

Obituary

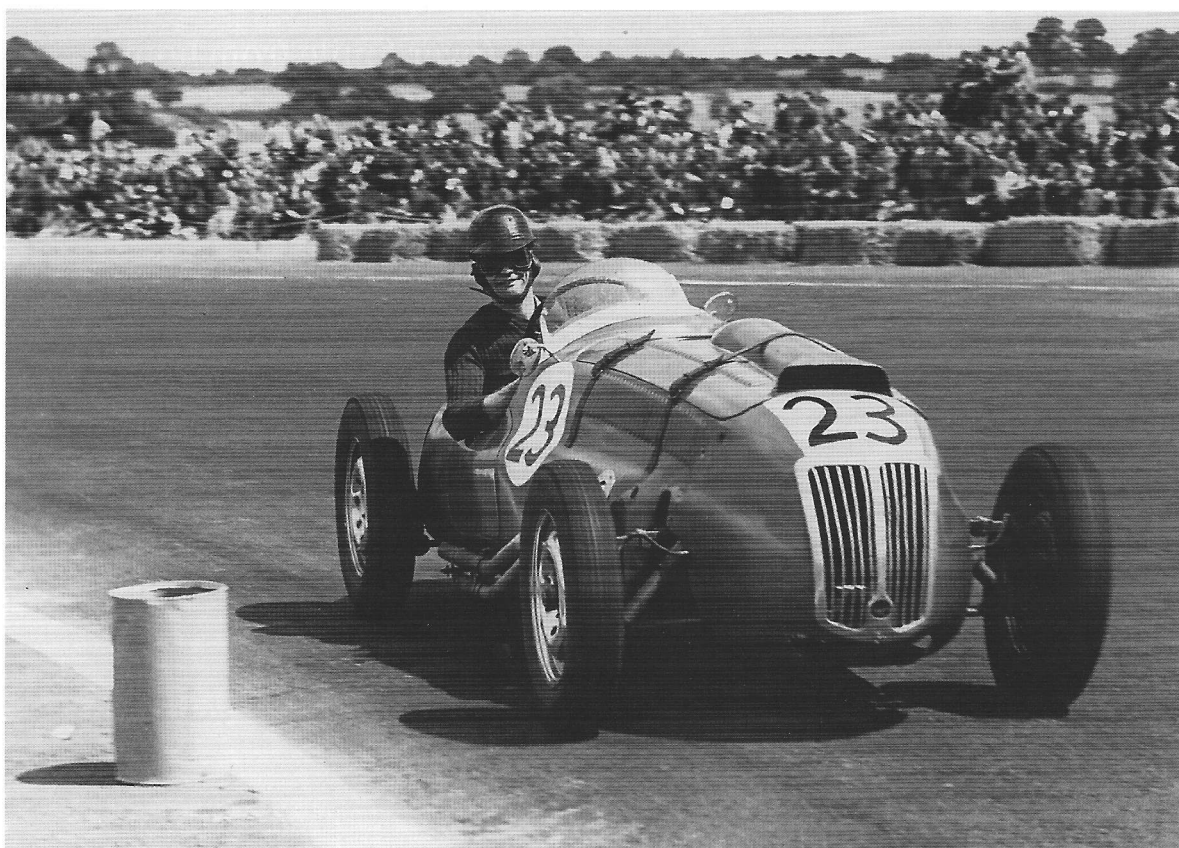
Tony Crook 1920 - 2014

James Trigwell

Thomas Anthony Donald Crook, a talented and successful racing driver in the early 1950s and owner of Bristol Cars for over 40 years, died in February, shortly before his 94th birthday. Tony was born in Manchester and educated at Clifton College, Bristol and at Cambridge. His father died when he was just six years old and as the family owned coal mines in Lancashire, Tony

became a wealthy young man with a supercharged MG PB at college. He served with the RAF during the war, achieving the rank of Flight Lieutenant, and in 1944 started Anthony Crook Motors with a capital of £20,000. He purchased various sports cars which he would then sell to other officers. He retained an Alfa Romeo 2900B and a Frazer Nash-BMW 328 and used these when he took up racing as soon as it restarted after the war.

