

Ewell Downs Motor Services, 1916–1968



Mrs. Wynn Jones has asked me to continue the notes that her father began on the business at Ewell Downs Motor Services. I was in touch with Mr. Swift from September 1919 until his death in April 1946. Some of his Russian and other European experiences were already known to me as he often told his 'boys' about them. I was still one of his 'boys' at the time of his death, although by then I was over 40 years old, having first met him when I was not quite 15.

I will take up the story at the point he mentioned as being under shellfire in France with the Royal Naval Division, but I have no firm dates. Eventually he returned to England and soon found himself in the (then) Royal Naval Air Service, later to become part of the Royal Air Force. His engineering experience was of course very valuable, and he spent the second half of the war working on the repair and maintenance of the Navy's flying-boats at RNAS at Felixstowe, attaining the rank of Chief Petty Officer. He was very proud of his naval career.

After the war, at about the end of 1918, he was released from the Navy and returned to his old firm Clement-Talbot Ltd. in West London. The site of these works was for many years the London service establishment of Rootes Motors Ltd. He now met again with Mr. W. A. Priest, with whom he had travelled in Europe selling Humber cars in 1906. (W.A. stands for Walter Alexander.) Mr. Priest was then London Sales Manager for the Sunbeam Motor Car Co. Ltd. of Wolverhampton, with offices and showrooms in Hanover Square, London, but he also became involved in setting up a company to take over an existing motor business in Epsom. (He then lived in Woodcote Road, Epsom.) The motor business was that owned by Mr. Thomas Hersey, who at the turn of the century had a blacksmith's shop in South Street, Epsom, eventually turning his attention to cycles and later to motor cars. The motor car side was started, I believe, in 1904, and certainly by 1914 it was soundly established. In the years 1916-1918 Mr. Hersey was the appointed dealer for Studebaker cars, a well-known American make. Motor car owners in Epsom

and round about could, of course, be counted in dozens, not in thousands as today, and most of them ran Studebakers. To my knowledge the business maintained an appreciable stock of parts for these cars, a service that was quite unusual in those days.

But I digress – back to W.A. Priest and his company. The chairman was a well-known Epsom worthy, Mr. George Simpson, who lived in Mill Road and was by occupation of Commissioner of Queen Anne's Bounty – one of the last men, I believe, to hold this ancient post and title. He was also Chairman, or it may have been President, of the Epsom Brotherhood. Mr. Simpson had a son-in-law, Mr. Douglas Campbell Norman, recently home from war service with the rank of captain. This young man had spent a few years pre-war as a motor-car salesman in Buenos Aires, but had very little technical knowledge. He was appointed Managing Director of the new business, now to be known as the Woodcote Motor Co. Ltd.

The company was, of course, very short of the expertise necessary to operate a motor car business. Mr. Priest, now Vice-Chairman, bethought himself of young John Swift who had given such a good account of himself in Austria and Russia, and was now in London.

It was a young man's trade in those days – in fact it was a very young trade – and John Swift at 30 years of age, with European, including Russian, experience, ex-Tourist Trophy racing mechanic, ex-flying boat mechanic, was very much the expert, and in May 1919 he came to Epsom to be Works Manager of the newly formed Woodcote Motor Co. Ltd.

As these notes are about John Swift I will not go into the early history of Woodcote Motor Co. Ltd., beyond reporting that the business prospered, John Swift became a well-known and highly respected member of the community, and stayed with the company for nine years until May 1928. At that time the area known as 'Ewell Downs' was being developed, mainly by good upper middle class housing, of the sort that sooner or later would have a motor car, but in 1928 that state of affluence had not quite arrived. John Swift, however, could see that it was coming, and had decided at least to try to establish his own motor repair business in the area, which now consists of part of Reigate Road, and all of Ewell Downs Road, The Green, Higher Green, Longdown Lane North, Beech Walk, St. James Avenue and, coming much later, the Wallace Fields district.

