THE OLD MANOR HOUSE

GEORGE SINGER
Founder of the Singer marque, manufacturer of Singer cycles, motor-cycles and cars, and three times Mayor of the City of Coventry, was born here on 26th January 1847.

This plaque was unveiled by Annabel Levaux, George Singer's great great granddaughter, on 13th September 2013, on behalf of Singer enthusiasts worldwide.

KINGSTON MAURWARD

The Plaque and its unveiling at the Old Manor House
Friday 13th dawned wet and miserable - should we perhaps have been a little more superstitious? Nevertheless, some 30 Singers, adorned with Celebration Rally Plaques depicting George Singer with one of his first bicycles and one of the last cars made bearing his name, set off from the George Albert Hotel for the first of Chris Hayward’s scenic drives, along country lanes and past the well-endowed Cerne Abbas Giant carved into the chalk hillside. Turning right towards Minterne Magna, where Chic Photographic were taking pictures of our Singers as we passed through, we drove along a watershed, where the rain falling on our left would make its way into rivers flowing into the Bristol Channel, while that falling on our right was bound for the English Channel. The route then took us over Charleton Down to Charminster, finally crossing the A35 to Kingston Maurward College, where we parked on the terrace overlooking the lake at the Georgian mansion, now Kingston Maurward College. By this time the rain had eased and a few umbrellas were in evidence, but the odd spots were not enough to dampen spirits. The assembled ‘Singer Folk’ were directed through a hole in the hedge behind a huge, recently restored urn, to a pleasant tree-lined avenue for the short walk to the Old Manor, where they were met by the more elderly, including Lauretta Ince, wife
of the late Roy Ince, a founder member of the SOC, who had been driven to the Manor in Singer cars.

Then came the big moment when Annabel, ably assisted by her son George, were invited to unveil the plaque in commemoration of the birthplace of their world-renowned forefather. This they did by removing the half-size replica of the Rootes-Singer Pennant ‘rescued’ from Barnes Brothers of South London by John Horne.

Richard Recites .. ‘To George’

I imagine you born with a knowing smile, Able to write cursive aged three And doodling wheels and spokes with chalk On a slate in your country school While boys played soldiers and stood to mock attention You wandered country lanes gazing at great houses There you saw destiny In the city of spires Smokey with opportunity Home was here Among oiled metal muscles The allure of speed Meetings, money Municipal machinations Where you sought the peace of family And you dreamt of Dorset, the village pump, the farm, your father’s hand…., Richard Hoare

Next on the programme were guided tours of the Old Manor, generously provided by the owner, Andrew Thomson. The Old Manor is a beautiful Elizabethan "E plan" house, the ‘E’ shape said to show allegiance to the Queen. It was built in about 1597 by Christopher Grey, whose family coat of arms is over the entrance porch.

(Continued Overleaf …)
In the 17th century, Angel Grey, grandson of Christopher, built an extension on the south-east side of the Manor. This was used as the kitchen and is now the dining room. You can just see the raised rim of the hearth to catch the juices dripping from the spit roast.

The house remained the Grey family seat until 1700, when the last Grey heiress, Lora, a descendant of Angel, married George Pitt, who built the new Kingston Maurward House on the hill across the park.

The Old Manor became subordinate, and was eventually divided to provide accommodation for three Estate employees and their families. In around 1846, one of these was Farm Bailiff George Singer and his wife Hellen, the Dairy Manager. Thus it was here, in January 1847, that their son George was born, and lived until 1853 when the Estate was sold. The Singer family subsequently moved to Sussex.

Dorset County Council eventually bought the house, and in 1947 converted it into five private residences for council tenants. But by the late 1950s it had again fallen into disuse, suffering from the ravages of death watch beetle and woodworm. Agreement was reached for it to be demolished, but the ensuing public outcry resulted in the building being leased to Dorset businessman Rohan Sturdy in 1962 at a peppercorn rent, in return for an obligation on his part to restore it. The award-winning restoration took six years, during which the foundations of a staircase tower that once occupied the space between the Tudor house and the Grey extension, were discovered.

Angel Grey, builder of the 17th century extension, was a staunch Royalist, and it is thought the destruction of the staircase was carried out during the Civil War as a warning or punishment by a troop of local Roundheads - next time the whole house would be demolished!

