

The car was used by night for murder and mayhem. Then, when

James Black next to 5-PP - The Moon Car he so painstakingly restored



Dark side of The Moon Car

Starting with an old Dublin telephone directory, Nicholas Young pieces together the story of Silver Ghost commandeered by the IRA in 1922 before being buried in an Irish bog for the

it became too hot to handle, it was burnt out and buried in a bog



A REPORT IN THE SECTION NEWS of *Bulletin* B294 (May/June 2009) mentioned the discovery of a 1919 Silver Ghost chassis (5-PP) which had been found many years earlier in an Irish bog. It was saved from destruction by RREC member Andrew Daly and, following some years of restoration work by James Black, Andrew gave members an update in *Bulletin* B315 (November/December 2012).

At that point, little detailed research had been done into the history of this vehicle, the original owner or its coachbuilder. Andrew put a request in the *Bulletin* asking for further information. Always enjoying a good mystery and having some experience with genealogical detective work, I took up the challenge.

Silver Ghost chassis 5-PP is known colloquially in Ireland as 'The Moon Car'. It's an open tourer, speed model and the chassis was completed by Rolls-Royce in Derby in June 1919. On 25 November that year it was delivered to A B Wardman & Sons of Harrogate to be fitted with its body.

The story began three years earlier with the purchase of a Rolls-Royce chassis by M L Hopkinson in July 1916. Given the designation 27-RD, a deposit of £44 5s 8d was paid and work commenced. But the war intervened; the government requisitioned all Rolls-Royce chassis and the company was obliged to postpone the order until the end of the war. It would be almost three years before Rolls-Royce would be in a position to complete the order; but by then M L Hopkinson had dropped out of the picture.

In 1919, the original order was reinstated and the requisitioned chassis was replaced with a new one which was designated 5-PP (PP standing for postponed). Its purchaser was Robert Randolph Adamson of Currarevagh, Galway, Ireland; and Wardman & Sons paid Rolls-Royce Ltd the balance of £1,115.13.4 (net of a 20% discount on the original price of £1,450). The car arrived in Ireland a few weeks later but it was not registered in Galway. Adamson also had an apartment in Fitzwilliam Square in Dublin and a grander residence, The Farm (actually a stud farm), in Castleknock – about five miles to the west of the capital. Registered by Dublin County Council, the number allotted to the car was RI-9049. Robert Adamson was well known in horse racing circles and during the summer months, Robert drove to his county house in Galway where he enjoyed fishing and attending local race meetings. Described as a 'fine house', Adamson had Currarevagh fitted with electricity to make it more comfortable.

On 18 January 1922 Robert drove his car the short distance from his apartment in Fitzwilliam Square to his solicitor, Messrs Chaytor in Molesworth Street. Having completed his business there, he waited in his car outside Chaytor's office for his wife to return from shopping in another part of the city. Suddenly, three men appeared and at gunpoint they ordered him to drive to Naas in County Kildare. Forced to stop at Rathoole and expelled from the car, Robert was told the vehicle would be needed for half an hour and that he was to wait by the roadside. He waited there for the car's return but it soon became apparent that the men were not coming back – and Robert reported his

abduction to the Dublin Metropolitan Police.

This unprovoked attack on Robert Adamson came just weeks after the Anglo-Irish Treaty had been signed which provided for the creation of an independent Irish state. Described in some circles as 'a car used in the fight for Irish freedom', 5-PP was no such thing – but why spoil a good story?

The car was used, often by night – hence the nickname – to spread murder and mayhem. Then, when it became too hot to handle, it was burnt out and buried in a bog. There it lay for some 60 years, until recovered by Liam O'Callaghan in 1981 after a ten year search armed with a metal detector and a JCB.

When discovered, the car appeared to be beyond redemption and, in between its discovery and O'Callaghan's return soon afterwards, the radiator and other easily-removed components were stolen. Nothing was done with the find until O'Callaghan's death in 1995. The car's new owner was a scrap dealer in Cork who was aware of the car's history but left it sitting on the roof of a small shed in his scrapyard.

Acting on a tip off, Andrew Daly bought what was left of the car after two years of wrangling with its owner – but then only after the man had finally decided to retire from the scrap metal business.

IRELAND IN THE 1920s

Before detailing my research into the vehicle, we need to look into why this car is so significant and why it was necessary to attempt to destroy it.