Mr. Swift therefore approached Mr. John Wallace, a Scotsman long resident in Ewell who owned and farmed the Priest Hill fields on the Reigate Road, and suggested that Mr. Wallace sold him an acre of land somewhere about the Drift Bridge. Farmer Wallace refused, but pointed out to 'Swiftie', as he was now generally known, that the Curtis dairy farming family was reducing its dependence on milk production and wished to sell a field at the village end of Reigate Road. A deal was done, and John Swift became the owner of 1.1 acres along Reigate Road, near to Mongers Lane.

The only building on the site was the former cowshed, a very old structure but in fair condition, brick built with a tiled roof, which survived into the Esso era. This became the main workshop for several years.

It is well known that Ewell Downs Motor Services ran for a year as a one-man business, but in 1929 a private limited company was formed, with Mr. Swift as Chairman and Managing Director. His reputation was such that work just poured in and the business expanded very rapidly. The initial staff, on opening in May 1928, consisted of two men – a highly skilled young motor mechanic (now living in retirement in Devon) and a building handyman. By the time that I joined the firm, in 1935, the workforce numbered over 70 people.

From 1935 until the outbreak of war in 1939 the company operated quite a profitable business – one might call it a sideline – selling and hiring trailer caravans. These vehicles were much smaller and simpler than most now on the road, but of course very much cheaper. A 4-berth van with adequate (not luxurious) equipment, including crockery and cutlery, but no linen, could be purchased for £100. Hire charges were of the order of £5-£10 weekly, according to season. Larger, heavier and more expensive vans were also available. In those days few, if any, cars had towing equipment, so there was a useful spin-off in fitting towing bars to hirer's cars – average cost of this about £20. The caravans were attractively displayed on the grassy area alongside the Ewell bypass adjoining the showroom building until early 1939, when the Borough Council planning committee decided that this grassy plot was not part of the industrial area for which planning permission had been given in 1932. For a few months, each time a van was shown on this site a phone call from the Town Hall said, in effect, 'Remove it – or else!'.

Anyway, back to 1935. That was the year when it was decided that the cowshed and the wooden huts could no longer cope, and plans were made for the present main workshop, a steel-framed structure that was the largest workshop of any trade under one roof anywhere around Epsom. As well as the workshop the new building included the present offices, and a large and elegant showroom. The steel frame was supplied and erected, with largely glazed roof, by a specialist firm, Pierson and Sons Ltd., but the rest of the work, brick walls, concrete floors, heating, drainage, plumbing and all electrical work was carried out by direct labour under Mr. Swift's personal supervision.

This direct labour was of course a very economical way of doing the job. As Stores Manager, I was responsible for the supply of such material as bricks, sand, cement, electrical cable and conduit, plumbing bits, and so on, all to arrive at the right time to suit the inexperienced building staff, and all subject to Swiftie's firm instruction: 'Don't spend too much money!'. A few years later, when I was a Director of the firm, I had occasion to have the building given a professional valuation – this was eight times the amount that I knew the building had cost.

The low cost of the building in 1935 was partly due to the amount of secondhand material – not, of course, the steel frame, that was brand new

and made for the job – but the offices and Stores Department were fitted out with mahogany counters and doors and window frames, lovely woodwork indeed, and all from a demolished pub in Wimbledon. The hot water boiler and the heating radiators were also secondhand, but I've forgotten whence they came.

This account of the new large building, formally opened by Mrs. Swift in 1936 (the foundation stone is still in situ, but the copper plaque commemorating the event is now in Bourne Hall Museum), follows naturally from the earlier remarks about the cowshed and the wooden huts, but during this period another development appeared. This was the coming of the Ewell Bypass Road in 1932.

Petrol sales were already important to Ewell Downs Motor Services, and some pumps had been installed along Reigate Road, and this was the main entrance to the site (now, of course, the rear entrance, still known as 26 Reigate Road, opposite the main entrance to Seymour's Garden Centre). The site as purchased was larger than now, the eastern boundary being about the centre line of the present bypass. The County Council needed a strip of this land to give sufficient width for the new road. Amicable negotiations ensued, as a result of which Mr. Swift was paid a sum of money equal to the amount which the land had cost him in 1928, with Surrey County Council agreeing to remove the petrol pumps and tanks to a new position facing the new road. This in effect swung the entire site to face the bypass, with the original entrance on Reigate Road being now of minor importance. Soon petrol sales really took off, and they have remained important ever since (which of course was the reason for the Esso interest in 1968). A few years later a cantilever canopy was erected over six pumps, the remaining four pumps being left out in the open for the use of high vehicles and trailers and caravans which would obstruct the other pumps.

