



The Brinton White Knight

by
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I FIRST met Mike Cummins, then living at Chaddesley Corbett, Worcestershire, early in 1975, and nearly two years after his acquisition of the Brinton White Knight. At that time he knew little of its origins or history — in fact, our friendship was largely based on a mutual desire to unravel the story behind this unique motor car. Thirteen years later, we are still friends.

As a professional historian I was, perhaps, better placed to conduct the research necessary, but I also received valuable assistance and co-operation from the directors of the Brinton family carpet business in Kidderminster, and the Trustees of the Brinton estate. Gradually a fascinating story emerged, together with period photographs which proved invaluable in the restoration which Mike was to undertake.

Above: The registration SS 227 was originally sought for Brinton's Silver Slipper car.

Below: Miraculously, the original mascot survived.



Cecil Charles Brinton was born in London on April 25, 1883, the seventh son of John Brinton MP of Moor Hall, Stourport on Severn. Educated at Cheltenham College and Caius College, Cambridge, he won the Salamons Engineering Scholarship and took an Honours Degree at Cambridge. At that time, Cambridge was the very crucible of engineering talent, and one of Brinton's contemporaries there was Harry (later Sir Harry) Ricardo. An earlier distinguished scholar had been the Hon. C. S. Rolls.

In 1904 he entered the family business in Kidderminster founded by his great-grandfather in 1783, and one of his first tasks was to re-design the gripper Axminster loom invented in 1893 by Thomas Greenwood, an employee of the company. This he most successfully accomplished, and in 1908 travelled to



Canada to set up a branch factory there. He was made a director in 1909, and his subsequent career was distinguished both in commerce and service to the community, becoming High Sheriff of the county in 1925.

From an early age he took an interest in motoring, graduating from bicycles to a Rex motorcycle whilst still at Cambridge, and owning a succession of motorcycles and cars thereafter. As early as 1904, however, he designed and built his first car, which was registered O 4, an early Birmingham issue. This number was transferred to various later vehicles, and for some years has graced the Bentley of Sir Tatton Brinton MP.

His second effort, in 1910, was altogether more ambitious. Based on the chassis of a large Calthorpe, (originally registered O 3755), and fitted with a

Above: The Brinton White Knight as it is today, reunited with the Brinton family.

number of prototype bodies whilst being developed, this one finished up with a pretty two-seater with a rounded tail, and was christened the Silver Slipper. It was registered in East Lothian to secure the prefix SS, and registered SS 227. Beneath the short bonnet, however, there reposed not a Calthorpe engine, but a unique vee-six unit designed and built by Brinton himself. The castings for the crankcase were made in the Kidderminster carpet factory's own foundry, and machined and built up in Brinton's own workshop at Yew Tree House, Belbroughton.

The cylinders were contained within rivetted-up water jackets, an unusual

arrangement, and both inlet and exhaust valves were overhead and actuated by exposed pushrods. Each bank of cylinders employed its own separate ignition system. Connecting rods, drilled for lightness, were yoked at the crankshaft end, but despite such iconoclasm, the engine ran successfully for 10,000 miles before being replaced by a modified Model T Ford unit.

Brinton's search for perfection continued, however, and around 1918 plans were laid for yet another one-off car. The Silver Slipper lost its two-seater bodywork to the new project, but was itself rebodied with four-seater coachwork and endowed with a Rolls-Royce-type radiator. In this form it continued in use into the twenties.

Mechanically, however, the new car was totally unlike its predecessor, and

The engine is a Daimler sleeve valve (hence the Knight part of the name) of about two litres capacity.



