

January 2020

Ulster Centre

MAGazine



1920



2020

Chairman's Chat and Introduction

Firstly, a Happy and successful New Year to all readers, members and friends.

The Ulster Centre *MaGazine* after two years of very successful publication under the expert editorship of Simon Johnston, had a rest after its April issue in 2019. Prompted by the appearance of the January edition of *Safety Fast!* in its 2020 MGCC 90th Anniversary *MaGazine*¹ guise, it was decided with Simon to continue our version with a review of 2019.

The Ulster Centre is one of the smallest Centres of the MG Car Club, but has always punched above its weight and despite difficulties faced after the very successful 50th Anniversary in 2018, continued to run a large number of planned motorsport competitions and social events for its members, invited clubs and friends.

Emails to members gave notice of all our events which were reported in *Safety Fast* and on the Centre website giving information on the results of competitions and our very successful social side.

Competitions included the excellent Derek Walker Memorial Classic in April and the Evening Classic event in August. A review of our motorsport competitions in 2019 is included in this edition of the magazine in addition to articles on some aspects of members' activities through the year.

2019 started with the traditional New Year Run and Treasure Hunt organised by Brian and Liz Patterson, starting and finishing at The Dunadry Hotel Antrim. The splendid road book reflected the expert rally background of the Pattersons, who in addition to reporting on rally events in their regular blog, prepare rally special stage pace notes for competitors on local, National and International events using very sophisticated digital measurement and video recording devices.

The three Mikes; Armstrong, Wilson and Dowie, formed a sub committee to advise and plan social events for the Centre, with one (or more) of their number reporting to the main committee each month. They produced a splendid calendar of events



Ulster Centre Chairman, Terry Ingles

through 2019 and have completed plans for the first half of 2020 with the remainder of the year nearing completion.

Their first run of the 2019 season was a visit to McConville's Scutch Mill at Dromore, Co Down and a route of about 35 miles round Slieve Croob with its views of the County Down scenery, ending at Temple Golf Club for a late lunch.

The *Drive It Day* runs are an initiative of the Federation of British Historic Vehicle Clubs to encourage motor clubs in commemorating the 1000 mile Trial of 1900 – see <https://www.fbhvc.co.uk/drive-it-day> for very interesting links to its history. Our calendar for 2020 includes details of the Ulster Centre plans for *Drive It Day* on 26 April.

We had an invitation in June to join the Thoroughbred Sports Car Club at its Sprint meeting and an article in this edition describes the very enjoyable event for the members who took part.

Later in June about twenty of us visited Killyleagh Castle, where Gawn Rowan Hamilton has had the keys to the family residence since 2001. The original castle of 1180 has been the family residence for over 400 years and Gawn personally gave us a

¹ Some extracts from *The MaGazine from the 1930s* can be found on the Triple-M Register website at https://www.triple-mregister.org/MG_magazine/IndexMGM.html

fascinating tour of the Castle, outside and in, while delivering an interesting, amusing and often intriguing history of the castle and the Hamilton family. After our visit the party went on to lunch at Ardglass Golf Club.

Members have joined other organisations' events through the year and we would be very interested to receive reports for the MaGazine through 2020 and it's not too late to let us have articles of your travels and visits from 2019.

I joined in the August meeting of Lisburn City Old Vehicles Club Parade at Lagan Valley Island, running in convoy to the Dundrod for a parade lap of the circuit and supper in one of the luxury marquees erected for the Dundrod GP motorcycle races later in the week. The rain hammered down all evening at Dundrod and on our way home we ran through a stretch of unavoidable inches-thick slurry of the typical red mud on the Moira road which resulted in hours of cleaning the car, including its underside, the next day – the joys of motoring!

Later in August the Social sub-committee had organised another super outing; lunch at the Downshire Arms in Banbridge, then a very interesting tour of Ferguson's Linen Centre on the Scarva Road. This once major weaving business still produces fine Damask linen on a small number of computer controlled Jacquard type looms and also runs a specialised embroidery business, again on computer controlled machines. We were treated to a demonstration of skilled manual scissor work dividing sheets of linen for smaller articles, where the operator, followed a line of the weave armed only with a large pair of shears by pulling a single thread as she cut the sheet across its width without a pause.

We were invited to join the MG Owners Club NI at a breakfast meeting organised by the Transport Museum at Cultra on the first Sunday in September. A good number of cars old and newer and their owners (also older and newer!) met for a display, bacon bap and optional f.o.c. museum visit in another joint club meeting which helps to continue the all-important MG Car Club Marque of Friendship position.

Later in September the Centre met at Sprucefield for a visit to The Ulster Aviation Society at The Maze, Long Kesh. This splendid collection of aircraft and aeronautical items of historical and general interest is housed in two WWII hangers

which, as listed buildings, severely restrict the ability of the Society in maintaining and repairing the structure to protect the heritage aircraft and other items. Many of the exhibits have been recovered and restored by the Society volunteers and include the Ferguson Flyer replica of the 1911 Harry Ferguson wooden framed and linen covered machine, the building of which was shown in a BBC series in 2016 and 2017. After our visit we continued on a cross country route to Maddens Bar in Antrim for lunch.

