



V8 Register Autumn Tour 2011

The V8 Autumn Tour was held from Friday 23rd to Monday 26th September. The event was organised by Bob and Carolyn Owen with Julian Holmes, the Register's insider on all things nautical, providing invaluable assistance in setting up the special features of the tour of Portsmouth Historic Naval Dockyard. The general setting for the tour was Hants, Berks & Wilts. Don Avery gives his account of this popular annual MG Car Club event.

Arrival on Friday

The Norton Park Hotel near Winchester had been chosen as the tour base and on Friday afternoon there was a steady flow of arriving V8s in various guises burbling down the mile-long drive to the hotel. Once everyone had arrived there were some 32 cars in all, the majority being RV8s and BGT V8s. However, also represented were TFs (one old and one new) and two MGCs. MGCs are usual on the V8 tours being regarded as "honorary V8s" – albeit short of a couple of cylinders.

Cars had travelled from all points of the UK compass but mainland Europe was also represented; Brigitte Wijnen and John van den Boorn brought their RV8 from the Netherlands and Eva and Allan Doyle their BGT V8 from Germany. The most northerly UK participants were Bob and Janet MacGillivray who travelled from Lanark in their BGT V8.

On arrival, participants were greeted by either Bob or Carolyn and issued with an

information pack which included rally plaque, route book and various goodies.

Once rooms had been found the next item on the agenda was the inevitable trip to the bar for pre-dinner drinks. The bar is always a good ice-breaker and an ideal opportunity for first-time participants like us to meet new friends. All evening meals for our 63 participants were taken in the hotel's function room. The "room" was actually a large converted thatched barn allocated exclusively to our tour.

Saturday – Hampshire, Berkshire and Wiltshire

The serious (touring) part of the weekend started on Saturday. After a substantial breakfast it was time to prepare the cars for the journey ahead. Those with soft-tops folded them away whilst those that didn't looked on with envy as the day had set fair and was perfect for open-top driving.

Bob and Carolyn had thoughtfully provided a choice of routes for Saturday but all were common up to the first stop at Whitchurch Silk Mill.

We were beginning to have some concerns about what lay ahead when we saw the water filled "lakes" (huge potholes!) on one of the unmade-up legs of the route to the Mill. However, our fears were unfounded. In fact the route to the mill was not too long or arduous and ensured we got there ahead of the general public to allow time for a guided tour.

The mill is situated on a small natural island on the River Test. The Register had

been allocated special parking on the lawned garden in front of the mill and this made for some interesting and tricky manoeuvring trying to get all the cars in place; it certainly convinced one new RV8 owner that power steering was next on her shopping list!

One poor member of the public, thinking this was the public car-park, found himself in the middle of a gaggle of MGs only to discover that he would be boxed in until after lunch. He was not amused. However, with help and guidance from club members he managed to extricate his Audi TT from the grass without falling off the edge and into the river – and later apologised for his sense of humour failure.

The mill produces bespoke silk fabric for historic buildings and for film and television dramas. It can still be run from its original water-wheel. After a very interesting and informative guided tour, followed by the obligatory visit to the gift shop, a generous lunch was taken in the mill's tea room.

From Whitchurch onwards drivers had three options:

Option 1 provided a scenic tour through NW Hampshire into Berkshire and Wiltshire enjoying stunning views of the Downs before reaching Avebury, passing the odd white horse on the way.

Option 2 catered for the "green" members of the tour with a route to The Living Rain Forest at Hampstead Norreys. This has two zones, a small sub-tropical and a larger tropical house containing a variety of small animals including insects, reptiles and birds.

Option 3, for the technophiles, led to the Crofton Beam Engines. This fascinating site on the edge of the Kennett and Avon canal was holding a special "In-steam" day with lots of additional attractions on show. Nearby Hungerford and Marlborough were offered as alternatives to any of the ladies (or men) who preferred shopping to steam.



Top, cosy parking in front of the Whitchurch Silk Mill and above, "Pay attention class, there will be a test!"



Now that's what you call a cylinder head! –
Crofton Beam Engines



The Hackpen White Horse



Revving up at the Living Rain Forest!

After a tiring but thoroughly enjoyable day, in weather that we could only have dreamt of, it was back to the hotel for victuals before retiring in preparation for an early start the following morning.