In early 1921, the new Government of Ireland Act came into effect and Ireland was split into two separate jurisdictions – Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland – with separate home rule for both. While this was broadly accepted in Northern Ireland, its unpopularity in Southern Ireland ensured that it was never properly implemented.

Elements of the IRA had been escalating their activities for some time, ensuring that many parts of Ireland became ungovernable. During the period 1919-1921 the IRA murdered almost twice as many Irishmen as British. This demonstrated the problem; not only was the island of Ireland divided, the south was itself divided. Home Rule within the United Kingdom for the south of Ireland was abandoned and



A Dublin street during the Irish Civil War (28 June 1922 - 24 May 1923)

5-PP, the 1919
next 90 years

The Moon Car continued to spread terror after the civil war ended



independent Dominion status – along the lines of Canada and Australia – was instituted. It came fully into being under the name The Irish Free State on 6 December 1922 and it included Northern Ireland – but the latter exercised its right to secede almost immediately. This new Irish Free State was supported by the majority but hated by a significant minority who were determined to carry on the fight. So rogue elements continued their campaign of terror and ‘Southern Ireland’ drifted into civil war. It was members of this group who used the Moon Car for its murderous activities – mostly against fellow Irishmen and the Irish Free State government, whom they considered traitors.

Long after the civil war ended in the spring of 1923, the Moon Car continued to be used to spread terror. It was a particularly cowardly attack in 1924 which abruptly put an end to the car’s nefarious career. Under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, the Royal Navy retained a base on Spike Island off the coast of Queenstown (now Cobh). Soldiers and sailors enjoyed the friendliest of relations with the locals and were welcomed in the town. Their frequent visits were made via a small launch that ferried its passengers between ship and shore. On 21 March 1924, its number plates having been removed, the Moon Car, with two Lewis machine guns mounted in the rear, made its

The Dublin Four Courts after being fired upon by provisional Irish government artillery in June 1922 in an attempt to dislodge elements of the IRA. The Four Courts were largely destroyed by a huge explosion which also destroyed almost 1,000 years of Irish records

way silently to the quayside. Gunmen disguised as legitimate Free State soldiers quickly unloaded their weapons and assembled them next to the car. As a party of some 50 men, women and children disembarked from the launch arriving from Spike Island, the gunmen opened fire. The indiscriminate nature of the attack resulted in one soldier being killed and at least 18 other soldiers and sailors being injured, many with loss of limbs. The outrage also resulted in one Irish civilian death and five other civilians being seriously injured, two of whom were women.

The Irish government, indeed most of Ireland, was deeply embarrassed by the atrocity. In the Irish parliament, the head of the Free State government, William Cosgrave, denounced the crime as cowardly and described it as “...a stain on the honour of our country”. Cosgrave was confident that “...every decent Irishman will share my sense of horror and detestation”. The Irish government then offered a reward of £10,000 – more than half a million pounds in today’s money – for information leading to the apprehension of the perpetrators. The car clearly needed to be disposed of as soon as possible.

Investigating the history of this car and tracking down its original owner, Robert Randolph (R R) Adamson, proved to be fascinating.

THE INVESTIGATION BEGINS

Starting with the 1921 Dublin telephone directory, I discovered two entries for an R R Adamson. Subsequent research confirmed that these two entries were the same man.

However, according to Andrew Daly’s article in the *Bulletin*, the car had been delivered to Oughterard in County Galway so what was the connection?

Robert Randolph Adamson was born in 1883 in Sunderland, the son of ship owner William Adamson and his wife Eliza. Robert had two younger brothers, William and Victor.

Robert and William were both educated at Sherborne School in Dorset. The boys’ father died before they completed their education, and William and Victor became ship store merchants.

Robert was the first to marry, in 1908, to an Irish girl called Mary Bridget Hetherington from Clogheen, County Tipperary.

By 1911 Robert had brought his bride back to England and the couple were living on private means in Goring, Oxfordshire. Robert became a lieutenant in the Royal Berkshire Regiment but, after resigning his commission in 1913, he and Mary set off on a tour of South America. They returned to Ireland in June, where Robert took Mary to a fishing lodge in Connemara before going shooting in Donegal. They returned to Dublin in time for the Horse Show in late summer.

Come the Great War, the three brothers joined up. William was killed at Gallipoli in 1916; and in 1917, Victor became an officer in the Royal Flying Corps.

