

# Charles Cowlin

1924 - 2016



Charles Cowlin, one of the eight founder members who established The Sporting Car Club of Norfolk in early 1951, has died in Hastings at the age of 92. He outlived the other founder members, so his passing means the loss of our final link to the very early days of the club when the excitement and fun of motor sport was being rekindled after petrol rationing ended in 1950.

I never met Charles but made contact with him five years ago while I was organising SCCoN's 60th Anniversary celebration event at Kimberley Hall, and I had many phone conversations with him at that time. He was keen to help SCCoN as much as he could telling many anecdotes and sending me three separate packages of documents and photos that were invaluable to me as I recorded the first few years of SCCoN's history within the programme brochure for that event.

Born in Liverpool, Charles gained an engineering degree from Cambridge University and during his early career worked in the City Engineer's department at Norwich City Hall. Following the east coast floods of 1953, he was seconded to Great Yarmouth where he repaired many pumping stations that had been put out of action by the flooding. Later in 1953, Charles left Norwich and moved to Leicester where he joined the British Automobile Racing Club and from where he competed on rallies organised by Kings Lynn and District Motor Club. He particularly liked their Hunstanton Rally (that concluded with driving tests on the seafront) because he was able to reacquaint himself with his old SCCoN pals who were also competing. In later life, Charles moved to East Sussex and worked for Hastings Borough Council. He had a successful career in Hastings, being appointed to the position of Borough Engineer and then being promoted to Chief Executive of the council, a role he held until his retirement.

Soon after SCCoN began, Charles entered his first motor sport event, the 1951 Daily Express National Motor Rally, as navigator for John Olorenshaw (another founder member of SCCoN) in John's Sunbeam Talbot 90, a works-built rally car that John and Charles collected from the factory in Ryton. This rally, run by the Motor Cycling Club, had eight starting points, lasted for 3 days of competition driving and featured a Concours d' Elegance on the 4th day. An astonishing 700 cars entered which the organisers had to limit and they accepted "only" 450. John and Charles started from Norwich on a 1000 mile route that took them through the Lake District and mid-Wales before finishing (coincidentally) in Hastings. The road sections were set at challenging average speeds and at the finish there were driving tests against the clock along the promenade. One of the other entries was Jack Sears driving his MG TC. Jack, who would later become a Vice President of SCCoN, sadly passed away the day before Charles died.



Charles Cowlin (driving) with Desmond Crawford before the start of the 1953 London Rally

Charles entered this event again in 1952, but driving this time in his own MG TD with his brother Geoff navigating. On that occasion, the rally finished on Brighton's Marina Drive. The top prize was £50 and the rally was so big that the celebratory dinner at the finish was held in two different hotels on two separate evenings! He entered the 1953 London Rally (a non-stop 24-hour event) with another SCCoN founder member Desmond Crawford as his co-driver. The big rallies at that time involved driving overnight with little time for rest and Charles said he was always "thoroughly worn out" at the finish. SCCoN crews didn't win any awards, but they always achieved creditable finishing positions.

After the club's 60th Anniversary event I kept in touch with Charles and spoke with him a few more times to keep him abreast of the club's activities. He remembered borrowing Stanley Boshier's Jaguar XK120 at Snetterton Airfield where he enjoyed exceeding 100 mph by a considerable margin! He also told me that he'd driven his MGA at well over 100mph on the M1 soon after it opened, which was a perfectly legal speed in 1959.

Charles' passing marks the end of an era for our club and the management team and members of SCCoN wish to express their gratitude to all the founder members of the club. The Sporting Car Club of Norfolk sends its sincere condolences to Charles' daughter Johanna and to all his family and friends.

Peter Riddle