Downstairs, Sturdy converted much of what had been the Great Hall into an L-shaped drawing room in which the original Tudor fireplace was re-exposed after removing eight layers of lath and plaster. Upstairs, the attic
comprises eight great A-frames, some of which still bear numbers carved into them by the Tudor carpenters. The attics, which spread across the full width of the house, have now been modernised, and one has been converted into a luxurious bed sitting room. They are accessed from the first floor by a spiral staircase said to have been made from a single oak.

The attic windows also provided a unique opportunity for a picture of the cars and Singer folk gathered around the plaque. (See picture below.)

The staircase to the first floor was brought from Haddon Hall in Suffolk and installed in a new hall built into the space formerly occupied by the screens passage and part of the Great Kitchen. The first floor has three superb bed & breakfast suites. For one of these a custom designed four-poster bed in Elizabethan style was commissioned, with the family crest of the Maurwards reproduced on one side and that of the Greys on the other. Andrew postulated that being the largest of the three possible ‘flats’ it would have been allocated to the senior estate employee - the Bailiff - and being directly above the kitchen, with its huge fireplace in constant use, and with its own fireplace to boot, this would have been the warmest bedroom, and on a cold January day in 1847 would have been the most likely room for baby George to have been born. Indeed, as Andrew cheekily quipped during his preamble, perhaps also for him to have been conceived?? (But probably not in a four-poster!)

After being let to various tenants, the house was bought by Andrew and Mulu Thomson, who uprooted their family from London and arrived in Dorset in 1998. Following a 12 month refurbishment they opened their doors to Bed & Breakfast guests in April 1999.

The Old Manor features in Thomas Hardy’s novel "Desperate Remedies".

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With the Georgian Mansion providing the back-drop, the cars made a splendid display as we walked back to the college for the official reception.
On arrival we were greeted with a fruit drink in the Grand Entrance Hall, with its twin marble fireplaces. When all were gathered we moved down to the Conference Hall, which was dressed in creamy drapes with red pelmets.

ASCO Chairman Simon Bishop then welcomed the guests and all present, and thanked the Kingston Maurward College for providing their facilities, which afforded such a fabulous setting for this very special occasion. In response, Matthew Price, Chairman of the Kingston Maurward Charitable Foundation, told us something of the wonderful work and achievements of the College.

Also responding, Councillor Tim Harries of Dorchester Town Council noted that while he had twice been Mayor of ‘Casterbridge’, in no way could this match George Singer’s three times mayor of such a great city as Coventry. We gathered also Cllr Tim’s family used to own a Singer.

Richard Hoare, former Head of English at Coundon Court School, proposed the Toast - George Singer and his Wonderful Legacy, the reply to which was given by Annabel Levaux, George Singer's great great granddaughter.

We were then told of an additional item on the programme, as Marylin Angus and her daughter Kate had made a wonderful cake for the occasion, which Annabel and George duly cut, albeit reluctantly, as it seemed such a shame to spoil it!
The final formal item on the programme was a talk by local historian, Kay Kearsey, on history of Kingston Maurward and the connection with George Singer. This was given in the magnificent Pengelly Room, formerly the music room, which is richly decorated with hand-painted Italian wallpaper. Entered through the Grand Entrance Hall, it commands great views of the rolling lawns and five-acre lake. Kay’s first picture was a watercolour of where we were - Kingston Maurward House - but as it looked in about 1900, being unchanged outwardly from the time George Singer senior was farm bailiff. The house was built for George and Lora Pitt in about 1720. The white marble font (pictured) was given to the church by Lora Pitt, as the original font of Norman origin had been broken and was thought to be lost. It was discovered by Thomas Hardy himself in the churchyard and restored in 1920, when it replaced the marble font. All George and Hellen’s children were christened using the marble font - George on 28 Feb 1847, Arthur William on 3 Sep 1848, and Mary on 3 March 1850. A third son Frederick was christened on 7 Dec 1851, but died aged 5 months and was buried on 14 Apr 1852.

