



The Plaque and its unveiling at the Old Manor House



# George Singer Celebration

13<sup>th</sup> September 2013  
The Old Manor, Kingston Maurward.

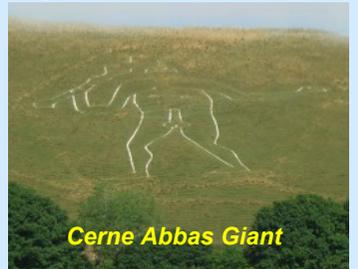
Friday 13<sup>th</sup> dawned wet and miserable - should we perhaps have been a little more superstitious? Nevertheless, some 30 Singers, adorned with Celebration Rally Plaques depicting George Singer with one of his first bicycles and one of the last cars made bearing his name, set off from the

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



See more pictures of this event at  
[www.chicphotographic.co.uk](http://www.chicphotographic.co.uk)



of the late Roy Ince, a founder member of the SOC, who had been driven to the Manor in Singer cars.



After welcoming all present to this very special occasion, with particular mention of those from as far afield as Scotland, Holland, Germany, Spain and Australia, Barry introduced Richard Hoare, ex-head of English at Coundon Court school, who, in a time-honoured fashion, recited a poem he had written to mark the occasion, called simply:

**'To George.'**

*I imagine you born with a knowing smile,  
Able to write cursively 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

\* \* \* \* \*

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.



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.



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





**Andrew and the oak staircase**

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".



\* \* \*



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.



Cllr Tim Harries

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!

