

## BADGERS: TO CULL, OR NOT TO CULL?

Many a Marden resident has woken up to see the tell-tale signs of a badger in their garden the night before - a tunnel under the fence or a big hole where a favourite plant used to be. This nocturnal animal is increasingly being driven into our gardens from its woodland, farmland and grassland habitat by both large-scale developments and some modern agricultural methods. In our gardens it forages for food, a badger can eat several hundred earthworms a night, as well as insects, grubs, roots and fruit. In the wild it predated the eggs and the young of ground-nesting birds as well as small mammals, amphibians and reptiles. Weighing some 8 – 12 kg, it is our biggest land predator and, as one of the few predators of hedgehogs, is widely blamed for contributing to the rapid decline in their numbers.

In 1973 an Act of parliament made it illegal to kill badgers without a licence, not because they were rare or endangered, but mainly in an attempt to stamp out the barbaric practice of badger baiting, which incredibly still continues today in certain areas. Between 1975 and 1981 badger setts were gassed with hydrogen cyanide to try to control the spread of bovine tuberculosis (bTB) and other infectious diseases. Finally, in 1992, the Protection of Badgers Act was passed, consolidating and tightening up previous laws and making it an offence to wilfully kill, injure, or ill-treat a badger or destroy or damage its sett. The badger is now one of the most legally protected animals in the UK.

So why is it that such a highly protected species is subject to legal culling? Every year tens of thousands of cattle are slaughtered because of bTB at enormous cost to farmers and the taxpayer. It is widely accepted that badgers (along with fallow deer and some other wild animals) contribute to the spread of bTB, but the extent to which this is the case is hotly disputed by the experts. Lobbied by many dairy farmers trying to protect their herds from the spread of bTB and the ensuing slaughter, and in an attempt to reduce the financial implications of slaughtering herds of cattle, the government has continued to authorise culling trials. These have often had conflicting results with some showing a decrease in the incidence of bTB in the area whilst others showed no difference whatsoever.

Animal protection groups continue to campaign against what they consider a barbaric practice. Many others, including the Wildlife Trusts and the National Trust who do not permit culling on their land, argue that culling will not provide the entire solution to the bTB problem. Their view is that all transmissible livestock diseases can be mitigated by good husbandry practices and keeping sheds clean and well-ventilated. Animal welfare groups advocate vaccination and several Wildlife Trusts have actually started trials of badger vaccinations on their land.

This debate has raged on for decades, with tens of thousands of badgers and cattle being slaughtered in the meantime. But now there is a glimmer of hope on the horizon. Research, testing and trialling of a vaccine for cattle has been completed, though currently an EU ban remains in place on its use. The government has also recently announced that its current intensive culling policy will be phased out in the next few years and gradually replaced by government supported badger vaccinations.

An end may finally be in sight which will meet the demands of the pro-cullers, the anti-cullers and all animal lovers - a stop to the slaughter every year of tens of thousands of both badgers and cattle.

*Carol Hogg*

# The Parish Pump

THE JOURNAL OF THE MARDEN SOCIETY – APRIL 2020

Sadly, we have had to cancel our programme of talks this year until further notice because of the COVID-19 virus outbreak. So there are unlikely to be any more meetings before the autumn programme starts on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, with Geoff Doel's talk (postponed from last year!) on **Hopping in Kent and the Hartlake Disaster**. However we will of course keep you informed once the situation becomes clearer.

## A MESSAGE FROM CHAIRMAN MO

These are certainly extraordinary times and I hope everyone keeps well, and positive, until we come out of this period. Sadly our meetings are all cancelled but we have some helpful shops, and certainly the prevailing atmosphere seems to be supportive and cheerful. My email and phone number are below so if anyone wants to chat I would be happy to hear from them.

I made an awful error a few days ago - bumped into some old friends in a supermarket and without thinking we hugged and laughed about old times and then remembered - oops - 2 metres distance. He was already on oxygen with an existing complaint! In Spain, so a friend who lives there told me, you can't even have 2 people in a car. He was thundering on about how lax we are here. And the Netherlands is almost as strict. So good luck to all, at least most of us don't have to worry about losing our jobs. *Mo Clayton - 831529 [tillerqirl2913@gmail.com](mailto:tillerqirl2913@gmail.com)*

## BACK TO THEIR ROOTES

Steve McArragher's talk traced the history of the Rootes Group from its beginning in Goudhurst, via Hawkhurst and Maidstone, through two World Wars, the peak in the '50s and '60s and subsequent takeover and loss of name in the '70s.



William Rootes Snr hailed from Goudhurst and in 1895 opened a cycle shop, repairing bikes and hiring them out at 6d. per hour. This was very successful and he moved to larger premises in Hawkhurst. He and his wife Jenny had two sons, William, (Billy), 1894 and Reggie, 1896. Like their father they both had a mechanical turn of mind but while Reggie was the scholarly one, Billy, bright but lazy at school, was the outgoing extrovert. He left school at 16 and was

apprenticed to Singer Cycles, moving on to motorcycles and racing trials and then cars. He persuaded Singer to help him set up his own car agency in Kent. His father didn't approve, but with financial help of a local farmer, he was established in the motor trade by the age of 18.