Victor is the key to the mystery of why the car came from Yorkshire. In April 1915 he married Leeds-born Katherine Townsley at Harrogate and described himself on the wedding certificate as a

but a cowardly attack in 1924 put an end to its nefarious career

gentleman of Curraghwagh [Carrowmanagh], Oughterard, Co Galway.

Victor died at Nottingham Place in London in December 1925 leaving two daughters and a widow. Victor and Katherine were supposedly living at Towersey Manor in Thame – but Katherine had moved out having discovered that Victor had a mistress.

It would seem that, on his brother's behalf, Victor Adamson acquired the Wardman-bodied Rolls-Royce during his brief stay in Yorkshire and subsequently arranged to have the car delivered to Ireland.

Arthur Benson Wardman was born in Harewood, Leeds in 1855. By the time he was 16, he was a Post Office letter-carrier lodging at the Nag's Head Inn, Upper Headrow. He married Mary Ann Dodd in Leeds in late 1880 and they went on to have three sons. Arthur was by then working as a coachman and general servant, living at 156, Old School Buildings in Warmfield cum Heath.

Their first son, Ibbotson, was born in June 1882. The young family moved to Harrogate the following year where their second son, Charles, was born in November. Their third son, Harold, was born in 1886. Arthur then took a job as a sewing-machine agent.

By 1891 the family was living at 17, Regents Parade and it was from here that Arthur decided to start his own business as a cycle maker and repairer.

In 1900, A B Wardman & Sons appeared in the Harrogate telephone directory for the first time. The sons, still in their teens, described themselves as mechanical engineers. The business prospered and by 1906 the firm is described as being auto engineers running from rented premises in Myrtle Road. It also boasted a cycle manufacturer's department at 19, Princes Street. In January 1907 Wardmans, now automobile and cycle dealers, bought the 360 square-yard site in Myrtle Road.

In 1910, A B Wardman is credited as supplying a Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost chassis No. 1243; engine No. 43 (pictured below) to Capt. J Tremayne of Cornwall and they may also have built the body.

By 1911 Arthur and his family were living in an eight-roomed house in Dragon Parade and the

**Arthur B Wardman
(from the Harrogate
Herald in 1938)
Picture courtesy
of Tony Cheal
(www.harrogate
peopleandplaces.
info)**



company took on new staff. They were joined by George Harbord Gyton; and in order to carry out his task on behalf of Wardmans as a Rolls-Royce representative, he became a qualified Rolls-Royce driver, mechanic and trained automobile engineer. Driving the Royce was not an easy task for George as he was only 5ft 2½ inches tall.

In 1913 A B Wardman & Sons, now in Cambridge Street, appeared in the *Michelin Guide* as Michelin tyre stockists and agents for Fiat and Rolls-Royce.

On 21 May 1914 the company announced the following in the *Commercial Motor Magazine*: A B Wardman and Sons, Ltd., of Cambridge Street, Harrogate, has opened a branch office at 20, King's Arcade, Bradford, and is desirous to receive trade catalogues at that address. This company holds the Yorkshire representation for Rolls-Royce cars but it is prepared to handle other lines.

Come 1914, Wardman & Sons lost some of its staff for important war work. George Gyton joined up in October that year (there was no conscription at that point). He used his skills on some of the many Rolls-Royces that had been acquired for war service. During 1914-15 he worked as a driver with No 5 Royal Naval Air Service Home Defence Squadron, and he drove Seabrook armoured lorries on anti-Zeppelin duties along the south coast. He subsequently transferred to the RNAS armoured car division, driving Rolls-Royce armoured cars in action in France. In September 1915 he was transferred to No 20 Squadron RNAS as a Petty Officer Mechanic. His trade was described as Motor & General Engineer, Air Mechanic. This squadron worked on the development of the very first tank and Gyton was posted to Wembley where the machine was being tested. He recovered broken-down tanks using a traction engine – being one of the few with sufficient experience to drive one. He stayed with 20 Squadron until 1920.

After the war, A B Wardman contracted somewhat. The premises were partly demolished in 1920 to make way for a new 'picture house'. Their last appearance in the telephone directory as a coachbuilder was in 1922. Having built 33 bodies on Silver Ghost chassis up to the war, they only built two post-war, on chassis 5-PP and 33-LE.

Arthur continued his cycle business at various addresses in Harrogate until his death in early 1938 aged 82, still in harness.

