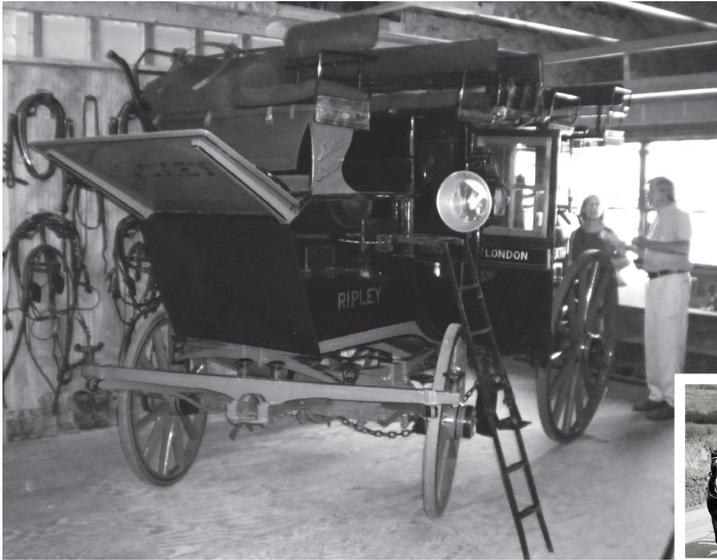


Talking Pictures – Rocket Launch

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. The History Group's last article got a lot of memories jogged and we're sharing some of those words here



Above: On the road out of Thame.
Left: The original photo (inset)
Far left: The Rocket in its new US home in Richmond, Virginia

We were thrilled with the great response to "Talking Pictures" included in the last Hambledonian. What a result! The picture which attracted the most attention was the country coaching scene. Mavis Humphrey, John and Elizabeth Parker, Philip White and Erica Meadus were just a few who wanted to share their memories.

In this extract from his email, Philip White of Chidden recalls:

.....the "Rocket Run" photograph was taken in April 1968 by a professional photographer who was on hand to make a record of the first "Run" from Southleigh Park to Britwell Salome in Oxfordshire. The event was minutely organised by Tom Parker and Philip's grandfather, Sir Dymoke White, after (he suspects) Tom had twisted his arm to get involved in long distance road coaching.

Unfortunately this was the only "Rocket Run" Sir Dymoke took part in as he died the following month (driving one of his other coaches at the Aldershot show - what a way to go!). In fact, one of the photos in the collection is of him with Tom Parker, Judy Rusbridger and a gentleman by the name of Richard Roadnight (all of whom, apart from Sir Dymoke, can be seen in this photograph).

The coach in the picture has an interesting history; which Philip is able to provenance with documents. Sir Dymoke bought a drag from the Royal Engineers many years earlier which he had converted in late 67/early 68 to a road coach for these runs. This involved upgrading the running gear and changing items like the style and function of the door windows to represent how a road coach would have looked in its heyday.

Sir Dymoke's original intention was to name the restyled coach "Hambledon", but in the end it got called "The Rocket." Following Sir Dymoke's death, Tom Parker purchased the coach and continued the "Rocket Runs" until about 1980. After Tom Parker died (1982), the

Parker family held onto it for a few years. (Philip was very pleased to think that his wife (Fiona) had managed to have a ride on it in 1985.) Eventually it was sold - but it remained in the UK.

However the story doesn't finish there, as Philip explained. A Gloucestershire cousin of his, who is into coaching in a modest way discovered that "The Rocket" is now in Richmond, Virginia, USA. By an extraordinary stroke of good fortune (in August 2019) Philip and family, on their way to relatives' wedding close by, were able to go and see it, and meet the new owner John Hundley. An enthusiast with a long career in horse related work (saddlery, farriering), he has lovingly maintained it, to use for weddings and other occasions in his locality. So "The Rocket" lives on – the other side of the Atlantic Ocean!

The keen eyes of John, Elizabeth, Mavis and Philip have managed to identify all the faces we can see in the picture. Philip has also shown us more photographs, taken throughout that "Run", together with a detailed account of the entire journey, written by Tom Parker's daughter Judy Rusbridger. Talking Pictures is working and you can look up more details online using the link below!!!

There will be fresh images in the next Hambledonian – Meanwhile, do keep "Talking (to us about your) Pictures" This has been such a good start.

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If you have memories or comments you would like to add to our online version please use the comments form here on the website or join the forum.