In 1914 Billy and his father moved to larger premises in Maidstone and both exhibited at the London Motor Show. With the coming of war in 1914 Billy joined up leaving his father to run the business. Whilst serving in the Naval Air Services he was shocked by the scrappage and waste of aircraft and persuaded the Ministry to let him set up an aero engine repair service in Mill Street Maidstone, employing many ladies to regrind engine valves! His contract allowed him to buy the business for £1000 after the war, which proved a very good deal.

In 1916 Billy married, producing two sons, Geoffrey and Brian, while Reggie had the one son Tim. The brothers continued in partnership and post war the demand for cars and commercial vehicles grew rapidly. Rootes capitalised on British products, such as Austin, Singer, Clyno and Hudson, but also some French makes. They were expanding and wanted a base in London, so in 1926 they took a lease on Devonshire House in Piccadilly. They had always been distributors, but now wanted to move into manufacturing and targeted Hillman and Humber, who were already linked. However they needed more capital and found this from "The Man From the Pru". They had soon taken control of Hillman, Humber and Commer, and by 1936 had also acquired Sunbeam, Talbot and Karrier. In 1937 they commenced work on the new Art Deco showrooms in Maidstone, finished in 1940.

With WWII looming, Rootes became a principal contributor to the Shadow Factory scheme to produce aero engines and aircraft. They built an assembly plant at Speke near Liverpool, to manufacture Bristol Blenheim aircraft, quickly and cheaply using automotive techniques. They were also manufacturing military vehicles and the two Humber Staff Cars supplied for Montgomery still exist in museums. The company suffered bomb damage in London, and Coventry, but the Maidstone site was missed.



Post War they set about rationalising their business, producing the Hillman Minx as a family car, Humbers as luxury models, Sunbeam Talbots for the sporty market and Commer commercial vehicles. One error of judgment perhaps was Billy's (and the rest of the UK Motor Industry's) post-war dismissal of the VW Beetle as having no future.

In 1949 Rootes became a PLC when shares were issued to the public. Much of the equity capital remained with the family however and with their partner Prudential. A proposed merger with Morris came to nothing and instead they merged with Austin to form BMC. In 1955 Singer was in trouble, and by the end of the year Rootes had taken them over. Billy now owned the company where he had started his apprenticeship in the motor industry.

By 1960 the company was at its peak, the fourth largest manufacturer in the UK, employing around 17,000 people and producing 150,000 vehicles a year, but from here things started to go downhill. There was a 13 week strike in 1961 at the body panel plant. The introduction of the small Hillman Imp, built at a new factory in Scotland, required substantial investment, so in 1964 Rootes had to sell some of their shareholding to Chrysler, who acquired 46% of the stock. Then Billy, by now Lord Rootes, died and Geoffrey and Reggie took over. By 1967 Chrysler assumed full control and by 1970 the Rootes Group name had disappeared. Then in



1978 Chrysler ran into problems and were taken over by Peugeot. Peugeot cars continued to be produced at the Ryton plant until 2007 when it was closed and demolished. The Maidstone premises in Mill Street continued to be used until 2017 and the site is Grade 2 listed. It currently stands empty although plans have been prepared for conversion to retail premises and apartments.

Marden had a connection with the family, as George Rootes, a cousin of Billy and Reggie, used to run the West End Forge and pub. But that name also disappeared long ago, although old photographs can still be seen in the Marden History Group collection.

*Barbara Dubois*

### **MAIDSTONE LOCAL HISTORY DAY**

On Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2020 Maidstone Museum hosted a Local History Day where Catherine and I represented Marden History Group. Also there were representatives from Headcorn, Lenham, Loose and Maidstone History Societies, Wessex, Maidstone and Kent Archeology groups and Maidstone Library. Kent Archeology Society were very knowledgeable and, of course, our Trevor used to be a member.

We each laid out an exhibition on our tables which were interesting, diverse and relative to our own area. Groups enjoyed talking to each other and learning about the history of areas that were near to our own but had different industries such as the water mills at Loose for example.

The day had been organised by KCC, who not only failed to advertise the event but also to fully brief the museum staff. Visitors were minimal apart from one speaker who directed her attendees to the old café area where we were sited. Most other visitors seemed to be looking for a cuppa. It was a long day and had it not been for some stalwart History Group members (many thanks) plus some friends of mine coming to see us it could have been very lonely.

*Diane Fisher*

### **PLANNING NEWS**

The Neighbourhood Plan passed its referendum by 90% Yes to 10% No, with a reasonable 27% turnout, so we now have a formal Neighbourhood Plan. Further details are available on the Parish council website at <http://www.mardenkent-pc.gov.uk/community/marden-parish-council-13394/home>. The Parish Council has also finalised its response to MBC's call for sites relating to sites 226, 309 and 318, which is also available on their website together with a full list of the MBC sites.

Results of the MBC call for Sites process were due to be announced in May, however according to a recent "Downs Mail" report this has now been delayed as Planning Officers need more time to review the 330 submissions. This was debated at an acrimonious closed meeting in February when an agreed scheme to eliminate unsuitable and speculative proposals was ignored by Planning Officers who said that "the problem is that there aren't that many no-hopers." It is not known how long the delay is likely to be.

*Steve McArragher*