The Derek Walker Classic and the Evening Classic are multi venue production car autotests and as a gesture of thanks to land owners and marshals, they were invited with others to visit Raymond Walls's Automobilia collection at Ballygowan. We are deeply indebted to landowners who agree to their premises being used for our competitions and to the regular marshals on all our events. Raymond Walls has been collecting and dealing in automobilia for several years and has a vast display of motoring history in his barns, ranging from a huge collection of glass petrol pump globes and walls lined with old enamelled metal signs for oil and motoring services, to motorsport collections including original and extremely rare items used on the 1903 Gordon Bennett Race on its figure of eight course starting and finishing at Athy.

Another intriguing and hugely interesting visit was to James Black Restorations in early November. This private concern tucked out of the way at Ballinderry is a major Internationally renowned restorer of Rolls Royce cars, specialising in the Silver Ghost Series and so well considered world-wide that there were three cars from New Zealand and Australia on the premises for services, repairs and restoration. James showed us round his workshops and personal collections of cars and motorcycles and the twenty or so members were treated to an evening of fascinating history, presentation and mild ribaldry. We finished with a supper in the vast main garage with its polished wooden floor. Gathered round the roaring open fire, leather settee, antique display cases with home manufactured parts for no longer available Rolls Royce brass fitments and distributor caps, surrounding the partly completed rolling chassis of a Ghost on a huge four poster lift, a 1904 Rolls Royce in the corner and another make of veteran car in the other corner. It is heartening to know that there is an internationally renowned

business tucked behind the rural hedges of Ulster based on skilled knowledge and engineering in this age of computerisation and imported mass manufactured goods of dubious quality. Watch your emails for an opportunity to visit again in 2020. Mike Wilson has a reserve list from 2019 for a return sometime this year.

A couple of planned events had to be cancelled through lack of interest – the Tudor Cinema Comber Film Night and the Bowling Night at Dundonald, but our other social events, including the bi-monthly Nosh n Natter lunches have been well supported through the year. We have tried a couple of other venues from the traditional Poacher's Pocket in Lisbane, with varying success, and will continue to try other venues further afield in 2020.

The traditional Mince Pie evening at Shandon Golf Club attracted a large audience to hear Davy Patterson give a presentation of his incredible ride on the Tour Divide. This is an annual event where riders on their mountain bikes find and follow trails from Banff in Canada to the US border with Mexico down the Continental Divide of the Rocky Mountains. Riders are unsupported and may only get assistance from each other and normal outlets in places they pass through. No rally type assisted servicing is permitted and while each individual is tracked via GPS competitors cannot expect search and rescue! Apart from a date for the start, there are no formal start and finish facilities or ceremony and only the GPS tracker determines the times and distances travelled by the "competitors". In addition to his illustrated talk, Davy brought along his bike and equipment, all of which he carries stowed in bags and

haversack and spent much time explaining the display to the collected members and friends.

During 2018 and 2019 collections were made at events for our chosen charity of Air Ambulance NI. The Centre was invited with other donors to a "giving day" in October at its headquarters at the Maze, Long Kesh where we handed over a cheque for £1,600. The Centre thanks everyone who donated during the period and will encourage donations towards its new chosen charity of The Children's Heartbeat Trust, for 2020 and beyond.

2019 was a success for the Centre both in its competition and social events, but as with the situation at the beginning of the year, 2020 will be a continuing trial in attempting to run so many events if members do not wish to assist in the planning and organisation. We rely so much on a diminishing number of stalwart members and our continuing thanks will not sustain the endeavours of this minority.

However, that is a matter for the near future and suffice it to say, the Centre can take pride in having continued in 2019 the philosophy, purpose and practice of the MG Car Club, now entering its 90th year.

We invite all members and friends to take part in and enjoy our events in 2020 and encourage all to consider giving whatever assistance you can in the administration of the Centre and in the organisation and running of its competitive and social events.

I hope to see many of you and your cars at our events during 2020.

Terry Ingles

MG Car Club Ulster Centre Calendar 2020

Competitions:

Saturday 25 January - Derek Walker Memorial Classic, multi-venue Production Autotest.

Start and Finish, Echlinville Distillery, Gransha Road, Kirkubbin **PLEASE COME and MARSHAL!**

Saturday 28 March - ANICC Championship Autotest

Saturday 25 April - Autotest

Thursday 21 May - Evening Autotest

Thursday 18 June - Evening Autotest

Friday 28 August - Ulster Classic Trial, evening multi-venue Production Autotest

Saturday 19 September - Production Car Trial

Saturday 26 September - Production Car Trial

Saturday 3 October - Production Car Trial

Saturday 31 October - Autotest

Saturday 14 November: AutoSOLO

Important

Potential competitors – don't forget: **ALL** drivers and passengers in Autotest and Trial events now need a Motorsport UK competition licence.

A Clubman Licence is available online free of charge at

<https://www.motorsportuk.org/get-started/2020-rs-clubman-licence/>

Get yours NOW!

Please do consider giving a hand at an event this year. Venues for the autotests and trials will be confirmed nearer the time.