The business carried on at Station Parade until 1946. Then, in 1947, it moved to West Park as A B Wardman 'Cycles etc'. In 1957, the business was described as A B Wardman & Sons Motor Engineers of 14, West Park; and on 10 October 1958 the company A B Wardman & Sons Ltd was finally dissolved.

DIGGING FOR CLUES

Meanwhile, the Moon Car lay mouldering in its grave untouched by Irish and world politics. But how can we be sure that the car saved from destruction by Andrew Daly was indeed the Adamson's missing Silver Ghost? Renowned Silver Ghost restorer, James Black heard about Andrew Daly's discovery of a Silver Ghost at an AGM of the Ireland Section of the RREC. Enthused by



Picture courtesy of Surrey Vintage Vehicle Society (www.svvs.org) and Julian Stephens, Operations Director of the Lost Gardens of Heligan Cornwall. Heligan was the residence of the Tremayne family from 1659 until the early 1970s

Jim discovered a fragment of yellow paint on the chassis and



its history, James bought the car from Andrew with a view to totally restoring it. The chassis included some brass fittings, suggesting the Rolls-Royce was one of only six in the PP series that utilised this alloy.

The steering rake on these cars was set according to customer requirements. Rolls-Royce confirmed that the rake of the steering on chassis 5-PP matched their records for the Adamson car. They also confirmed a low-sided touring body and low radiator had been specified. And that the car was to be painted bright primrose.

The clincher would be the chassis number but it was so corroded that it could not be read. Jim Black showed a cross-member to a friend who worked at the Northern Irish police forensic science lab and, with the aid of a special acid, he was able to retrieve the number. The composition of the metal is such that it changes under the pressure of being stamped. Even if the number had been ground off, the acid treatment would bring it out. The car was indeed 5-PP.

During my original research into the Moon Car in 2013, I soon became aware that there was one vital document missing, without which the story would not be complete. This was the report created by Robert Adamson's claim under the Irish Free State's 1923 Damage to Property (Compensation) Act. The files were stored in the National Archives in Dublin but, in 2013, were not indexed. By the time I picked up my research again in 2019, the entire collection had been indexed, and I wrote to my contact at the archive to see if she could retrieve it for me. I was not expecting a 50-page document that would cost over £100 to copy. A few days later, I had the whole document on CD. It made interesting reading. First of all, it confirmed the cost of the car when new – including its Wardman body. The loss claimed for the full purchase price of the car – £3,600. Adamson affirmed that he was forced to drive at gunpoint to Rathoole in County Dublin. He further affirmed that the car was covered by insurance up to £2,000 for third party damage (not compulsory at the time), and for destruction by fire up to £3,100; but the car was not covered for theft.

**January 2013: the car takes its first drive in 89 years with James Black at the wheel.
Picture: Andrew Black/Daly/James Black**

The technical details of the car were recorded in the claim: engine No 3 c; chassis No. 5 p.p.; 6 cylinders $4\frac{1}{2}$ -inch bore and $4\frac{3}{4}$ -inch stroke. This gave less information than an accompanying letter written by Adamson himself in which he states the RAC rating was 48.6hp and the registration number was R I 9049.

The Irish government wasn't going to pay up without a fight, and Messrs Rolls-Royce in Conduit Street must have been taken aback by a letter dated 16 May 1924 which asked if they had recently received any order for spare parts for the Rolls-Royce motor-car "...of which the following are particulars".

The response from Rolls-Royce was swift but in the negative. It confirmed the identity of the owner according to its records and his address in Galway. The letter confirmed that no word of the car or its owner had been heard "...for some considerable time".

Adamson was by now in some financial difficulties. In August 1924, he handed over to the Bank of Ireland his interest in any compensation he might receive. He also owed £1,037.2s. 2d to the Revenue. As soon as the Revenue Commissioners heard that the award was due to be paid, they requested it be delayed for two weeks, "...when it is hoped the identity of the person liable for the Tax will be established." When the compensation claim was finally allowed, an additional 10% was awarded; as were costs of £21. 4s. 4d. The claim was paid in respect of 'chattels' taken "...by a person or persons requisitioning such chattels to the use of an organisation engaged in armed resistance to the provisional government of Ireland".

As the 1920s progressed, things settled down a little. Adamson's fortunes were restored to a degree and he continued as a stud farmer in Castleknock.