Sunday – Things Nautical

Sunday dawned chilly but dry and it was an 8.45 departure for Portsmouth for a day packed with things naval, both old and new. Our destination was the historic dockyard at Portsmouth, home of the Royal Navy. The plan was a quick run down the motorway to Portsmouth, then to all re-assemble before continuing a short journey to the dock-yard.

Julian Holmes, the V8 Register's man in dark blue, had used his inside knowledge to organise special access to areas usually off limits to members of the public. Firstly, he arranged that we could marshal in the (unused on Sunday) nearby Technopole car park without being wheel clamped. From there we proceeded in convoy and entered the dock-yard. The sight of some thirty V8s line astern (very nautical) certainly turned many heads as we passed through the historic gates. Then - not only were we allowed to take our cars into the dockyard – we were given parking alongside HMS Victory, flag ship of the Royal Navy and Lord Nelson's flag ship at the Battle of Trafalgar.

Then perk number two came once on - board HMS Victory - tea and biscuits in the ward room! This was very kindly prepared by Julian's wife, Caroline, ably supported by their 7 year old son, Lewis.

But we couldn't linger too long in the wardroom because our next stop was a

more modern warship, HMS Diamond, which was a brisk 20 minute walk from Victory. Julian apologised that his influence did not run to having the ship moved to a closer berth. HMS Diamond is a Type 45 Destroyer and was so new at the time of the visit that it had not been formally handed into service and was still undergoing final acceptance procedures.

The visitors were split into four groups and after the usual safety briefs set off in different directions for tours above and below decks. The tour lasted about an hour and then we were escorted back to the public area at HMS Victory. As we walked back it was interesting to see defence cuts in action! With the exception of HMS Diamond and HMS Dragon, another Type 45, the only other ships evident – and looking operational - were a newly BAE built Omani corvette and a couple of coastguard cutters. It was a sad sight to see HMS Ark Royal, HMS Invincible and the Antarctic research ship, Endeavour, all awaiting their fates.

For the remainder of the afternoon club members were free to do as they wished - and there is just so much to see. The Mary Rose is in the midst of a move to new purpose-built premises and was not on show but HMS Warrior, boat tours of the harbour, the museums and the Spinnaker Tower were all options for the afternoon.

The pre-departure rendezvous was at Boathouse No 7, one of the Dockyard's eateries, where a splendid afternoon cream tea had been arranged.





HMS Diamond



Allan Doyle tries the Captain's seat on HMS Diamond



Welcome aboard HMS Diamond and below, "Anyone for tea?" HMS Victory Wardroom



The return to base at the Norton Park Hotel was via a short tour starting with Southwick Hill which offers a magnificent panorama of Portsmouth, The Solent and the Isle of Wight.

Sunday evening dinner at the hotel was the last of the weekend and a raffle had been organised. Many of the attending Register members had generously donated prizes and the raffle raised over £500 for Coco, the Children's charity supported by "Bridget the Midget" on her African Odyssey. No doubt you've read of Roy Locock's and Chris Vernon's MG adventures in Safety Fast! You can read more on the web site at www.bridgetthemidget.co.uk

Monday – Things Sacred - and the Finale

For those participants who didn't have to return home on Sunday night, the final run of the tour was a more-or-less direct route to Salisbury for a visit to the Cathedral. Register member Al Barnett had managed to arrange permission for the cars to park immediately in front of the cathedral West Front – yet another rare perk. Unfortunately the paved area was too small for all the cars. However, a rota system soon allowed everyone the chance of that special photograph.

Being a large party, we were divided into more manageable groups and given very comprehensive and informative tours of the cathedral by the resident guides. To finish the cathedral visit some very brave souls

took the famous tower tour, seeing the clock and its bells, the medieval scaffolding in the spire and tentatively stepping out to enjoy the stunning views of Salisbury and the surrounding countryside. The cathedral visit brought to an end the V8 Register Autumn Tour 2011 and the cars headed home, their owners and passengers no doubt looking forward to an equally successful and enjoyable event in 2012.

If you enjoy driving your MG, seeing great scenery and magnificent structures, and wining and dining with like-minded people, why not join us on the next V8 Autumn tour? This will be based in Llandrindod Wells in Mid Wales over the long week-end 31st August – 2nd September, 2012, and will once again be organised by Bob and Carolyn Owen. See the V8 Register website at www.v8register.net for details.



Sue Walker looks out from the Cathedral tower (above) and below, V8s at the West Front of Salisbury Cathedral.