In 1947 Tony purchased a garage with a Ford agency and established a sales, service and race preparation company. For the next few years he



Tony Crook in his 1952 Le Mans Rep chassis 170 at the 1952 British Grand Prix at Silverstone.
Photo – from the Frazer Nash Archives

competed whenever and wherever he could in the UK and his successes provided good publicity for his company. In 1948 he was appointed a Bristol agent and thereafter concentrated on racing Bristol saloons and Bristol-engined sports cars, always painted in his favourite colour of Bristol Maroon. In 1950 he purchased the ex-works Frazer Nash High Speed (TME 924) that Dorino Serafini had driven for AFN in the 1949 Targa Florio and Mille Miglia races. The car was pretty tired by the time Crook got it, but his company prepared it very carefully and Tony had a good season in British club events. For 1951 he ordered a new Frazer Nash Le Mans Replica (PPG 1) with which he had an even more successful year, winning the one-hour sports car race at Silverstone in May and setting a new production sports car record at Shelsley Walsh in September. He also used the car to establish long distance records at Montlhery in November with a best lap of 123.92mph.

For 1952 Tony ordered another Frazer Nash (RPJ 1), the new lighter weight Le Mans MkII with narrow parallel tube chassis. He used this in both sports car and Formula 2 races including the British Grand Prix at Silverstone and the 2-litre sports car race at Monaco where he finished third. He taught himself to take a tight line and brake as late as possible, right up to the apex. As he approached a corner and needed to brake he would say to himself 'Not yet, not yet, not yet'. But the competition was getting fiercer, so Crook ordered new and lighter Cooper-Bristols for 1953 and he raced these through to 1955, when he retired from racing. He continued to build his business and took on Abarth, Simca and Zagato agencies as well as dealing in aeroplanes and helicopters. He was himself an excellent pilot and continued to fly his own plane well into his 80s.

In 1960, after the Bristol Aeroplane Company had merged with the Hawker Siddeley Group to become Bristol Siddeley, the Bristol Car Company was considered surplus to requirements. Sir George White arranged to buy the car company and offered Crook a 40% interest in it. Thus Tony became a director of the car company. Then in

1973 he purchased the remaining 60% from the White family after Sir George was involved in a bad road accident. In 2002, at the age of 82, Tony Crook eventually sold the company but continued to manage the Kensington sales office until 2007. He then had more time on his hands and we were very surprised and pleased when he and his secretary Anne-Marie, who had worked for him for 46 years, visited the Frazer Nash Archives Open Day in July 2012.

Tony Crook was known to be short tempered with journalists, but was in fact a most charming and gentlemanly person. He had been a good friend of the Aldingtons and had a definite soft spot for Frazer Nashes, having bought and sold quite a few in his time. Stories of his pranks when younger are legion – such as dressing up as an Arab at an Earls Court Motor Show and pretending to order several cars on the Rolls Royce stand, or stealing a replica steering wheel from an advertising hoarding in Monaco and blaming HJ Aldington who was then arrested by the police. Down the years he contributed several articles to this magazine. To read more about his racing experiences with Frazer Nashes see Gazettes numbers 96 to 98 from 1992.

Tony Crook

Nic Dyer

I was very sorry to learn of the death of Tony Crook recently, although not entirely surprised. I had a Christmas card from him which he had trouble writing.

I first met Tony whilst I was working for AFN in 1952. We were building his Mk2 Le Mans Replica, the body of which was his own design, copying the outline of the 1939 Grand Prix Mercedes. It also incorporated the back axle design of Allen Hart which was a failure. Tony had taken delivery of the car on the Friday and returned it on the following Monday, highly dissatisfied. Consequently, having built the axle I was charged with the task of restoring the axle to the A-bracket location used on all previous cars.

When Tony came to collect his 'restored' car he insisted on trying it out to restore his confidence before leaving the factory. As I had done all the restoration I was told to go with him to ensure that all was well. The theory being that if it wasn't right it would involve both of us, not just him. Fortunately he was satisfied with the handling and we returned to the Works safely.

The car was entered for the Prix de Monaco in May 1952, together with a Works Replica driven by Stirling Moss. Tony came in third whilst the Works car retired with a rear wheel loosened. Tony's only comment after the race was 'Well, at least none of my wheels came off'.

Many years later we met again at Donington where a Frazer Nash meeting had been organised and we examined the car together to see if the specification had been altered much and to our surprise it was remarkably unchanged. Tony drove the car on several demonstration laps in stripped form, I think, but I do not have any lap times.

In 2002 when the car was 50 years old a reunion was held in Tony's workshop in Chiswick reuniting him with his last Frazer Nash and with the Mark 1 car he had owned previously.

We were all very pleased to see him when he visited the Archive and I understand that he was equally happy to be with us. It was a good day.