Thomas Hardy was also christened using the marble font, which was donated to the diocese after WW2, and now resides in the rebuilt St Luke’s Church, Winchester.
And so, with final expressions of heart-felt thanks to all involved in making this event so special, the Singer folk dispersed to visit the various other attractions of Kingston Maurward, including the Animal Park and Gardens, and St Michael’s Church, Stinsford, a short walk through the grounds and along the road, which in addition to the Singer family connection, is the place where Thomas Hardy’s heart is buried. Stinsford is also the village of ‘Mellstock’ in Hardy’s novels ‘Under the Greenwood Tree’ and ‘Jude the Obscure’. But as Simon Bishop said in his words of welcome at the reception, it would be nice to think that if only 1 in 10 that casually read the blue plaque at the Old Manor, then go home and Google George Singer and learn that they are not just in Thomas Hardy country, but also in George Singer country, then we have done a good job.

Chris’ scenic route back to the hotel took us to the west of Charminster, then via Cerne Abbas, Sydling St Nicholas, through a ford, then the long climb to the A37. Time now to get ready for the ‘Big Red Bus’ trip to the Green Man pub at King’s Stag for an informal meal and George Singer quiz.

The bus was full of happy passengers, so Mike and Jeremy followed in their Hunter. The weather was foul, with the hotel in the clouds as we set off back down the long hill to the ford, by which time at least we were out of the clouds! The bus successfully negotiated the ford, but then the ‘fun’ started as it toiled up the equally long climb from the ford, getting slower and slower until it came to an even steeper bit, which was the last straw, and the passengers had to disembark and walk up the steepest part, whilst Robert Lovegrove
got his head under the bonnet. Modesty forbade him to reveal exactly what he did, but thereafter the bus was able to proceed, and the passengers re-embarked. The journey continued without further ado, and everybody arrived safely at the Green Man, where a special room had been prepared for us. The meal was very good - and efficiently served - we had chosen from a menu of Ham, Egg & Chips or Lamb, Beef or Chicken casserole. This was followed by a ‘George Singer’ quiz devised by Barry, which proved to be both interesting and informative. Did you know, for instance, that at the age of 14, George Singer became an apprentice with Marine Engineers John Penn & Sons, of Lewisham? And that whist in Lewisham he met another future car manufacturer, William Hillman? Also that when he moved to Coventry he lived in Paradise Street, where his future wife lived next door? As Barry’s clue said, he must have felt in heaven!

Our ‘Guardians of the Grave’, John Taylor and Richard Hoare, certainly did, as they were the only ones to score full marks!

Altogether a very enjoyable evening - and the Big Red Bus took a longer but less hilly route safely back to the George Albert, without further ‘incident’.

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A fitting end to a quite remarkable Singer day.

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On Saturday 14th we awoke to a day as bright and cheerful as Friday had been wet and miserable. Off came the covers, down came the hoods and off we went on the next of Chris’ scenic drives, heading first towards Sydling St Nicholas, then along a narrow Roman road with passing places, to Grimstone Viaduct, where Chic Photographic were again waiting to take pictures as we drove through.

After a series of right-angle bends through a council estate, we arrived in the architects’ paradise of Poundbury, a pleasant urban development on the South West outskirts of Dorchester, where we parked in the Queen Mother’s Square. Poundbury was designed by the Prince of Wales, who outlined his pioneering ideas in his 1989 book, ‘A Vision of Britain’.

Leaving Poundbury via the old A35 Bridport Road, which forms a broad avenue with gentle road humps through the centre of the estate, we drove through the pretty villages of Martinstown, Winterborne St Martin and Winterborne Steepleton, where we took the road sign-posted ‘Hardy’s Monument - Portesham’. Before long we could see the 72ft high edifice towering over the 780ft Black Down hill. The Hardy family chose this site because they wanted a monument which could be used as a landmark for shipping - it is visible from a distance of 100 kilometres.

Vice-Admiral Sir Thomas Masterman Hardy served as flag captain to Admiral Lord Nelson, and commanded HMS Victory at the Battle of Trafalgar in October 1805 during the Napoleonic Wars. Nelson was shot as he paced the decks with Hardy, and as he lay dying, Nelson's famous remark of “Kiss me, Hardy”, (or “Kismet, Hardy”?) was directed at him.

