

Brian Scarlin Bashall 1928-2016

by Chris and Philip Bashall

Brian died peacefully in hospital after an ongoing battle with septicaemia caused by a nasty leg infection. He was taken in during the early hours

of Saturday 20th November and simply faded away. We visited him and were able to say our goodbyes before he went.



Brian had a good and unusual life. His family background meant he was interested in a wide variety of subjects. Born on 4th September 1928 he was little brother to Helen. Their mother, Betty, was an amazing women. Daughter of Alwyn Lasenby who was the MD of Liberty's of London for several years, and sole surviving child of Alwyn after her brother Scarlin was killed by a shell in WWI, Betty went on to start her own toy factory in

Thames Ditton just before WWII, and used Brian and Helen to test the prototypes. Once WWII started, she went to Hawker Siddeley and negotiated for contracts to build the wooden and latterly metal parts for the Mosquito aircraft. She used to joke that she paid the school fees with the money from the scrap metal left from making Mosquito undercarriages.

Towards the end of WWII she designed and built in the factory's backyard a 65'9" yacht called Mellona, using the staff from the factory. She had the design checked by a naval architect, whose only changes were to move the wheelhouse forward six inches for perfect balance.

Brian was doing his National service towards the end of the build and would ride back on his Vincent at weekends to help with construction. Betty was larger than life. Once the yacht was finished she took it out to the Med and eventually chose to settle on Mallorca in what was then a quiet fishing port called Andraitx. She then designed a beautiful Casa overlooking the port and settled there permanently.

As a family, the Bashalls were always surrounded by boats, cars (usually Bentleys) and motorbikes. They were into most aspects of motorsport. The entire Bashall clan including cousins and distant relatives were all motorheads!

In Brian's youth it was boats and motorcycles, then Land Rovers, followed by military vehicles, tractors and in the latter years Bentleys. He never had one of anything, always multiples, which inevitably led to a move from Thames Ditton in the 60s to Farley Green (on the North Downs) where a smallholding called Stock House was purchased to house the burgeoning collection of rusting military trucks awaiting restoration as well as numerous Land Rovers.



His passion for Land Rovers at this time had really taken hold and he left Comerford's of Thames Ditton, where he had been the Workshop Manager for some years, and started buying, repairing and selling Land Rovers from Stock House. The neighbours complained about the large collection of army trucks in the field, and Brian won a court case over keeping them there. But the writing was on the wall, and along with his

wife Pip they bought a small garage and established Dunsfold Land Rovers in the idyllic village of Dunsfold on the Surrey/Sussex border, about a 20 minute drive from Farley Green.

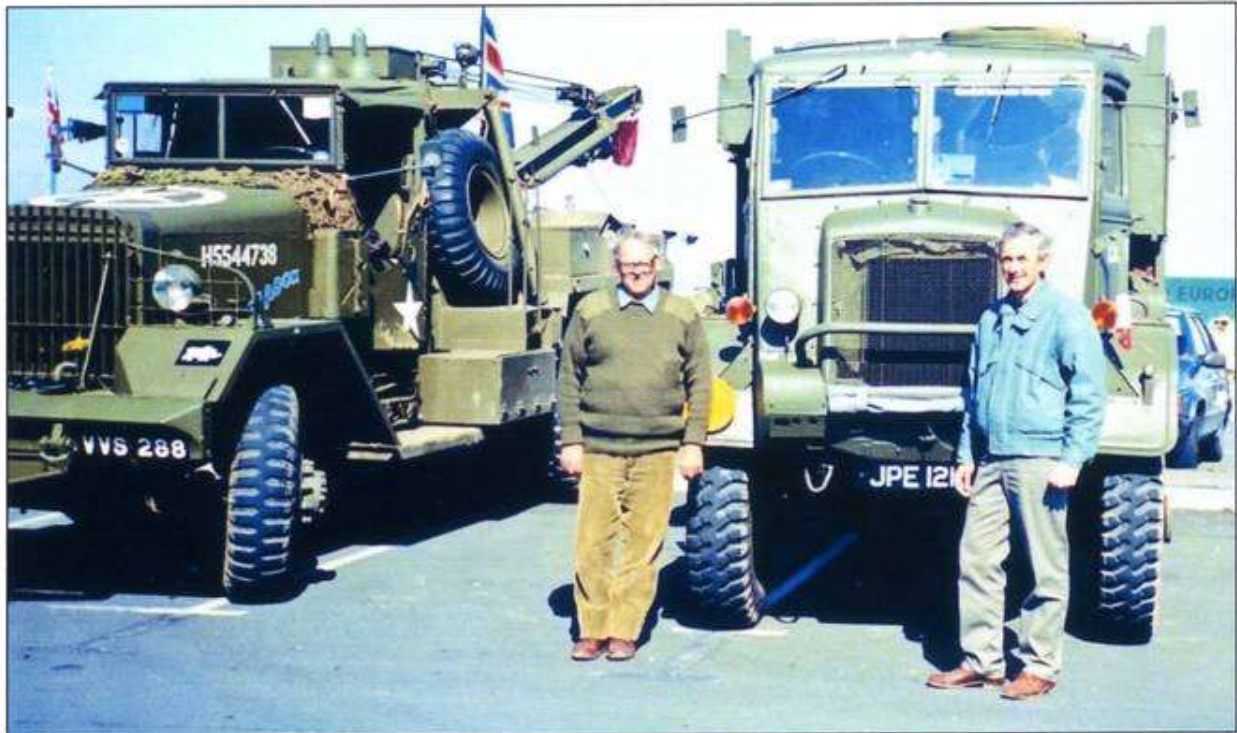
The business premises was originally a WWII searchlight battery for the nearby airfield, and consisted of a rather rickety shed and an odd-shaped barn on a reasonably sized plot.