At this point I'd like to make a digression about the old Lloyds Bank in Epsom. In 1932 Epsom High Street, from the central crossroads Ashley Road-Waterloo Road, was widened to twice the original width northwards to the East Street-Church Street junction, the buildings on the west side of this length of road being demolished. And on the Waterloo Road corner stood a substantial edifice occupied by Mr. E. G. Pullinger for his equally substantial business of stationer and bookseller. A few doors from this building was another occupied by Lloyds Bank, formerly by the Capital and Counties Bank. In 1931, a forced sale of Mr. Pullinger's corner site by the landlord enabled Lloyds Bank to take the opportunity to purchase the property – banks in those days always wanted a corner site. The bank (Lloyds) arranged to build and occupy new premises on Pullingers site and Pullingers were to transfer the business to the old Lloyds Bank. Unfortunately the Surrey County Council had decided to widen the High Street and, after a Public Enquiry prior to which the move had already been made and the new Lloyds Bank built, the frontagers lost and a brand new bank was pulled down.

When Mr. Pullinger moved into his new premises (Lloyds Bank's old premises), he found the bank had left their old strong-room (which incidentally

he used as a stock room) particularly the massive steel frame of the door, and the heavy door itself. Mr. Pullinger did not want the door – it was in his way to say the least – but how to get it out? He consulted his old friend Mr. John Swift. Along came Ewell Downs Motor Services breakdown wagon with crane, and the door and frame were hauled up to ground level and carried away to the garage at Ewell. It was put aside until the new workshop and showroom buildings were erected in 1936. Owing to the two levels on the site there was a considerable basement below the showroom, so part of this was constructed as a strong-room, using the door and frame rescued from Pullingers. This was in regular use at least until January 1984.



But to return to Ewell Downs Motors. Now that, in 1936, the company had a good showroom facing the Ewell Bypass Road, the time had come to obtain a car dealership, or franchise as it is now known, and so arrangements were made for the cars made by the Standard Motor Co. Ltd. of Coventry. The vehicles were in fact supplied by Lankester Engineering Co. Ltd. of Kingston upon Thames, who for many years had been Standard distributors for the whole of Surrey. To back up the franchise a substantial stock of parts was established, and was maintained for several years, even after the Standard agency had ceased. The Standard factory produced quite a large range of vehicles, from 8 hp to 20 hp, the most popular being the 10 hp and 12 hp models, and soon Ewell and roundabout was buying them in satisfactory numbers.

Then came the war in 1939 and new car sales were no more. Petrol was rationed, customers disappeared to their war jobs, as did many of the staff, including myself, and for a year or two things at Ewell Downs Motor Services looked very grim.

Mr. Swift, of course, took energetic steps to keep the business alive, eventually with much success. I cannot give a lot of detail of the war period, as I was away for six clear years, but I did visit the works to see Mr. Swift each time I came on leave. A small fleet of elderly Austin cars was kept in service as private hire vehicles, and was much used by car-less customers, but net income from this was very small, and finance remained a worry.

Tentative arrangements were made for a large manufacturer of aircraft components to move to Ewell in an emergency, and in September 1940 there was such an emergency when their main factory at Croydon was destroyed by enemy action. Within days much equipment, mainly power presses for small sheet metal items, was installed in the big workshop at a satisfactory rent, an arrangement that continued into 1946.

The small garage-type machine shop was rapidly expanded until it occupied the whole of the original cowshed and overflowed on to the carwash. The high standard of workmanship found favour with the Ministry of Munitions and plenty of work was soon forthcoming. It is thought that the whole of the Royal Air Force requirements for a universal-direction type of gun mounting for its Typhoon fighter aircraft was supplied by Ewell Downs Motor Services. The machine shop also did experimental and prototype work on the equipment used for catapulting aircraft from merchant ships.

