

Anthony Charnock (Sandersons 1949 – 1953)

Anthony Charnock the distinguished vintage sports car racing driver and respected commercial surveyor died on 1st November 2017.

Tony was born in Redbridge in East London on 15th December 1935. In 1945 he moved to Sussex when his parents retired to Goring-on-Sea, a place for which Tony always had a great affection.

His father was W.H.Charnock, an OL and noted motoring poet and artist. W.H.C was also heavily involved in the revival of the Bentley Drivers Club after the Second World War. Tony's parents' love of motoring saw the family embark in their much loved Rover Speed 14 on many intrepid winter road trips to the Lake District. Tony grew up with the smell of Castrol R in his nostrils and the joy of motoring was to become one of the major passions of his life.

Whilst, in his own words, he had an undistinguished career at Lancing College it was one of the happiest times of his life. Outside of lessons and chapel he was very much left to his own devices. This enabled him to follow his motoring passion and he formed the first Lancing College Motor Club. The Club was given a disused stable in which he would endlessly tinker with engines.

At Lancing Tony suffered from nose bleeds which meant he was excused most sports. This was a big relief as he did not have to try and match his father's prowess who had been a very competitive cross country runner. A pursuit Tony considered rather "exhausting". The school's action proved to be very wise as later it was discovered Tony had a heart condition. This required him to undergo a pioneering hole in the heart operation. This was before the days of keyhole surgery and he carried an impressive scar across his chest for the rest of his life. The operation was a complete success.

Tony's main priority was then to take his motoring experiences, from his early days of Austin A40 ownership, to a new level. With his father's encouragement he joined the Vintage Sports Car Club and eventually acquired a fearsome 4.3 litre Alvis special. Over the coming years he crisscrossed the country entering all manner of speed trials, hill climbs and track races. Aided by his quick reactions and great strength and endurance he proved to be a highly successful racing driver. The shelves of his parents' home quickly became laden with his trophies.

Tony's life took a dramatic new path in 1962 when he married Chris, the love of his life, and acquired a new family with two step children, Alexandra and Nigel. They moved to London and from their flat in Kensington embarked on a vibrant social life with new acquaintances, many of whom became lifelong friends. In 1964 the family grew with the arrival of his precious daughter Camilla.

Up to that time Tony's working career had been somewhat secondary to his motoring exploits. However with his growing family he discovered his metier when he became a commercial property surveyor. He quickly acquired extensive property knowledge. His eye for detail and formidable negotiating skills enabled him to build a portfolio of devoted clients, many of whom employed his services for decades to come. This appreciation of his skills was demonstrated by the fact that he was still working up until two days before his demise.

The freedom he experienced at Lancing College also nurtured Tony's entrepreneurial skills. As well as his day job, he carried out various property developments. For a time he was a member of Lloyds thankfully exiting, unlike many of his contemporaries, without any financial pain. But the life of any entrepreneur has its ups and downs and his time as an investor in a Ferrari garage was not a happy experience.

His appreciation of what Lancing College had given him and his affection for the school ensured he was a regular visitor for the rest of his life. He was described by current senior staff as "...one of our most distinguished and respected O.Ls..."

When his daughter Camilla arrived he decided it was time to hang up his racing helmet. Instead he took up another far less dangerous motoring pursuit, riding high performance motorcycles!

In quick succession he owned a Norton Commando and Vincent Black Shadow before discovering the delights of what BMW had to offer. His favourite motorcycle was a BMW 900RS with a distinctive smoked grey paint scheme. On this he would carry out epic rides. Long before it was commonplace to ride motorcycles in Europe he would think nothing of finishing work at 94 Park Lane at 5:00pm on a Friday, donning a nylon over suit over his three piece suit and then driving down to Newhaven to take the boat to Dieppe. He would then drive through the night to arrive for breakfast at his mother-in-law's house, Les Jouberties, in the Dordogne. The journey would then be repeated on Sunday evening with him arriving straight off the boat for work at Park Lane on Monday morning. This was long before auto routes and the excellent French roads of today. These feats of endurance were ever more remarkable considering the health issues of his youth. The heart surgeons had certainly done a brilliant job!

But cars still remained his first love.

Long before classic cars caught investors' attention he built up an amazing collection. This included; an XK150 Jaguar: a Le Mans Replica Frazer Nash (now owned by a drummer of a famous band): a light weight Gullwing Mercedes and a D type Jaguar. Eventually the responsibility of caring for these cars, tightly garaged in his Kensington mews house, became too onerous and the collection was sold. Years later he would reflect on the many millions of pounds that these cars were now worth. But for him cars were never just about their value, it was all about the joy of ownership and driving. His family were amused, if not also a little bemused, at the pleasure he had in running modest cars like a Renault 5 and coaxing it into six figure mileages, the fuel consumption for which was always carefully recorded.

Despite the disbursement of his collection he retained for many years an elegant, ivory white, vintage convertible Bentley. This was the perfect wedding car which he generously drove for many friends and relations on their special day.

His passion for cars also led him to become something of an expert in automobile memorabilia. This included building a select collection of motoring books, model cars and car badges. If he wasn't able to find a model car of a particular type he had the skills to make one himself, to a highly professional level of craftsmanship.

Tony was loved and admired by his huge circle of friends. They recognised him as one of those increasingly few, quintessentially English gentlemen, who had a quiet unassuming courtesy to all. A great raconteur he was always so self-effacing. He was a friend who could always be relied on. Time and time again he would step forward to help a friend in need.

The heart of his life was his family. He was a devoted son-in-law to Gaynor and devoted grandfather to Gabriel, Allegra and Harry. Tony was always there to provide every possible support when it was required. This included a time of great sadness with the loss to cancer of his much loved son-in-law Matt.

The greatest love of Tony's life was his beautiful wife Chris to whom he was devoted. They were a formidable team who exuded great enthusiasm and charm whenever they were 'in company', which was often. They enjoyed a hugely social life in their annual promenade between their houses in London, Buttermere and the Dordogne. Tony was a wonderfully, supportive consort to Chris enabling her to follow their passions including many years of involvement with The Friends of the Royal Marsden Hospital, Chelsea.

In his later years Tony faced challenging health issues which he endured with stoic resolve. The last year of his life was sadly steeped in tragedy. His beloved Chris died as a result of a car accident in December 2016. His own health continued to decline and he passed away, broken hearted, on what would have been their 55th wedding anniversary.

His family will always remember him in happier times typically preparing to drive Chris to another social engagement. He would always be impeccably dressed, from his waistcoat and tie or smart cravat, down to his well polished shoes or, in the summertime, his co-respondent brogues. And, whenever possible, whatever season of the year, driving roof down in some exotic vehicle.

There was a wonderful turnout at his funeral. In his eulogy his good friend Edwin Lovegrove said, "Our dear friend Tony would be enormously touched, and a bit surprised, to know that so many of us should be here for him today. And Chris, the love of his life, would have been so proud, and not at all surprised."

Nigel Lloyd-Jones (Sandersons 1967 – 1972)