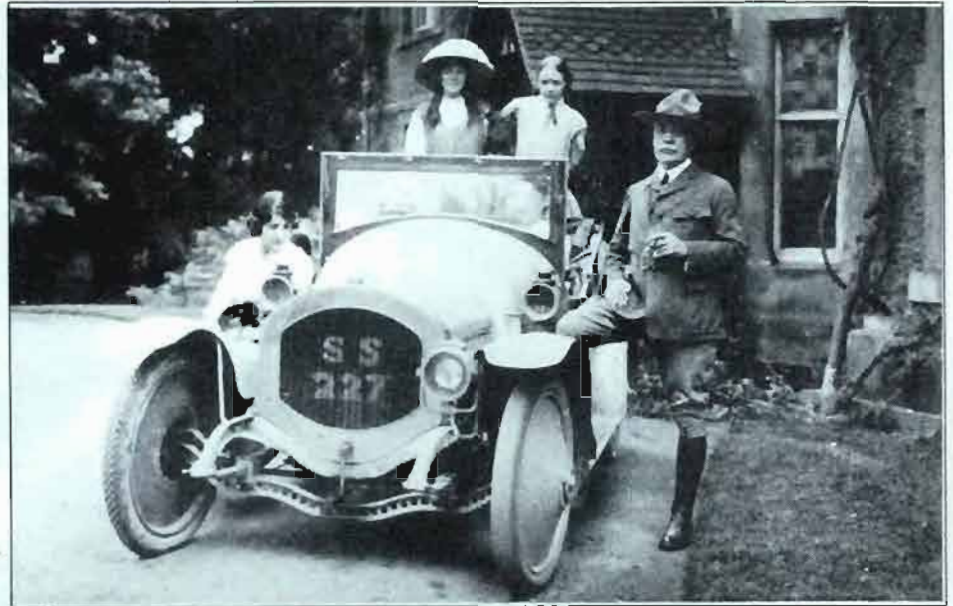
Instrumentation is not prolific, but the speedometer is well placed for easy reading.



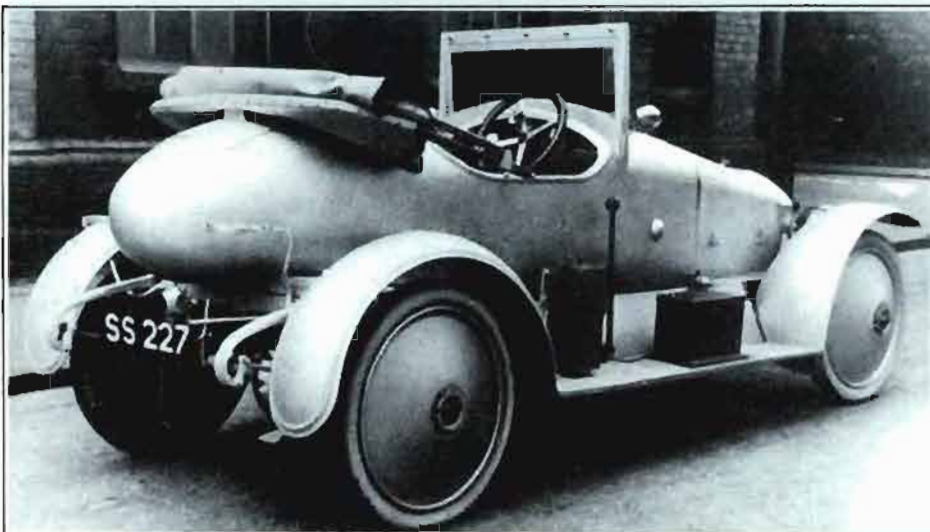
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appears to have been based partly on a small Daimler or BSA. Certainly it is fitted with a Daimler engine of about two litres employing the Knight-type double-sleeve valves for which Charles Knight's company, Knight & Dilbourne Patents Ltd, held the manufacturing rights. A large three-speed gearbox, believed to be of German origin, transmits the drive to an overhead worm rear axle which would not appear to be of Daimler manufacture.

I speak in the present tense because, although little of the Silver Slipper has survived (I found the remains of the engine and all the wooden patterns in the coalshed at Yew Tree House, and a test body was also unearthed), the later car is intact, and running well. It was not so when found by Mike Cummins, however. Both Cecil Brinton and his first wife were long deceased, and the second Mrs Brinton, Cecil's second cousin



The Silver Slipper photographed on 1st June 1912. Cecil Brinton is at the wheel and his first wife, who died in 1954, sits on the running board.



Marjorie, was still living at Yew Tree House. She was a Victorian lady in all senses of the word, and although approaching her ninetieth year, fully in command of the household.

Mike's home at Chaddesley Corbett was not far from the hamlet of Hill Pool, where the Brinton business had been founded in the late eighteenth century, and possibly because of this fact Mike was able to approach the old lady upon the subject of the car. Its existence at Yew Tree House had been known to a few enthusiasts for some years, but all attempts to liberate it had, up until that time, failed. Mike's face fitted, however, and he was permitted to buy it. All attempts at that time to learn its history, however, were politely rebuffed by Mrs Brinton.