The war was over in 1945 and everybody was looking for a return to pre-war normality, but this was a very long time coming. Petrol continued on ration, parts of all sorts were in short supply or non-existent, the Standard franchise had lapsed, and the factory was not able to make any firm commitments for renewal. Four of the old Austin hire cars were still on their feet, but only just, and they only lasted another year or so. Some of the staff returned, and so did many of the pre-war customers, many of them with cars that had been laid up for years, so there was plenty of work getting these on the road again. Shortage of material was chronic.

The lack of a franchise was of course very serious, but by the end of 1945 Mr. Swift had negotiated an Area Dealer agency with the Rootes organisation, then making or trying to make, Humber and Hillman cars and Commer commercials. Again we were under a large distributor, this time the Caterham Motor Co. Ltd. at their Reigate branch, but we had exclusive trade rights to cover Epsom and Ewell and about five or six miles around. Again, also, a large stock of parts was established, and gradually increased right up to the Esso takeover at the end of 1968. A new store room was built on the main workshop floor for this purpose, and the basement of the showroom building was also used as a stock room.

I say that Rootes were 'trying to make' motor cars – they did make them, and very good ones too, but shortage of materials meant that production was very small indeed. The Ewell Downs Motor Services allocation for 1946 was for six cars only, and we had seven retail dealers under us to provide for.

But by early 1946 Mr. Swift's health was becoming worrying. He had undergone several operations to his throat, but he continued to work, although often in considerable pain, but always so approachable, he always had time to listen, he was always ready with encouraging words and good advice. During the winter of 1945-6 Mr. Swift's health gave cause for concern. He continued to work, although often in considerable pain, and it should be recorded that the tenor of his thoughts throughout this period was always towards the future. The Rootes dealership was gradually being consolidated, subordinate

retail dealers were being appointed, an experienced and energetic sales manager, Mr. Geoffrey Welton, was engaged, and a new stores department for spare parts was established on the workshop floor level. This last operation was rather a long job – although the company now had the money for this, the overall supply of parts, and in fact every kind of engineering material, was very poor indeed. I well remember that I spent much of my time from September 1945 onwards in trying to persuade our Rootes distributors, at that time the Caterham Motor Co. Ltd. of Reigate, to increase our allocation of parts, and in looking up old trade friends of pre war days who might have stock of one sort or another that would be useful. In this connection the ‘Old Pals Act’ was particularly useful, and one remembers with gratitude the Lankester Engineering Co. Ltd. of Kingston, G.J. Riches and Co. and R. Cadisch and Sons (two of the smaller London factors), the Dutch firm of Philips Lamps, and the large British components makers S. Smith and Sons Ltd., now Smith’s Industries, who were to be our only source of supply of car batteries for several years.

Spring of 1946 brought no real improvement in ‘the guv’nor’s’ health, but outwardly at least he usually appeared cheerful and optimistic. At this point I would like to record my last meeting with my old friend and mentor.

About the end of March 1946, the Institute of the Motor Industry held a meeting at the Connaught Rooms in Great Queen Street, London, to hear a lecture by Air Commodore Frank Whittle, then much in the public eye for his development of the jet engine. Attendance at the meeting was restricted to Fellows and members of the Institute: John Swift was a Fellow, and I was a member, and we went together in Mr. Swift’s car. As we were about to leave EDMS premises, Mr. Swift asked me to drive. I had by then known him for almost thirty years, and I had never known him ask anybody else to drive him in his own car. I felt sad, because it meant of course that he could not manage the drive to London and back.

A few months previously he had bought a boat, or at any rate a hull, and this was then being rebuilt and fitted out at a Putney boatyard as a river cruiser for half a dozen passengers. After the Institute meeting I drove him to a ship’s chandlers near Waterloo Station, where he bought various nautical brasswork, then to Putney to see the boat. He explained to me that sailing on the Thames was to be his hobby and principal relaxation in his retirement, which was not to be very far away. ‘Soon’, he said ‘you young so and so’s can run the business, and I’ll come along sometimes to tell you what you’re doing wrong!’. We arrived back at Ewell about 7 p.m., and I never saw him again.