Somewhere along the way, Klaas Blankevoort had a problem in the rh rear hub of his LM, but fortunately he was
It was fortunate the skies were clear, and we had breath-taking views along the coast to Portland. Also, Chic Photographic picked a great spot to photograph our cars as they climbed the Black Down hill approaching the entrance to the Monument car park, as well as snapping them on the way out.

See more pictures of this event at www.chicphotographic.co.uk

Next on the itinerary was the picturesque village of Abbotsbury, via a steep descent on a narrow road, with St Catherine’s Church below on the hill to our left and, ahead, more amazing views over the English Channel, before arriving at the Swannery at feeding time. The Swannery was, in a word, stunning.

As Jana Taylor said, “You just don’t expect to see so many swans in one place at one time - I thought there might be a few dozen, but there were hundreds!”

The Swannery was established by Benedictine Monks, who built a monastery in the village during the 1040s.
The monks farmed the swans to produce food for their lavish banquets. The monastery was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1538, but some of the ruins are still visible near St Nicholas’ Church.

The Swannery is a sanctuary, not a zoo - there are no cages and the swans are all free flying. Today, this is the only place in the world where you can walk through the heart of a colony of around 600 Mute Swans, and help to hand feed them, as Jana - in green trews and with bucket - is doing, whilst one opportune specimen avoids the crush!

The cygnets, which in May and June you can actually watch as they crack open their shells, were already quite large and would soon be learning to fly. Generally the young were kept in separate enclosures, as the parents are fiercely protective, but some families were paddling up the many inlets and rivulets, along the banks of which they build their nests.

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From the Swannery we drove back through Abbotsbury village and took the Jurassic Coast road up the steep incline of White Hill for more spectacular coastal views.

Once over the brow of the hill the vista extended beyond West Bay and Burton Cliff, the location for TV’s Broadchurch, and where most of the fossils are found.

At the bottom of the hill and on the right is the small village of Punc-knowle, pronounced ‘Punnel',
where, after a tight squeeze in the car park of the thatched Crown Inn, carefully choreographed by Colin and others too numerous to mention, we had a buffet lunch.

Chris’ scenic return route to Dorchester took us back up to the top of White Hill for yet another feast of Dorset scenery as we drove down White Hill to Abbotsbury, then through the Dorset countryside to Waddon, Upwey and Winterbourne Monkton, before passing below Maiden Castle and into the bustling, historic, Roman town of Dorchester.

On a walk up the High St you could visit ‘Bloody Assizes’ Judge Jefferys’ lodgings - now a restaurant, or The Dorset County Museum, where you can walk on an actual Roman mosaic, or see fossils from the Jurassic Coast, including the 155 million year old Weymouth Bay Pliosaur - the World’s Biggest Bite!

Or you could take a walk around the Roman town of Durnovaria and see part of the original Roman wall, visit the beautiful Borough Gardens, see a
The Club Dinner was held at the George Albert Hotel. Barry and Anne had decorated the tables with balloons, and Anne had made a beautiful flower arrangement for each table. After a welcome speech by Chairman Simon Bishop, and the Grace, said by Chris Hayward, over 70 Singer Folk sat down for an excellent meal, with Butternut Squash Soup for starters and a main course of Slow Cooked Shoulder of Dorset Down Lamb (or Goats’ Cheese Tart for the vegetarians). The service was excellent and the waiters well drilled - four would approach a table, each carrying two plates, and when all were in place they would advance to the table in unison so that the whole table was served in one go. The only problem monument to all Dorset Martyrs, including victims of Judge Jefferys’ Bloody Assizes, walk around the remains of a Roman town house, and see a statue of Thomas Hardy, the author who was also born and lived in the Kingston Maurward area.
was some tables seated nine, so one diner was left in limbo! (But not for long.) There followed the Loyal Toast to the Queen given by Vice Chairman and Toast-Master, Peter Watts, who said we were pleased the royal family had adopted our suggestion to name the future King after the man whose achievements we were honouring that weekend, and that Annabel and George were able to be with us, and he proposed a Toast to George Singer and his Family. After the toasts we were served a mouth-watering Fruit Pavlova for dessert.

