

# BRIAN BASHALL

## 1928 - 2016

*In a tribute to Brian Bashall, who passed away as this issue of LRM was being prepared, we have suspended Dunsfold Diaries this month and look back on Brian's rich if not remarkable life*



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rian Bashall, founder of the Dunsfold Collection and co-founder of The All Wheel Drive Club, has died aged 88.

Brian had a good and unusual life, engendered by a fascinating family. Born in September 1928, he was little brother to his sister Helen. Their mother Betty was an amazing woman. She opened her own toy factory in Thames Ditton just before WWII, and used Brian and Helen to test the prototypes.

At the onset of WWII, she negotiated for contracts with Hawker Siddeley to build wooden and metal parts for 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 foot yacht called Mellona, employing the staff from the factory. Brian was doing his National Service towards the end of the build and would ride home on his Vincent at weekends to help. Once the yacht was finished, Betty sailed it to the Mediterranean and settled on Mallorca, where she then designed and built a house.

An avid collector, in Brian's youth it was boats and motorcycles, then Land Rovers, followed by military vehicles, tractors and in the latter years Bentleys.

By the '60s, his passion for Land Rovers had really taken hold and he left Comerfords of Thames Ditton where he had been the workshop manager and started buying, repairing and selling Land Rovers. The neighbours complained about the large collection in the garden and



although Brian won his court case, the writing was on the wall so, along with his wife Pip Bashall, they bought a small garage and established Dunsfold Land Rovers in the idyllic village of Dunsfold on the Surrey-Sussex border.

Before long it was a thriving if somewhat chaotic centre full of Land Rovers and military vehicles, which became more of a club than a typical business model.

A keen member of the Southern Land Rover Owners Club, Brian organised the National rally for the Land Rover Club and took along a WWII Dodge 6x6 weapons carrier with a big winch. Land Rover Club HQ took umbrage at a non-Land Rover being present, and The All Wheel Drive Club came into being. The first event was advertised in the Exchange and Mart and 30 or so people turned up. The club gradually grew into the largest off road club in Europe and became more professional.

Brian's Land Rover collection was growing and when his son Chris went to the States to work in the mid-1980s, son Philip joined the company permanently and took the collection by the scruff, restoring a lot of them single-handedly.

The collection eventually became too large to handle alone, so Friends of the Collection was formed and a regular band of enthusiasts started to get involved. The collection now has charitable status and currently has around 150 vehicles, many unusual and some unique.

Brian was presented with a Lifetime Achievement award by the Transport Trust for his dedication to preserving rare and unusual Land Rovers and for creating the collection.

Brian stepped back from it in the '80s, having remarried, and handed the reins to son Philip to settle down to a quieter lifestyle. 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 also found a new interest in owls, which he rescued and bred for release into the wild.

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. It was during this period that he found a new girlfriend, Pamela Johnson.

Eventually, old age and illness caught up with him. His mobility declined and he ended up wheelchair bound and had home carers in the final five years. Sadly, his 'toys' were sold off to fund his care.

The Bashall family, who kindly prepared this obituary, said: "Brian will be remembered for his enthusiasm to involve lots of people in what ever he was doing. The home would always be full of people and there was always a crowd around. He was a kind and gentle soul who will be greatly missed."