He died during an operation for throat cancer on 19th April 1946 – Good Friday that year – and the world was a much poorer place for so many of us. The funeral service was held at St. Martin’s Church, Epsom – it is a large church, but it was quite full for John Swift’s funeral, and the Vicar (I think it was Canon Warner) gave an address that showed us that he knew much more about Mr. Swift than any of us expected. He obviously respected and admired Mr. Swift.

Most of the garage staff attended the church service, otherwise throughout the period of his illness and funeral it was 'business as usual', as he would have wished, but of course changes in management were inevitable.

Mr. B.E. Nightingale, who was the Company Secretary and non executive director, and a chartered accountant with his own practice in London, became Chairman of the Board. Mrs. Swift became a non executive director, and Mr. Geoffrey Welton, the Sales Manager, was appointed Managing Director. Miss Ethel Murfitt, already a director, was then appointed Company Secretary – she was already doing the greater part of the work – and continued in this post until her retirement some twenty years later. Not all the more senior members of the staff found themselves able to work happily with Mr. Welton, and a few changes took place in the ensuing months.

After Mr. Swift's death, the directors of the firm were:

Mrs. Lillian Swift, the founder's wife; she was Chairman 1954–1964

Mr. S. Charlton

Mr. C. Stanbury

Miss Ethel Murfitt, 1929–1966; she was Company Secretary 1954–1964

Mr. B. E. Nightingale; he was Company Secretary and Chairman 1946–1954

Mr. G. Welton; he was Managing Director 1946–1966

Mr. W. R. Burton; he had joined the company in 1928 and was Works Manager 1952–1962, and Director 1955–1968

Mr. H. F. J. Lee; he had been Stores Manager 1935–1968 (he was in the army on leave from the company 1939-45), and was Director 1955-1968, and Company Secretary 1966-1968

Mr. J. Moxley; he was Sales Manager, Director 1966–1968

Mr. H. A. Y. Nutt; he was Majority Shareholder and Chairman 1964–1968

Conditions in the retail motor trade were very difficult in 1946, and many wartime restraints were still upon us. The newly won Rootes Group franchise was no moneyspinner! Our exclusive territory was quite small and rather rural, covering the Borough of Epsom and Ewell and the villages around – part of Ashted, all of Banstead, Tadworth, Burgh Heath, Langley Vale, Chessington, Oxshott and Claygate. In this area eight retail dealers were appointed in the EDMS franchise, and to satisfy these eight, plus our own retail orders, our allotment in 1946 comprised six new vehicles.

Petrol was still severely rationed; tyres and many component parts subject to government control, and of course a general shortage of everything. We did our best not to break the law, but a certain amount of bending was essential if we were to keep our motor repair shop in being. For example, for some controlled material Epsom was covered by a certain Ministry's London office, but the same Ministry's Brighton office did not seem to know this – hence a request to both places would produce two certificates, and so two cars could be dealt with. Without this sort of thing many cars would have been out of action for very long periods, which of course was no use to the motor trade – we had to keep them going to keep ourselves in business. We did not, however, buy in the black market, and we did not charge our customers

above the regular or reasonable retail prices, whatever the difficulty experienced in obtaining the material.

In these circumstances and these very difficult times it must be recorded that on the whole our customers, the motorists of Epsom and Ewell and round about, were neither appreciative nor grateful, although most of them knew of the trouble and time we had taken to get or keep their cars on the road. When in due course conditions became easier and supplies more plentiful, many of those who we had helped the most were the first to desert us and go to the cut price places that eventually appeared, and which did so much harm to the small independent motor trader.

At EDWS the war work was finished – the aeroplane parts makers had gone; we had very large premises under used, staff returning from the armed forces, no – or very few – new cars to sell, and the motoring public selling their secondhand cars to each other – so what to do?



Here Mr. Welton's undoubted selling ability came to the rescue. He sold himself and the firm's modest facilities, the expertise of his staff, even our geographical advantage in being on a main road near London, to the General Electric Co. Ltd. With very little difficulty part of the works, mainly the wartime wooden hut canteen, was adapted to take equipment loaned by GEC; we took on two dozen girls who had recently lost their war work jobs in Leatherhead, and set to work making Osram-GEC torch bulbs. It might be more accurate to describe the work as assembling; though GEC supplied the material, some in a semi-finished form, we put it all together, baked the cement in the canteen gas cooker oven, then tested and packed the finished bulbs. We attained a very high standard of work, and in about two years produced 14 million bulbs, and made enough profit to keep the firm on its feet..