Rudi Arends, Secretary of the Dutch Singer Owners’ Club then said a some very kind words about our George Singer weekend, after which he introduced DSOC’s new Chairman, Klaas Blankevoort, who thanked us for arranging the event to coincide with his birthday party, and said that now he was retired he hoped he would be able to spend more time on Singer activities, looking forward particularly to the next DSOC Lustrum, which would be in 2015.

Rudi then thanked the team involved in organising the activities over the weekend, and invited them to come forward to receive a DSOC mug each in appreciation of their efforts.

Final item on the menu was a quiz, with questions prepared and posed by Chris Hayward. If you know the **Make and Model** of the three cars pictured below, you may well have been a serious challenger to Andrew McAdam, who came top with 59 of a possible 75 points.

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**Quiz Answers:**

- **Q1** - Triumph Vitesse (not Herald, because of the metal bumper finish!)
- **Q2** - Ford Zephyr MK 2
- **Q3** - Singer Chamois

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Sunday 15th started dull, but at least it wasn’t raining - that was forecast for later in the afternoon. Today’s scenic route initially followed that taken by the bus on Friday, through Sydling ford to Cerne Abbas, except we turned right up the long climb to Piddletrenthide and along the River Piddle (Dorset for ‘stream’), to White Lackington, Piddlehinton and Puddletown. Here we turned along the former course of the A35 to Athelhampton House, or, to visit the Martyrs’ Museum, another mile or so to Tolpuddle.

With our Singers arrayed in front of the House and on on the lawns either side of the drive, there was a most impressive display.

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We were all so privileged to be welcomed to Athelhampton Manor for the last day of our ASCO weekend in Dorset. This stunning 15th Century Manor House extends its welcome as soon as you pass through its gates.

It is a beautifully proportioned building with noble nooks and crannies and well-crafted curves and cornices, all inviting further investigation from the moment you pass over the threshold. This welcome was compounded by its owners, who kindly allocated us shelter from the inclement weather in one of their stately panelled halls for our award ceremony.

The entire establishment welcomes and embraces its visitors with a roaring fire in the hearth of the magnificent Great Hall where you are actively encouraged to sit and absorb the atmosphere, and wonder at the vaulted ceiling, minstrels gallery and pipe organ, (pity Mike wasn't there to give us a tune), heraldic stained glass windows and linenfold wood panelling. From there, corridors through arches and stone stairwells absorb you further into the heart of this island in time.

From the Great Hall through to the Kings Room and Library, past the

Continued on page 22..)
Athelhampton House Display
wine cellar, then upstairs to 2 floors of Tudor delights. Dark oak furniture, four poster beds fully draped, wonderfully plastered ceilings. The yellow bedroom and state bedroom, an amazing bathroom complete with copper bath! (Who has to clean that I wonder?)

The garden - what a pleasure. Not only to experience the age of it and its planting and design, but that over the centuries it has evolved into a garden of parts which has become a whole, just like the house. From the 12 stately formal yew pyramids which crown the formal garden, to the little secluded arbour, seated within which you could hear the soothing ripples of the moving water in the channel leading to the river Piddle.

And I hope no one missed the splendid rose covered dovecote and its inhabitants - a joy to behold.

I felt so fortunate to have experienced the overwhelming history of this home, and it was the intimacy of the place bred over centuries that made it such a personal experience.

I think all we ASCO members owe a debt of gratitude to the organisers who smoothed our path to Athelhampton, and to its owners who made our day complete.

Pat and Richard.
The Awards were laid out on the magnificent oak sideboard in the Great Chamber, and were presented by Lauretta Ince and George Levaux under the baton of Awards Officer Peter Watts. Also, John Horne displayed his original Rootes Singer Banner from Barnes Bros with the Club Regalia, under the watchful eye of Chris Hayward. All award winners were also presented with screen-washer fluid and other goodies, which brought the Rally to its close.

Then the rain came! As far as we know, everyone arrived home safely, although Robert Lovegrove’s 9 Sports (broken oil pipe) and Mike Hyman’s Junior (stripped teeth on timing gear) needed the services of a recovery truck.

And finally, a big ‘Thank You’ to everyone who turned up to support us over this very special and unique George Singer Weekend.

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<td>Le Mans &amp; Sports 1933-1937</td>
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