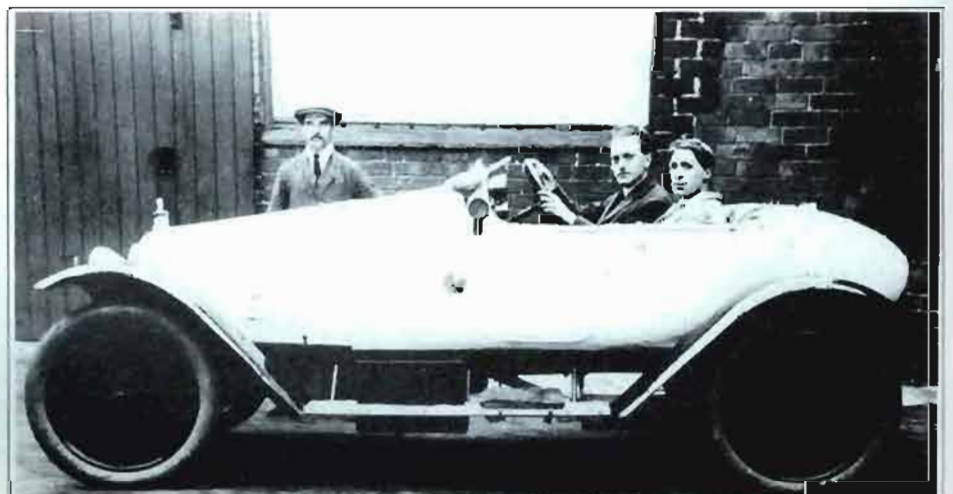
Some time later, and before restoration had commenced, Mrs Brinton's health deteriorated, and she was admitted to a home for the elderly. The trustees of the estate took the decision to sell Yew Tree

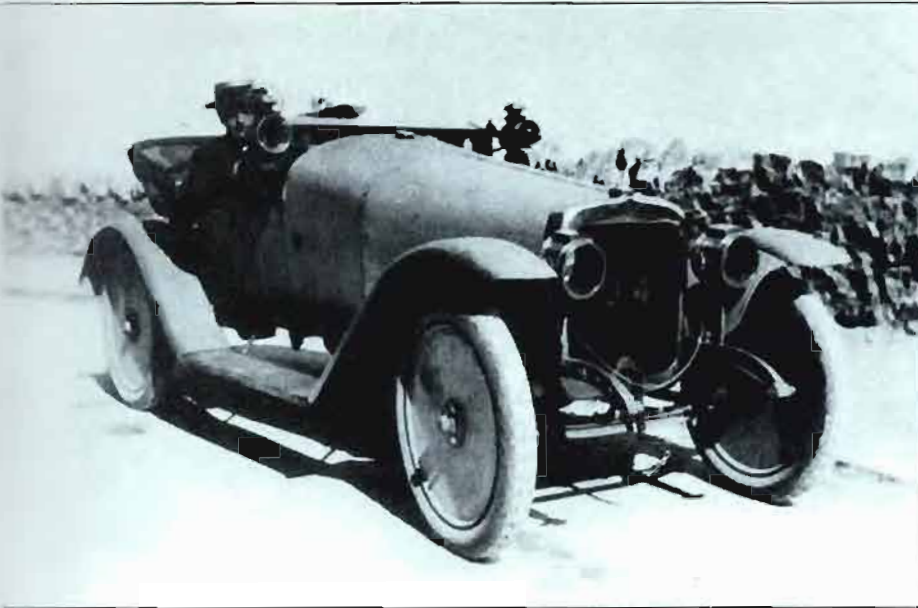
Above: A back view of the Silver Slipper in July 1913, showing the distinctive rounded tailed body subsequently inherited by the White Knight in 1919

Below: The White Knight, newly completed, in April 1919. Cecil Brinton is at the wheel, whilst beside him sits Harry Austin, a draughtsman who helped him work on the car.

House, and most generously donated the contents of the workshop and all motoring artifacts to the Veteran Car Club. Cecil Bendall and I operated a shuttle between Belbroughton and Hertfordshire for some days, removing such interesting items as a Rover Nine engine and gearbox, an 1899 steam engine which Brinton had himself constructed in that year whilst still at Cheltenham college, the remains of the Silver Slipper, and the body of a Brown Brothers car from around 1905, which had been built into a summerhouse. All were sold, and raised over £1,000 for the club's HQ building fund.

The White Knight was so-called because it was originally painted white and had a Knight engine. As can be seen, it was missing its headlights when it was acquired by Mike, but fortunately these were spotted atop two poles at each end of the overgrown tennis courts, and had obviously been used at some time as floodlights. The Trustees kindly made available many early documents relating to the White Knight and the earlier cars, including contemporary photographs, and these were carefully copied and used to aid the restoration.