The bulbs were 2.5v and 3.5v MES (Miniature Edison Screw caps) used mainly in hand torches. Before the 1939-45 war, Germany and Japan were large suppliers, but their industry was almost destroyed by 1945. After the war there was, of course, a huge pent up civilian demand worldwide which GEC,

now almost the only producer, could not fulfil. They had in their Wembley works some obsolete but serviceable equipment which they sent to Ewell, and thus EDMS was able to bridge the gap until Wembley could again provide the space and labour for miniature bulb making.

After the lamp bulbs, what now? The motor car business was slowly improving, new car sales were moving up to 300 cars a year, repair and servicing work was increasing and becoming less frustrating, but the premises overall were still under used. Pre-war, like most large garages, we had a small but efficient machine shop, considerably expanded during the war, but now quite small again. One day in 1950 a customer living in Stoneleigh was waiting for his car servicing to be finished and took a look at the machine shop, which surprised and impressed him.

He was an engineer with the English subsidiary of the American firm the Electric Furnace Co., operating from Weybridge, Surrey, and engaged mainly in manufacturing industrial electro-plating machinery. Their English factory in Yorkshire was not able to cope with the volume of work available, and soon EDMS was making quite a variety of small parts for the Electro-Chemical Engineering Co., as the Weybridge operation was named.

Electro-Chem, as we called them, soon had considerable confidence in EDMS, and within a few months we were making complete online barrel-plating machines, mostly 36-inch barrels with their ancillary equipment. We made several hundred of these, sending them mostly to motor vehicle makers in the United Kingdom and abroad. Fiat and Morelli (owned by Fiat) in Italy took about half the production, and in the United Kingdom Joseph Lucas, the big electrical firm, Singer Sewing Machines and Hoover Ltd. were important customers.

The 'barrel' method of electro-plating has been in use for many years for plating small items in bulk. The barrels made by EDMS to Efco specifications were used for such items as small bolts, nuts, washers and such, the 36-inch machine that formed the bulk of our work being suitable for loads of 100-120lb weight.

The word 'barrel' may be misleading to the laymen, as they are not normally the shape of a beer barrel, neither are they cylindrical. The Efco ones were, in fact, hexagonal, consisting of a pair of hexagonal end plates joined together by five flat panels. A sixth panel was a loose one, and was the door through which the bits to be plated went into the barrel. The measurement of 36 inches was the overall length of the barrel. Towards the end of the contract we made a few 12-inch barrels, these being small enough to be moved and carried by hand – the 36-inch ones needed mechanical handling equipment such as crane or pulley-block.

Over the years (we did this work for about ten years) various materials were used for the barrels, the main requirement being, of course, resistance to corrosion. Red fibre was an early material, followed by Bakelite (but not for long), then TUFNOL, which was a compressed paper type of material. We

also made a few in stainless steel. Eventually our customer standardised on acrylic sheet, a Perspex material, clear in its thinnest forms, but opaque at $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch thickness as used for these barrels.

In use, the barrels were immersed in a tank or vat containing the appropriate metal anode – copper or nickel or chrome for this work – and liquid, and the electrical cables for the electric deposition of the anode metal on the goods to be plated. At EDMS we were not concerned with the chemistry angle. The barrels revolved in the tanks, being driven by an electric motor on the outside and gearing to a gear on the barrel itself. The chemical in which the barrel revolved went over the work – the bolts and nuts or whatnot – through small holes drilled in the panels. A 36-inch panel, which would be about 7 inches wide, would need some 2,000 holes of, usually, about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch diameter. There were variations according to the type and thickness of plate to be deposited, sometimes the holes being counter-drilled, with one size hole going in halfway and another size going in the other half.