Social Events:

Saturday 15 February: Annual dinner and Prizegiving, Ivanhoe Hotel & Inn, Saintfield Road, Carryduff

Thursday 12 March: Nosh 'n' Natter lunch, venue tba - we thought we would try a Thursday!
April - a Karting event, watch this space

Sunday 26 April: Drive It Day - run and visit to Philip Faithful, Abingdon Collection, Omagh

Monday 11 to Wednesday 13 May: Donegal Tour, Shandon Hotel, Marble Hill, Dunfanaghy, Donegal - fully subscribed

Wednesday 20 May: Nosh 'n' Natter lunch, venue tba

Watch emails, the club website and the main MGCC monthly MaGazine/*Safety Fast!* for latest news, plus information on events being planned later in the year including:

June: Gobbins Path Walk

Visit to Marlacoo House Park and Gardens nr Richhill, date tba

July and September: Nosh n Natter lunch, dates and venue tba

Sunday 13 September - date to be confirmed: Ballyclare Heritage Museum "War Years Remembered"

REMINDER!

MGCC Ulster Centre AGM

Thursday 16 January 2020, 7.30pm

Shandon Park Golf Club

Please consider attending. The business of the Club is important and members should be part of any decisions made for the year. We welcome your input and involvement.

The Centre does require a Treasurer, as Stephen Dawson is standing down.

We would also welcome new members for the Committee of all ages, experience and skills. Especially younger people and others with ideas and opinions on how the Centre should be going forward in this age of technology and less desire of people to “join in”.

Nominations can be made before the meeting using the form sent in December 2019 with notice of the AGM and will be accepted on the night from the floor.

YOUR CENTRE NEEDS YOU!



Roger Dawson's MGB - TTS Autosolo

MG Car Club Ulster Centre Competition Report 2019

Stephen Dawson & Gordon Buckley

The MGCC Ulster Centre's 2019 competitive season comprised four autotests, two Production Car Trials, an Autosolo and two multi-venue Trials - the Derek Walker Memorial Trial open to any road car, and the Ulster Classic Trial for which only MGs and period vehicles were eligible. Because we held an early January AGM, with a fresh committee elected, we had decided to delay the Derek Walker Trial until April and therefore we kicked off 2019 with an early Autotest at Delamont Country Park near Killyleagh. We had a full entry of 30 competitors including a healthy BMC entry with two recently rejuvenated Midgets of Peter Moreland-Moore and Ralph Ewing. Expert coaches Ashley Lamont and George McMillan ran a pre-event tutorial reporting rapid progress of the trainees most of whom stayed to compete in the autotest. We then ran two tests on Delamont's two adjacent car-parks, joining them up to run a third test through both car-parks. Most competitors would have been happy with us only running the big test! Andrew Earney was in fine form in the FWDs and Jeremy Tomalin took FTD a smidgeon ahead of brother Tim, both in specials.

Over the past few years we have elected to run a round of the Autotest Drivers' Club Championship which now includes 'Clubman' classes for road cars to encourage new drivers into the higher echelons of autotesting. We held our round in March at TTS where Centre member Ashley Lamont had set three bewildering 'knitting pattern' tests for ADC Championship contenders – mainly driving specials, and slightly less complex tests for the Clubman classes. One test was so difficult we ran out of pylons and had to scrounge some from one of the ADC members! (note: we have additional pylon stock for 2020!). Tests took nearly 4 hours to set up so we didn't get underway until after mid-day and marshals had to have eagle-eyes to ensure the 40 competitors were going the right way! The very long Test 1 meant competitors unfortunately had to wait for a long period between runs. Top competitor of the day was Ashley Lamont and we were interested to see Richard and Andrew Earney out in their newly completed Mini Special. This was their former Mini road car in which they had competed in many MGCC events, however, now confined to round the pylons!



Andrew Earney's Mini and Jay Colville's Midget - TTS ADC Championship Autotest

Our delayed Derek Walker Memorial Trial ran in April when we thought the weather would be better. It wasn't, in fact it was terrible. Storm 'Hannah' decided to pay us a visit and it was February weather that met us on day – great fun if one is driving, not so good if one is marshalling or time-keeping. I spent most of the day hiding from 'Force 10' behind a shed trying to keep the time-keeping paperwork dry but I suppose the 'driving rain' maybe suited the event?? Noel Cochrane and Richard McCracken had lined up 19 tests in the Ards peninsula starting and finishing at Echlinville Distillery, Kircubbin makers of

premium brands of liquor such as 'Feckin' whiskey and 'Jawbox' gin. The drivers had a ball (not due to the drink you understand!) with the slippery conditions around farmyards, lanes and airfields. Will Corry and Peter Moreland Moore once again triumphed in the ballistic blue K-series Midget. Class wins also went to Midgets of Peter Mann, David Gomes and David Cochrane and it was good to see some MGBs out with Lloyd Cochrane taking the class win.



