in the garden around the BBQ or just maybe the chance to get some work done?

A new MOT computer systems comes into play shortly and a clever plan by the government (who installed the original computer system and now it needs replacing) handing the commitment and cost to us!

More training in electronics and diagnoses, try harder to look after our customers better and somehow try to enjoy ourselves at work. As with all our lives nothing is ever simple or straight forward. How we seem to love making everything so confusing and complicated.

e.g. A car in for an intermittent seat belt fault on the passenger side when no one is in the seat – could we find it – no chance! Eventually by pure opportunity the problem traced itself to a flying handbag when the customer got into the car.

Moral of the story to the ladies – **downsize on the handbags!!!!**

So ending where we started on a nautical theme..... The sun is over the yard arm so must be time for G & T.

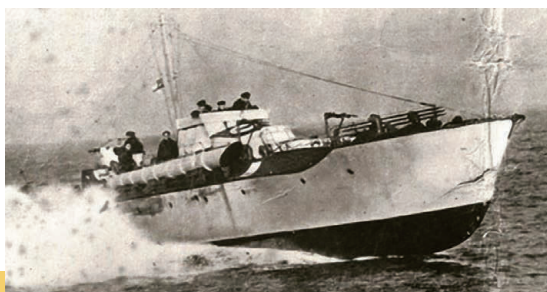


(L-R) Howard Cox, Phil Ewbank, Gordon Fry, Ian Bryant and Quentin Willson

Gordon W. Fry

Give careful thought to your ways

You have planted much but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages only to put them in a purse with holes in it!



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