Each barrel would need 4 to 6 tanks, as in addition to the anode or cathode tank, others would be required to clean the incoming work, perhaps to degrease it, and then rinse it, so the barrel with its load would go into each of these in turn, probably finishing its run in a 'brightener' solution. The tanks were supplied by our customer, as also the material in bulk for the barrels, and also the hangers for the barrels, but all the mechanical parts were EDMS responsibility. I have only described the plant in the simplest way, but there were a lot of ancillary parts to be made for the suspension and gear-driving of the barrels. There were also quite a lot of replacements to be made after the first sets had been in use for a few years. My best estimate now is that we made between 1500-2000 barrels. We also built 24 of the Junior Automatic machines, but these of course were very different.

Later we were given the job of constructing some completely automatic plating machines. Our customers, the Electro-Chemical Engineering Co., who were also the designers of the machines, called them Efco Junior, as they also made a larger one, but these Juniors were quite big enough for EDMS to handle. Length varied from 36 feet to 42 feet, width was 8 feet, height 11 feet and weight 4 tons each. Getting them out of our main doors (maximum height 11 feet 6 inches) and up the slope was quite a job! But every one got away safely.

There were variations of these machines according to the purchaser's particular needs, and some choice of operation. Some worked by electro-mechanical systems, some electro-pneumatic, and some were hydraulically operated. We built 24 in all.

The basic item for all this plating was the tank to hold the plating liquid and electrodes, and these were supplied by Electro-Chem, but the material for all the working parts – iron, steel, brass, copper – was the responsibility of EDMS. Our charges for this work varied considerably, from £300 for a single 36-inch barrel to £2,000 or more for a Junior Automatic. Compare this with the lamp bulb job previously mentioned – 2/9d (now 14 pence) per 100 bulbs –

but both jobs were very profitable and kept us going until motor vehicle work again became sufficient in volume and profits to resume our purely motor trade function. This happened about the end of 1960.

Car sales continued to improve, if rather slowly, but the arrival of the Hillman Imp in 1963 livened things up a little, although not as much as hoped. The design of the vehicle was right, with an excellent Coventry-Climax engine, but continual labour troubles and strikes at the Scottish factory that built them meant very uncertain deliveries, with of course the loss of sales too. That factory operated for some ten years and *never* made a profit.

But lamp bulbs and plating machines and motor repairs are not the whole story. With our excellent main roads, especially the Ewell bypass A24, we had a substantial petrol trade, and this steadily increased right up to the end of 1968, when this story will finish. For many years, certainly from the end of the Petroleum Board wartime arrangements, we had sold the various brands of spirit marketed by the Shell organisation. These were: Shell, Mex, Power, BP, National Benzole and Dominion. Mr. Swift had always appreciated the value of the petrol trade, but he had died early in 1946, and in the very difficult post war conditions still prevailing the directors concentrated on keeping the business alive, hence the emphasis on the lamp bulbs and the electro-plating machines, and the petrol station was left out in the cold.

Petrol of itself was never a very profitable commodity, but when the 1950 audit showed a profit on turnover of only 3% the directors belatedly decided to do something about it. The petrol station had always been operated as a separate department, but after Mr. Swift's death it was answerable to nobody in particular. In late 1950, therefore, the Board decided to incorporate it into the Stores Department with Mr. H. F. Lee, the Stores Manager, solely responsible.

Well within a year the profit margin had increased to 8%, which was just right. A year or two later we managed to reach a profit of 10%, which in theory was not possible, but oil prices generally were beginning to rise, and by keeping an ear to the ground, and with a little luck, it was possible to make some modest stock profits.

By 1957 the petrol station was looking rather old fashioned and a bit scruffy, and the concrete forecourt was breaking up. Solus sites selling one brand only were now the thing, and our Shell friends encouraged us to do a deal with the National Benzole subsidiary. These deals were usually for a 20 year contract, the petrol company paying a small rebate on turnover and also allowing the site owner to twist their arms in one way or another. However, we held out for a 10 year contract only, with permission to sell oil – not petrol, of course – from suppliers other than the Shell companies, but of course giving preference to Shell products. We were able therefore to continue to sell our usual 1,000 gallons of Castrol oils each year. The Shell people did not like this at all, but they needed us more than we needed them. We also squeezed an extra one-sixteenth of a penny extra rebate. The 'arm twisting' took the form of reconstructing the forecourt with new and larger underground tanks, re-

sited pumps and new concrete flooring throughout. This work was carried out between November 1957 and February 1958, the contractors taking two hours less than promised, which was not bad on a job that took two months. The forecourt reconstruction was valued at £6,000.