Vincent Rodgers' MGB and Richard McCracken's Sprite - Test 1 at Echlinville Distillery

May brings brighter days and opportunity for mid-week evening events. The Carlisle Fuels autotest at Crossgar is becoming synonymous with 'blasting around their big shed' and we had a healthy 25 strong entry on a nice dry evening. Robin Lyons, autotest maestro, in his Mini special, showed everyone the best way round the smooth concrete tests despite having to do some rapid spannering to complete the event, and win just ahead on time of Andrew Earney in his Mini special. Fortunately, this year we were not afflicted with any 40 foot lorries arriving unannounced to park up for the night in the middle of a

test; one did the previous year requiring a quick re-hash to avoid the new obstacle!

For the June Autotest we visited the Ulster Grand Prix pits at Dundrod where we abused their recently renewed tarmac. The day's rain moved off leaving a damp evening for a 19 strong entry with the moist surfaces helping the cars to slide. Andrew Earney was again in top form and won overall. The event turned out to be my downfall though. I had brought all the autotest kit to Dundrod in the back of my Insignia. I had set up the tests and cleared up the equipment after, with boot and doors open and

running lights on. I finished tidying just as the last competitor had disappeared from the site and when I went to leave, the car wouldn't start. The evening finished with me waiting an hour for a nice recovery man from Agnew's to administer a jump start! New battery required.

Moving forward to the August Bank Holiday weekend, we held our Ulster Classic Night Trial. Noel Cochrane and Richard McCracken had worked out a concise route but which still packed in 15 challenging tests for an entry of 24 MGs and period classics – not an MX5 in sight! A last-minute test reshuffle due to a coincident running race in Newtownards required Carol to swiftly amend the road book in the wee small hours of the previous night. Also, a 'Yellow Warning' weather forecast didn't bode well. However, on the evening, the car park at Ballyblack Community Hall filled with the sounds of BMC '4 pots' except for Angus Johnson's Frogeye which required some fettling before normal service resumed and all teams were on their way. Not for long though as Jamie Hanna

soon had to splutter his yellow Midget back onto its trailer. Robert Dickson was himself down on power being just out of hospital, but not that it showed in his driving as he threw his rally Mini with abandon around the tanks at McGimpsey's yard towards a final 3rd place. On through farmyards, Council yards and silage digester plant as daylight gave way to pitch blackness, two laps of the route were duly completed and all returned to the Community Hall for a sumptuous spread laid on by the members of the Community Hall.

The standard of driving was excellent and the commitment total given the value of many of the cars - all being flailed un-mercilessly around the yards between byres and concrete walls. Most finished unscathed but sadly Angus Johnson broke a half shaft quite near to home. 1st Overall went to David Cochrane & Ruth Steele in their Midget, a mere 1.9 seconds ahead of Will Corry and Adele Kennedy in the K-series Midget.



Lloyd Cochrane's MGB and Robert Dickson's 3rd place Mini on the Ulster Classic Trial

So on to the autumn PCT and Grass Slalom season, brief though it was! When the autumn weather is dry and the sun is shining, what better than a drive in the country – up a manure-covered slippery field. We had a small entry of 10 at Erwins' Farm at Cunningburn near Newtownards on 14 September for the first round of the Ulster Centre's PCT and Grass Slalom championships. We had set three tests with progressive slipperiness. Erwins had just slurried the fields and the first test on dry stubble gave drivers a false sense of security because the next two tests were nicely lubricated, providing a good coating of winter underseal for the cars!! Fun was had as the grip got progressively worse and no competitors got away with clear rounds. We had our first electric car entry with Roger Gordon gliding round the tests in his Prius showing great expertise with a foot-pedal handbrake until his battery needed charging!

After the PCTs we set up a grass slalom on a big 'M' shaped course on a flat stubble field where drivers were able to get the 'pedal to the metal' with two counting timed runs and a last run for fun. The sideways action was mighty with muck & straw flying - all good sport. Kevin McNamee set the fastest RWD time ahead of the quickest FWD of Andrew Earney in his Mini special which needed a few more gears! We were back again early October at Erwins' in Cunningburn for PCT Round 2. What a difference in the weather though, heavy rain early afternoon lubricated the slurry spread on the field a couple of weeks prior. After frenetic revving and wheel spinning of just a couple of cars, the hill looked like the Somme. Yet, Bailie Thompson in the trusty Corsa managed a seemingly impossible series of penalty free runs. Finally, 1st was serial PCT champion Bailie Thompson, 2nd son Will and 3rd, Zak Armstrong.



Zak Armstrong's Rover 25 with Granddad, Mike, and Paul Beardmore's Sprite - PCT1 at Erwins', Cunningburn

Unluckiest competitor was Chris Patterson whose Beach Buggy started once, spluttered, coughed, blew out white smoke, died and was returned to its trailer. We thank Chris for marshalling instead. Thanks must go to the Erwins for not only the use of their lands but also for rescuing three cars from the mire by tractor at the end of the day!

