

*Address given by Andrew Crisford at the Memorial Service for George Daniels 16 Apr 2012.*

In many ways, I felt that I knew George Daniels long before I met him. His book "Watches", written with his close friend Cecil Clutton and published in 1965 exactly addressed those aspects of the history of watches which interested me most. In the preface, the authors note how the emphasis in watch collecting had shifted from the decorative merits of the case to the mechanical intricacies of the movement. This precisely coincided with my own interest in antique watches and "Clutton & Daniels" became my Bible for many years.

On leaving the computer industry in 1973 to concentrate fully on dealing in antique clocks and watches, it was inevitable that I would hear more and more about the extraordinary talents of Mr. Daniels. My introduction was effected by Sam Clutton, whom I had met some years earlier through our mutual interest in Bugatti cars. In those days watch collecting still had the air of a gentlemanly pursuit and many collectors such as Sam Clutton and George Daniels would regularly wear important watches from their collections and willingly share the pleasure of examining them with like-minded enthusiasts. Thus I was encouraged to introduce myself to George Daniels in the paddock at Silverstone during a Vintage Sports Car Club meeting. No matter that he was stretched-out, fast asleep in the back of Clutton's commodious Bugatti saloon. "Just knock on the window, he won't mind" promised our mutual friend, and indeed he didn't. He seemed happy to study my watch but not before he had taken from his waistcoat pocket a recently-completed Daniels tourbillon for me to look at. As I remember, he made some interesting comments regarding my watch and I was practically speechless regarding his. So, after a few minutes each watch was returned to its owner and I retired. He reclined, and immediately went back to sleep. Thus began a friendship based on shared interests and values which was to last for nearly forty years until his death in October 2011.

From then on we met regularly in London, and throughout the next thirty years we enjoyed many motoring adventures, mainly in one or other of George's cars and occasionally in one of mine. Our first trip, together with the late Derek Pratt, was in the 1907 Daimler. We drove from Liverpool to Aberdeen to visit Professor R. V. Jones, the famous wartime physicist. Later escapades included a hair-raising drive to the Ardennes in the 1908 Grand Prix Itala, and taking the 1929 "blower" Bentley team car to the Nürburgring to race against the best German sports cars of similar age. Winning this race against a team of extensively and

expensively restored Mercedes 38/250 cars gave George particular pleasure; not only because his car had been driven from the Isle of Man in order to compete, but because it was in totally original condition, right down to the engraved plaque on the dashboard which read “Property of the Hon. Dorothy Paget”.

Our meetings always involved lengthy discussions on horology and motor cars but initially this ‘information highway’ was something of a one-way street. With avuncular patience, George would explain aspects of the working of watches and internal combustion engines. I grew to appreciate his iconoclastic approach to all aspects of practical watchmaking and I always enjoyed his comical *ripostes*. Whenever a watchmaker explained at length how to use some complex machine to achieve a certain result. George would reply, in that inimitable gruff voice, “well, I normally do that with a piece of cork and a bent nail”.

By 2006, the year of his eightieth birthday, George had completed twenty five superb hand-made watches. Every one had been constructed without assistance and without the use of automated machinery. To celebrate this near super-human achievement, Bobinet and Sotheby’s organised the “Daniels Retrospective Exhibition” at which all his watches were displayed together for the first and probably only time. To quote from the catalogue - “. . . it is almost beyond belief that one man, working entirely alone, could have created such a wealth of beauty, form and function”.

His energy, determination and long working-hours became the stuff of legend and certainly to see him, well into his seventies, change a wheel on a vintage Bentley by the roadside was enough to exhaust the idle onlooker. Even a few months before his death, and when very seriously ill, he managed, through sheer willpower, to attend a reception in his honour at the RAC. The mighty ‘Birkin’ single-seater Bentley, holder of the Brooklands lap record, stood proudly in the centre of the rotunda, reunited for the last time with its owner,

George Daniels, Master Watchmaker and remarkable friend.