At the same time a new showroom for 4–6 cars was constructed immediately behind the pumps, with access from the forecourt. National Benzole paid half the cost of this, EDMS paying the other half. For a few years, probably three or four, this showroom was used mainly to display Singer cars, as the Rootes Group had now acquired the Singer name and goodwill as well as the Coventry factory.

This old Singer factory, where all Singer cars had been made for many years, was then completely gutted and re-equipped as Rootes main parts depot for the whole world. The stores issue system was the first of such systems to be computerised, and in the early 60's the depot was extremely efficient. Mr. Lee, EDMS Store Manager, was twice given a guided tour of the depot – by now EDMS was taking a considerable volume of parts from Rootes.

Petrol sales fell off a little during the reconstruction work, but soon recovered. The electro-plating machine work had come to an end, and by 1960 we were back to our basic business as motor vehicle dealers and repairers, covering every aspect of the trade. Business was steady, but gradually becoming more difficult, mainly because the British motoring public was getting tired of the frustrations and delivery delays experienced when trying to buy British cars, and was turning more and more to foreign makes.

The next landmark was seen in the autumn of 1963. Mrs. Swift was in her seventies, the other directors were all aged about sixty, and we had no pension scheme. Mrs. Swift owned the largest shareholding, although not a controlling one, but the directors jointly did have control. It was decided, therefore, that they should try to sell their interest, but also continue in their departmental jobs and continue to manage the business, although Mrs. Swift would retire and withdraw completely. Mr. Welton was given the job of finding a buyer, and within a week a shortlist of applicants – three in fact – had appeared. It was soon apparent that two of these were not acceptable, and negotiations were opened with the third one, Mr. Horace Nutt, who owned a number of small garages and petrol stations in the South Midlands, based on Cambridge. Mr. Nutt was introduced and strongly recommended by our friends the National Benzole Co. Ltd. through their District Manager, the late Mr. James Tysoe. This NBC district was known as the Southern District and was quite a large one, covering Norwich and Cambridge and down to Southampton. Divisional Headquarters, however, was at Guildford, so we were always in close touch with 'Big Jim' Tysoe, who was over six feet tall and weighed 18 stone, and sometimes more. For ten years or so he was a good friend to EDMS, and Geoffrey Welton and Frank Lee were very sad to hear of his sudden death in 1969.

Mr. Nutt agreed to buy the shares of the directors on the one condition that Miss Murfitt and Messrs Welton, Burton and Lee continued in their jobs and

managed the business as directors for at least three years. This, of course, was just what we wanted. The arrangement worked well, and the new Chairman left us very much alone to run the business as we had done for many years. The style of management was in fact that directly inherited from Mr. John Swift, and remained very much the same throughout the 40 years (1928-1968) that the business operated. Relationships between directors, managers, staff, customers and suppliers can be described as firm but friendly for all this time. Customers often boasted that they had dealt with us for so-and-so many years – thirty years in many cases. The Nutt takeover actual date was April 2, 1964 – two days before the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the imposition of the long rumoured Excess Profits Duty – we were just in time!

There is now little else to report. Miss Murfitt soon resigned and went into retirement in Somerset. The business ran quite smoothly, made reasonable profits, sold 500 new cars a year, and a lot of secondhand ones. Mr. Frank Lee became Company Secretary on Miss Murfitt's retirement. Mr. Welton's health gave cause for concern and he retired, Mr. Nutt assuming the title of Managing Director; and Mr. Jack Moxley, Sales Manager, was elected a director.

In 1968 Mr. Nutt sold his interest, by now 99.6% of the equity, to the American oil giant Exxon Corporation, sacking the management and all but the most junior of the staff. All the discharged staff were rapidly taken on by other motor traders in the area. Mr. Jack Moxley left the motor trade to manage a pub, and Messrs. Burton and Lee retired from business. Sadly, Mr. Burton died suddenly early in 1971.

Frank Lee, 1984.