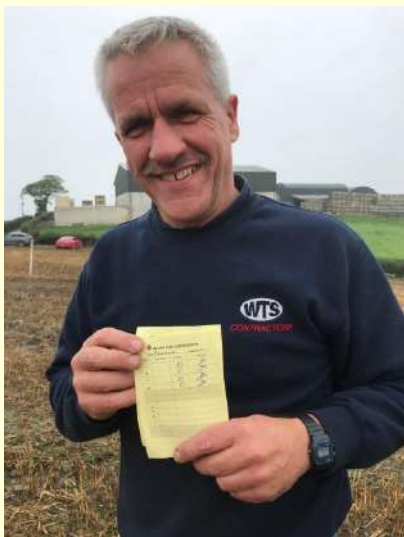
The ensuing winter weather put an abrupt end to the PCT season with PCT3 having to be abandoned. Also, coincident lanes rallies with each PCT did not help our entries this year.

We were lucky to have such a good dry, sunny day at the end of November for our final competition, the annual AutoSOLO. We had set 3 cracking forwards-only, 'no-hand-brake-turns-necessary' tests with varying degrees of grip just to make things challenging. TTS had recently re-surfaced their site and added some additional tarmac areas for us to play on! We had a full entry and the event ran so smoothly we finished very early. Therefore we joined up two adjacent tests to make a single 'just for fun' additional run of around two minutes in length. Will Corry came out on top with another smooth and fast performance in the K-series Midget, 16 seconds ahead of

nearest rival, Jimmy Dougan, in his Mini. Third was Robert Haslett in a Toyota Yaris. Everyone had so much fun that we are contemplating running two AutoSOLOs next year.

So, what about 2020? The 2020 DWT is again being planned for the end of January as I write – possibly starting again at Echlinville and venturing around the Ards by-ways.

Finally, for such a small organisational team, MGCC Ulster Centre produced a very successful nine competitive events in 2019. We are eternally grateful for the support of landowners especially this year, those in the Co Down farming community, Transport Training Services (TTS), Nutt's Corner, Delamont Country Park, Killyleagh and The Ulster Grand Prix, Dundrod, for use of their properties. We are also indebted to our MGCC marshals, heavily reinforced by volunteer marshals from other Ulster Car Clubs. Without their assistance our events would simply not run. We are very much in need of younger members to come on board to run the Committee and take up the organisation of competitive events. Without new organisers, the splendid events that the Club runs will be at risk of not happening.



Bailie 'Clear Run' Thompson! and Dermot Johnson's Sprite in the muck!

Informal Run to the Thoroughbred and Sports Car Club Summer Classic Sprint, Kirkistown, Saturday 8 June

Terry Ingles

The Ulster Centre was invited to this event, which replaced the traditional Cultra Hill Climb run by TSCC, the venue becoming unavailable in 2019. The Sprint was run on the lower part of the circuit, from below the control tower, leaving the hairpin end of the circuit free for invited clubs and individuals to display their cars, coming and going as they pleased without interfering with the competitive event. The club had also set aside slots for a drive around the sprint course for invited cars.

On a day with awful weather forecasts, 7 cars from the Ulster Centre met at Cloud 9, the Ulster Flying Club café and bistro at Newtownards Airport for mid morning coffee, scones and late breakfast baps. The rain had briefly chased us from Dromore, petering out at Carryduff and dry at Newtownards!

Arriving at Kirkistown we parked up at the hairpin end of the circuit along with many other interesting cars. The morning sprint runs were coming to a close at lunch time and we were marshalled to line up for our display run. The seven cars were then led onto the circuit for a reasonably spirited drive round the full sprint course. The feedback from members was good and several had not been on the circuit for a long time, if at all.

The Ards peninsula has a micro-climate of its own, not always to the advantage of visitors, but this time we were lucky.

Thanks to the TSCC for the invitation and to the participants. This is the sort of informal Ulster Centre activity we hope to repeat as we are receiving requests to join in with other clubs' events, in addition to encouraging members to bring their cars to our competitive events when a suitable venue can be arranged.



MGCC Ulster Centre cars at Kirkistown

*Brian and Liz Patterson on parade in their TC
Photo by Leslie McMullan*



TSCC Summer Classic Sprint

Photo by Leslie McMullan



MGA Register Spring Tour 2019

Terry Ingles

Linda and I joined 62 other MGAs, 2 MGBs and an MG3 for the MGCC MGA Register Spring Tour, 17 to 19 May, where the Royal Victoria Hotel at Llanberis, Snowdonia had been booked out by participants, with an overflow in accommodation in the surrounding town and area.

Amongst all the roadsters, we were one of only seven Coupés, two of which were 1500s, one a very early example with the door lock on the passenger side! This was a standard feature, even on right hand drive models, presumably because of the high number of MGAs exported to the US. The door lock, whilst still only provided on one door, was moved to the driver's side quite early on in production. There were five Twin Cams in the entry, from memory, all roadsters.

MGAs at Beaumaris, Anglesey



The organisers, Alan and Diana Sheridan, produced a splendid road book for the two days. They have intensive knowledge of the area, especially Anglesey, where they have a house and have moored their boat over the last thirty years.

Saturday's route took us from Llanberis to Anglesey for an anticlockwise run round the island, stopping first in Beaumaris where Alan had obtained permission from the Council to park all the cars on the green by the sea. His daughter and family marshalled the cars, but a drone or very wide angled lens would have been required to get all the cars in the same picture!