Left: *The White Knight on the road, having inherited the registration number O 4 from an earlier Brinton car. Note that acetylene lights are employed at this stage, with oil sidelights. The photo may have been taken in 1918.*

Below: *The rear of the White Knight, showing the Silver Slipper body.*



The silver knight chessman mascot was still, miraculously, with the car, and apart from surface rust the White Knight had weathered remarkably well the years which had passed since it was last used around 1927. Restoration commenced. The sleeve-valve engine caused problems, as they often do after prolonged periods of idleness, but the work was eventually completed. Sadly, Mike then found that the diminutive two-seater body, pretty though it was, was scarcely adequate to accommodate his six-foot-plus frame, and the car was reluctantly sold, having first been offered back to the Brinton family.

It then entered a rather unhappy period of its life, appearing at a couple of auctions, and passing through the hands of successive dealers. Sleeve-valve engines require sympathetic handling if they are to give of their best, and obviously it did not receive this from all of its owners during this period. Salvation eventually presented itself in the form of Doctor Bill Hutton of Horsforth, Leeds, a VSCC member and designer and builder of the Weslake

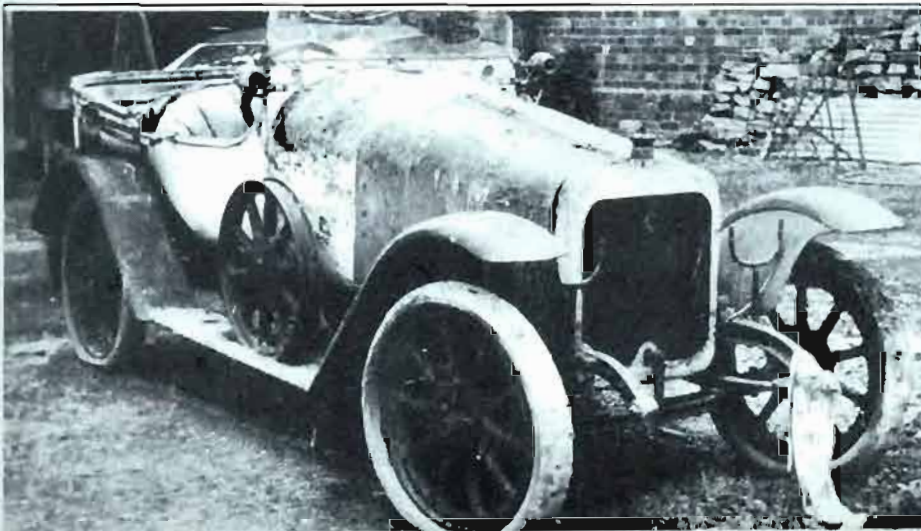
741cc-engined Hutton superbike. In his skilful hands the car was brought back to its former condition, and in April 1988 he drove it from Leeds to the International Classic Bike Show at Staffordshire County Showground.

I was there for the Sotheby's sale, recognised my old friend, and had a long chat with Bill. He generously let me pilot the car on a short trip in the environs of the showground, and it proved itself to have some curate's egg-like qualities! Low-speed torque was first class for so small an engine, with 60mph possible in top gear. An average of 30mph was easily maintained over a fifty-mile trip, but top speed was not much over 40mph. The gearbox was a mixture of vices and virtues. Arranged 'arse about face' with first gear bottom right, it demanded a fast change from first to second without a pause in neutral (similar to a vintage Lagonda). Getting it from second into top, however, required the patience of Job. I'd rather not comment about changes down.

It ran remarkably quietly — as one would expect with a total absence of

poppet-valve gear — and with virtually no smoke, steered positively like a good vintage light car should, but was weak in the stopping department, and not too thrifty. Springing was good, the car started readily, and the driving position was comfortable. Given the choice, however, I think I'll stick to the Austin Twenty. Bearing in mind that the car was built by an amateur in a home workshop at a time when motorcar technology was in its relative infancy, the White Knight was a creditable effort.

Having re-restored the car, Bill saw his mission as complete, however, and just a week after demonstrating the car to me he took it to show to present members of the Brinton family. Michael Brinton, Cecil's grandson, drove it a short distance with his son Algie as passenger and, as Bill later recounted to me, "seemed to enjoy it". Quite how much he enjoyed it may be judged by the fact that, as we go to press I have learned that the White Knight has been once again reunited with the Brinton family, and that Michael Brinton is the new owner. The wheel has turned full circle.



Left & below: *The White Knight as exhumed at Yew Tree House, Belbroughton in 1973 by Mike Cummins. Even the mascot was intact.*