Before long it was a thriving if somewhat chaotic centre full of Land Rovers, military vehicles of all sorts and was now joined by a Buffalo amphibious WWII tank that had been found in Wisley. The yard became more of a club than a typical business and most of the customers became lifelong friends.

Ever since the early 50s, Brian had been a keen member of the Southern Land Rover Owners Club and he regularly attended and organised trials, so most weekends were spent either trialling or at a steam rally showing off the military stuff or having

a work party on the Buffalo or suchlike. There was always a crowd around having a good time.

Dunsfold Land Rovers continued to thrive and additional buildings went up over the years. All along, Brian was always looking out for any of the numerous prototypes or engineering specials that were the backbone of the success of the Land Rover brand and as usual, multiple 'funny ones' started joining the ever-growing collection of toys at Dunsfold.



One year, Brian organised the National Rally for the Land Rover Club at Weavers Down near Liphook. For recovery purposes, he took along a WWII Dodge 6x6 weapons carrier that had a big winch on the front. The powers-that-be at Land Rover Club HQ took umbrage at a non-Land Rover being present and that was the start of the idea for the All Wheel Drive Club. At this point, Brian was surrounded by a large number of people who owned military and non-military 4x4s who wanted to play with them off road, but had no outlets to do this.

So Brian and a handful of friends set up the All Wheel Drive Club as an off road club for anything that had all wheels driven (although most things were welcome, including beach buggies and all sorts of weird and wonderful creations).

The first AWDC event was advertised in 'Exchange & Mart' and thirty or so people turned up. It was in a small field in Dunsfold and was pretty tame, but it was a start. The club grew, organising trials and you would see a fantastic mix of vehicles being put through their paces, it was not uncommon for a Bren Gun Carrier to be seen playing in the mud. The club thrived and grew in numbers and other events such as speed events against the clock were introduced, which in the early days were a series of fairly tough sections that were linked together by tracks and you were timed from the start to when you finished, having completed the whole route and would accrue time penalties for assistance etc. The club gradually grew into the largest off road club in Europe and became more professional.



During this period the Land Rover collection was growing in number and vehicles were scattered around numerous barns in the area to keep them out of the weather. We always worked at the business on and off and when Chris went to the States to work in the mid-80s, Philip joined the company permanently and took the collection by the scruff, restoring a lot of them single-handedly while actively seeking out more.

The collection grew and eventually became too large to handle alone, so the Friends of the Collection was formed and a regular band of enthusiasts started to get involved. The biennial open weekend was launched and quickly grew into a very large event with Land Rovers from all over the world attending. The collection has managed finally to obtain charitable status and currently has around 130 vehicles in it, mostly prototypes, rare or special vehicles and 'funnies'.

Brian was awarded a Lifetime Achievement award by the Transport Trust for his dedication to Land Rover history and preservation, and for creating the collection. Most of these vehicles were destined to be crushed, if Brian had not stepped in and rescued them.

Brian stepped back from all this in the 1980s, having amicably divorced Pip he was now married to Joanna, who wasn't really into the off roady stuff. Whilst maintaining his interest in Dunsfold Land Rovers he had handed the reins to Philip and had settled into a much quieter life at Pondtail, a delightful cottage in the woods down a private

track near Petworth. Needless to say, before long numerous vintage tractors appeared on the basis that they were useful for collecting firewood and hay for Joanna's horses. Brian tried his hand at some ploughing matches and won a couple of prizes. He also got heavily involved with owls and was constantly rescuing and breeding owls that would then be paired-up and placed in the countryside. He had a wide variety including a blind tawny owl that would attack anything that went near it (except Brian!), numerous barn owls and a couple of huge snowy owls, and occasionally a massive buzzard called Hilda would come and stay.



Life was good as he settled into his later years and was pleased to be presented with a granddaughter Sammy. Unfortunately Joanna was taken by cancer in the late 90s leaving a large hole in his life. He decided to get back into mechanical things and started collecting vintage Bentleys. He joined the Bentley Drivers' Club and started attending their rallies. It was during this period that he found a new girlfriend, Pamela Johnson. They got on well and she enjoyed going out in the Bentleys and they enjoyed several happy years together to present

times before old age and illness caught up with him.

Brian's mobility declined and he ended up wheelchair-bound. He gave the house a major make over and prepared it so he could live in it with carers, as this was obviously on the horizon. Eventually he reached the point where he needed full-time care and would need full-time carers to look after him.

The toys were sold off to fund his care and then an equity release was taken out on the house that bought him five more years of care. He had hoped to die in his own home, but the wonders of modern medicine kept him going through several

situations that would have been the end not that long ago, the upshot being that he outlived the equity release and had to move in to a nursing home, so the house could be sold to pay off the equity and fund his ongoing care.



Brian will be remembered for his enthusiasm and his ability to involve lots of people in whatever he was doing. Home would always be full of people and there was always a crowd around. He managed to infect so many people with his

passions, whether it was military trucks, Land Rovers, Off-roading or whatever he was up to. He was a kind and gentle soul who will be greatly missed. RIP.