From there, the route was planned very successfully to include many optional points of interest, which meant that there was never a convoy of cars to annoy other road users and the only places we saw many others on the route were car parks at stops, such as the RNLI station at Moelfre, which featured in a TV documentary about Anglesey.

Lunch for most people was at Trearddur Bay on Holy Island at the North of Anglesey, after which there was a choice of routes, round Holy Island or stopping off at the South Stack lighthouse on Ynys Lawd the rock outcrop on the edge of Holy Island, which we did. Descending the 400 steps down the cliff to a bridge over the sea to the lighthouse we stopped to view the many sea birds at this RSPB reserve on the cliffs including one Puffin – we were too early in the season



South Stack lighthouse: ascending the 400 steps to the top of the cliff!

for more, we were told. We climbed, for me the vertiginous, spiral staircase cantilevered out from the inner wall of the 28 metre tower for an interesting talk from an ex-employee on its history, built in 1809 and mechanisms of the now automatic, but not maintenance free lantern which flashes a white light every 10 seconds. We were told, and photographs show, in very rough storm conditions the spray will reach the top of the tower at an overall height of 60 metres above sea level after lashing the cliff!



View inland from South Stack lighthouse, Anglesey

Other stop off points included Halen Mon, a sea salt production facility providing Green & Blacks chocolate and Pipers Crisps with their salty ingredient and the National Trust property Plas Newydd. We had already decided after our South Stack exercise we would miss these attractions out and enjoy the road route and beautiful scenery instead!

However, before returning to Llanberis, we did take an obligatory detour to the village with the longest name:

Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysilio gogogoch Its meaning, in English, is Saint Mary's Church in the hollow of the white hazel near a rapid whirlpool and the Church of St. Tysilio of the red cave.

Not a very picturesque place however, but the easiest place to see the entire name is the railway station situated in a lonely corner of a shopping centre car park!



The railway station at Llanfair PG

A gala dinner was held in the hotel on Saturday evening where we were made very welcome by the newly appointed Chair of the MGA Register, Ian Wilson. It was a bit embarrassing to be especially identified in his after-dinner speech, but it was good to hear the Ulster Centre held in such respect. Of course, we had probably one of the shortest distances to reach the venue, just down the motorway to Dublin, across on the ferry and a shorter distance to Llanberis, but our effort was welcomed. Many members had travelled much longer distances in their cars to be there and were used to these journeys to other meeting venues. The main difference being their ability to keep going on the road, rather than having to interrupt their journey with an expensive and time-consuming ferry passage, also helped by bigger engines and five speed gearboxes fitted to a surprising number of MGAs.

Sunday saw a choice of locations off the route, again well presented in the Tour road book, with a lot of cars going to Portmeirion the tourist village and site of TV and film productions, where special facilities had

been laid on to allow cars to drive down to the village centre in groups. Beddgelert, Porthmadog, the Ffestiniog Railway, Llecwedd Slate Caverns and Bettws-y-Coed were also options on the Snowdonia route.

Linda and I however had already planned to go up Snowdon – on the steam railway! The station is just across the road from the hotel, so having collected our pre-booked tickets on the Friday when we arrived, we caught the 1010 from the historic terminal and chuffed up the track. The 1896 steam engine aided by its central cog wheel mechanism rattled and shook, stopping at intermediate station halts on the ascent, filling up with water at the Halfway Halt and arriving at the Summit station in cloud, one hour after our departure.



Steam train, Snowdon

The Summit station was packed with walkers, who we had observed in their hundreds on the main paths up the mountain. The actual summit was like pictures of the queues on Everest, without the need for serious mountaineering gear and oxygen, just the wait!

Most members stayed at the hotel on the Sunday evening. On Monday Linda and I were not in any hurry for the 2.00 pm ferry from Holyhead, so visited the

The queue in the clouds for the summit on Mount Snowdon



Slate Quarry museum on the edge of Llanberis. This museum utilises the site and restored buildings of the slate production business in the shadow of the open cast cliff faces, now disused. A fascinating visit included a video presentation of the frighteningly dangerous quarrying process and a demonstration of manual slate splitting producing the various sizes of slate for all purposes.



Hand splitting slate and cutting to size

In this general area of North Wales the countryside is full of, and scarred by, the industry of slate quarrying. Many of the cottages have entire gable walls clad in slate in addition to the roof, guaranteeing, according to the demonstrator, at least 100 years of weatherproofing as long as genuine Welsh slate is used as opposed to cheap imports from India and China, which only last a few years, before eroding – he said!

We enjoyed our tour immensely. It was well organised and produced and the weather was reasonably kind, only raining on the way back up from Dublin, when I was glad I had Rainex-ed the windscreen as the wiper blades struggled to clear the water.

The MGA Register will be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2020 and Ian was seeking contributions for a planned book on the MGA and members' stories and anecdotes over the 50 years. Mike Wilson and I have sent copy including details of MGAs in the Centre over the years and other known cars on the island of Ireland.

The venue for the planned 50th celebrations and other meetings during 2020 are planned and there was anticipatory talk of the possibility of an MGA Register Tour of Ulster in 2021!