I have already mentioned how, after Liam O'Callaghan's death, a tip-off led Andrew Daly to buy the remains of the car from a local scrap dealer; and how he later passed the chassis on to James Black.

Now began the momentous task of restoring a car that Jim felt needed to be rebuilt due to its historical significance. On close inspection the remains of the car were not as bad as he initially thought. This may not be so very surprising; as a driving vehicle, the car was only on the road for about three and a half years

**The Moon Car chassis as found.
Picture: Andrew Daly**



5-PP is now the same colour as on its last, fateful excursion in 1924



– barely run-in by Rolls-Royce standards. Jim was amazed to see that both sets of front wheel bearings – beautifully made Hoffman, brass-caged affairs – were still in perfect condition due to well-packed and greased hubs. They had survived all those years underground and, as Jim reports, are still in the car to this day. Likewise the crownwheel and pinion, bathed as they were in heavy gear oil, have survived perfectly and show absolutely no signs of wear.

The restoration took approximately three years; and when he drove the finished chassis with a test rig body fitted, Jim said it was one of the nimblest and liveliest Silver Ghosts he had ever driven.

FINDING A BODY

But what of the body? There were no surviving drawings to work from, so Jim's extensive Rolls-Royce knowledge was called into play. The original body had been fitted by Wardman of Harrogate, but whether they designed it is not known. I managed to trace A B Wardman's direct descendant who was fascinated by the story but unable to throw any light on the original design of the body. In any event, this was long before I had been in correspondence with Jim – and he had already come up with a solution.

He had acquired another Rolls-Royce, chassis number 2358, from its resting place in Barcelona. The car had a handsome open-touring body built by Henri Chapron of Paris, which Jim assessed to be from the 1919 – 1920 period. The car's body had been a replacement, and was in any case not suitable for the chassis to which it had been fitted. However, from the witness descriptions of The Moon Car it was clear this body was an almost perfect match for chassis 5-PP.

The Chapron body was refurbished and fitted to the Moon Car chassis. During the restoration Jim discovered a fragment of yellow paint. He had this analysed by pigment experts at Queen's University Belfast and then had a company mix the correct shade of yellow paint. Thus the car is now seen in the same colour it sported on its last, fateful excursion in 1924.

The results of Jim Black's labours are there for all to enjoy and all who see the finished car cannot help but admire it. The Royce took part in the 2013 Alpine Centenary Trial and was driven out from Belfast to St Moritz, completed the trial faultlessly, and drove back without incident. Jim also drove the 7,200cc beast from Belfast to Cork at speeds of up to 70mph. His destination was Glanmire, just outside Cork, where the car's rescuer, Andrew Daly, lived. Soon afterwards it was driven to Donoughmore and was

Left to right: parts of the chassis were remarkably well preserved thanks to the car being only a few years old and well maintained at the time of its burial.

In need of extensive refurbishment, the Chapron body takes shape.

Resplendent in its original yellow paintwork, body and chassis are introduced.

All pictures: James Black

parked close to where it had been unceremoniously dumped all those years previously. Later it was put on display at the Military Museum at the Curragh.

In another twist, in April 2015 the Moon Car's saviour, Andrew Daly, celebrated the happiest day of his life by leaving the church in the fully-restored car with his new bride, Eidin, by his side. Despite the car being fitted with a Lewis machine gun, this was no shotgun wedding; but there can't be many men who have got away with having both wife and former mistress in the same picture on their wedding day.

Eventually the car came into the ownership of Irish Silver Ghost collector Patrick McSweeney but that's not the end of the story. In January 2020, he donated the car to the Irish Government with a view to it being permanently exhibited at the Curragh Military Museum in County Kildare. The government valued the fully-restored car for tax purposes at €800,000 although this is unlikely to reflect its true value.

The car has only one fault: it does not bear its original registration number. My research having established that the true number of the car is RI-9049, I wrote to the Irish Defence Department suggesting that the number should be restored to the vehicle. I have yet to receive a response.

Andrew Daly and Eidin leave the church in the fully restored Moon Car on their wedding day. Picture courtesy of Andrew Daly

Nicholas Young is the compiler of the book Car Number Classics, which contains more than 1,000 biographies of Edwardian motorists and their vehicles and is illustrated with 800 photographs. The book is available from the author at £45 plus p&p. See www.CarNumberClassics.com or contact ny@nicholasyoung.com. For credit card payments please call 020 8998 0007.

