

WHITLOCK CAR

One of the best aspects of Family History is you never know what you are going to be researching next. Such is the case with the Whitlock car, a story with many different angles other than the family one. The rise and fall of the Whitlock Automobile Company is the story of the transition from the horse drawn carriage to the automobile. It is also at the heart of the beginnings of the British automobile industry, an industry so new that it didn't really have a name yet.

Most of the material about the Whitlock car starts with the founding of the Coachbuilding firm in 1778 and at this point the articles normally jump right to 1904 and the first automobile manufactured by the Whitlock family. I have attempted to fill in a bit of that century and a half gap.

While the name most associated with the coachbuilding firm is Henry Whitlock it assumed the firm was actually founded by Robert Whitlock (1752-1833) as Henry Whitlock was not born until about 1786. The reputation of the firm was obviously built by Henry Whitlock.

The last half of the 1800's has to have been the heyday of coachbuilding, Victorias, Broughams and Landaus were works of art and the coachbuilders of the day constructed each by hand and took enormous pride in their work. The Whitlock carriages were some of the best and were sought after. In the 1883 Sportsman's Exhibition Henry Whitlock Co., Coachbuilders, now displaying the coveted "By Royal Appointment" boasted their carriages were "First of Style! Sound Work! Moderate Charges!" By 1887 a Whitlock brougham was exhibited with "Mortimer's Patent India Rubber Tyres". Unfortunately the innovative design and progressive ideas that were the hallmark of Whitlock coaches were not carried over into the new automobile business. The first cars to bear the Whitlock name were not made by them at all, the 1903 Whitlock-Century. The firm was established at the Holland Park address but their material for the 1903 Crystal Palace Show only mentioned "motor bodies built to order in wood and aluminum". According to "The Great Cars" the first true Whitlock car was first exhibited at the Cordingley Show in the Agricultural Hall at Islington in March 1904. This car was called the Whitlock-Aster and had a Whitlock chassis and coachwork with an Aster engine.

Several variations were shown and in 1905 the Whitlock-Aster raced in the Tourist Trophy. I am sure the disastrous 22nd place finish convinced them never to try that again as that is the one and only reference to a Whitlock car being raced.

From what I have been able to determine 1906 marked the end of any involvement of the Whitlock family with the Whitlock car. It may have occurred sooner as the only Whitlock ever mentioned is old Henry Whitlock and we know he was dead by 1863. In 1906 the company was taken over by the Lawton family, later Lawton-Goodman and all of the Whitlock cars known to still be extant are from this period. At the 1929 Olympia Exhibition no less than seven models were displayed but sales did not appear to warrant additional manufacture and in 1930 production appears to have ceased.

Unlike many early automobile manufactures the name lived on. The Whitlock cars were listed in the directories until 1936 and in the 1950's & 1960's a branch of the company produced heavy machinery under the Whitlock name. Even today the Whitlock Automobile Company is listed in the London Telephone directory. Mr. R. Lawton-Goodman still ran the business at Cricklewood in 1981 and many of the pictures used in this article hung in his offices.