Bristol is the venue for the MGA Register Spring Tour in 2020, a bit further away than Llanberis! Hull in late September has been chosen for the celebratory Anniversary meeting, we've paid our deposits and hopefully, we will be there.

Into the West

MG Enthusiasts Club of Ireland 2019 Tour.

Mike and Linda Wilson

On 1 September 2019, six Members in three cars from the Ulster Centre headed down the M1 to join 60 members of the MG Enthusiasts Club Ireland in Celbridge, Co Kildare for their Annual Tour. Jenny and Mike Armstrong (MGTF), Phyllis and Des McDowell (MGB) and Linda and Mike Wilson (MGA) then proceeded southwards using motorways (for convenience) to Castletown House in Celbridge, Co Kildare, for registration and a welcome coffee and scone.



Castletown House

Castletown House, built in 1722, is the largest and earliest Palladian style mansion in Ireland and is well worth a visit. After leaving Celbridge, we followed an interesting cross-country route avoiding motorways through Enfield, Kinnegad, Rochfordbridge and Tyrrellspass to the lunch stop at Mount Temple Golf Club at Moate.

After a most enjoyable lunch and conversation we then followed a route through Athlone, Ballinasloe and Loughrea to the Raheen Woods Hotel in Athenry (where the Fields are!), which would be our base for the next two days. A very welcome facility at the hotel was our reserved underground car park. In the evening, there was a drinks reception and dinner with a few welcoming speeches.

The Tour mileage for Sunday was 114 miles.

Kylemore Abbey



The following day (Monday 2 September) the organisers had arranged a magnificent route in Co Galway, through Connemara, Joyce's Country and the Inagh Valley Drive to Kylemore Abbey for lunch and a visit to the Abbey and gardens.

After lunch, we turned towards Leenane on one of the best drives in Connemara along the south side of Killary Harbour fiord. We then continued through Joyce's Country to An Mam and Corr na Mona to Cong, Co Mayo. Cong was the location for the 1952 film 'The Quiet Man' starring John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara. After Cong, the return journey back to Athenry for Dinner was via Headford Claregalway and Oranmore.

The Tour mileage for Monday was 130 miles.

Tuesday offered an alternative day. Participants could catch a train in Athenry close to the hotel and go to Galway for the day (I understand that the traffic in Galway is a bit of a challenge). The alternative (which we all opted for) was a visit to Portumna Castle on Lough Derg using a circular route via Craughwell, Ardahan and Gort. A further loop used Scarriff and Whitegate to Portumna. This circular route actually circled the Slieve Aughty Mountains and arrived via a spectacular driving route up half the length of Lough Derg.



Portumna Castle (*above*) was built in 1618 by Richard de Burgo and is a great fortified house. It was destroyed by fire in 1826 but is now being restored by the Office of Public Works. There is an interesting exhibition and restaurant in the building.

After lunch there, we returned to Athenry via Loughrea for the final dinner in the evening.

The Tour mileage for Tuesday was 116 miles.

At the dinner, Mike Armstrong gave a vote of thanks to the organisers for the event, and when he added a 'plug' for the Ulster Centre Tour in 2020 he was inundated with enquiries (and deposits!).



Simon Johnston with his daughter Emily doing their run up Prescott Hill Climb in a friend's borrowed J1, July 2018

Photo: Sam Christie

Pre-War Prescott

If at first, you don't succeed ...

Simon Johnston

With so few Triple-M² M.G.s on the road here in Ulster, those of us who do drive them have to go 'across the water' to get the full enjoyment of the cars in the company of other like-minded owners. The Triple-M Register of the MGCC runs an annual touring event in which we have managed to participate a few times, but perhaps even more popular is an event run by the Vintage Minor Register at Prescott Hill Climb in the Cotswolds known simply as *Pre-War Prescott* (www.prewarprescott.com) This isn't a competitive event like, say, VSCC Prescott; it's a purely social event but the big attraction is that the modest entry fee includes untimed runs up the full Prescott Hill Climb.

The event is organised by the founder of the Vintage Minor Register who, amazingly, lives in Seattle and it is open to any pre-war car. It has become very popular with the Triple-M fraternity and with 2019 being the ninetieth anniversary of the M Type Midget and thus the start of the Triple-M era, last year's event was a great opportunity for Triple-M owners to bring their cars out, have a bit of fun and catch up with old friends.

There's a real garden party atmosphere about the event and most people bring a picnic and sit and have lunch in the shade of the trees beside a mouth-watering display of pre-war cars of all descriptions. With Prescott Hill Climb being owned by the Bugatti Owners' Club, there are usually one or two *pur sang* automobiles in action, as well as representatives of most pre-war British marques.

I first entered the J2 in 2015 and had planned to take in the Triple-M Register Summer Picnic as well which was being held on the next day but my plans were wrecked when I fell and broke my arm at the Cultra Hill Climb a month or so earlier. The next year, we were busy organising the Ulster Triple-M Register Tour so gave Prescott a miss but entered the following year, 2017.

We drove over in the J2 using the Belfast/Liverpool ferry and detoured via Llandrindod Wells in mid-Wales to have lunch with a cousin of mine. The weather was pretty awful, with torrential rain from there to Cheltenham where we were staying but we arrived safely at the pub where everyone was meeting up on the Friday evening. During the drive

² Midgets, Magnas and Magnettes built between 1929 and 1936

from Wales I had noticed the occasional very slight hesitation when accelerating but put it down to the pouring rain getting the electrics wet. We left the pub to head to our B&B and I found that the slight hesitation was turning into a proper misfire and we ground to a halt some distance from our destination. There was nothing for it but to call the rescue service and so it was almost midnight before we got to our beds.

The next morning I started to try and find out what the problem was, but even with the help of my regular Triple-M guru, Oliver Richardson, we couldn't track it down. So we had to abandon plans to drive Prescott Hill in the J2 and took a taxi there so that we could at least meet up with old friends, one of whom was kind enough to lend me his J1 (the four seater version of my J2) to drive up the hill (*see photo above*).

After a lot of pondering and discussion with others at Prescott, I concluded that the problem was probably the condenser. Given that the engine had been built with a new Bosch distributor (a very common modification when original Lucas units in good condition are hard to find), the condenser should have been fine but I had a spare one with me and, once it was fitted, all was well. If only we'd thought of that on Saturday morning!

We headed back to Liverpool on the Monday with a slight water leak from the radiator to contend with so the journey against the clock to get to the ferry wasn't exactly stress free. Add to that the challenge of driving such a small car with cable brakes and a non-synchromesh gearbox in heavy traffic on the busy roads of England which seem to be one roundabout after another, and you can well understand my good

lady wife's conclusion that 'next year we'll bring it on a trailer'!

So we made plans in 2018 to borrow a trailer but everything was thrown into disarray when, the week after the Ulster Centre Golden Jubilee Tour and about six weeks before Prescott, the engine in the J2 went onto three cylinders with a total loss of compression in the fourth. We clearly weren't going to get it running again in time as once you start dismantling an engine all sorts of other horrors manifest themselves. (The story of the engine rebuild would occupy another dozen pages so I'll simply say that it took over six months to complete but so far, so good.)

However, since we had booked our ferry and accommodation we decided to go ahead without the J2 and, as chance would have it, I managed to find a Brian James Minno Shuttle covered trailer for sale in the Reading area so snapped it up and took the opportunity to collect it while we were in England. We went to Prescott to enjoy the spectacle and catch up with friends and my pal with the J1 lent it to me once again for a trip up the hill.

Come 2019, with the J2 running well again, and the natty covered trailer to bring it in, we planned our Pre-War Prescott entry only for our tow car to expire in a cloud of smoke one evening on the M1 about two weeks before Prescott. A good pal stepped into the breach with the loan of a Mitsubishi Outlander so off we set, at last, to get the J2 finally to Prescott.

We had rented a nice cottage some fifteen miles from Prescott and I decided not to tempt fate by driving the J2 even that distance and we took it there in the trailer. Once unloaded I hopped in to drive it to the parking area and realised that we'd taken the key

The M.G. corner of the paddock (with a Morris interloper!)

Photo - PhotographyByAmandaJayne



out of the ignition while the car was in the trailer and the key was sitting in the cottage, fifteen miles away! As it happened, I had volunteered to do a stint on the Triple-M Register stand so while I was doing that our daughter, Emily, drove back to get the key and had returned just as I was wrapping up my time at the Register stand. With so many cars entered – upwards of 200 – there is inevitably a bit of queuing involved before getting to drive the hill. While one or two people complained about this afterwards, for the vast majority this was part of the crack. If you were in the queue people would come up to you and chat and admire your car, and if you weren't yet in the queue you could wander around and chat to the folks who were. Great fun and a good opportunity to check out the many and varied cars there, nearly half of which were pre-war M.G.s, not just Triple-M but TAs and TBs as well. I think the organisers did allow a few TCs, TDs and TFs as well as some post war Morgans as they look the part.

So after four attempts we finally got to drive the J2 up Prescott. I'd have to say it's a pretty forbidding

hill with a hairpin bend where the ground seems just to disappear on the outside of the curve, but we managed a couple of runs without drama and thankfully loaded the J2 back into its trailer for the journey home. Hopefully, now that we've broken our jinx, we'll make it there this year without any drama. (This YouTube link shows the view from the passenger seat of the J1 - <https://youtu.be/fJxxYslMw6g>)

And a final thought: although all of our current hill climbs in Northern Ireland are held on closed public roads, for a few years there was a hill climb in the grounds of the Folk Museum at Cultra and I've often thought that something similar to Pre War Prescott could be run there as it has the essential prerequisite of a return road from the top of the hill to the bottom which allows a steady flow up cars to go up the hill without having to have delays while they come back down again. However, I don't think there is much enthusiasm amongst the present management at the Museum for a motor sport day and even getting the actual hill climb back again seems doubtful.

We finally make it! In the queue for our first run up the hill in the J2 with number four grandson looking very cool in his vintage racing overalls. It will be another few years, however, before he's old enough to take part, even as a passenger.



Parting shot ...



More MGAs, with probably the most popular accessory, at Beaumaris, Anglesey