

Johnny Thomas

1935–2020

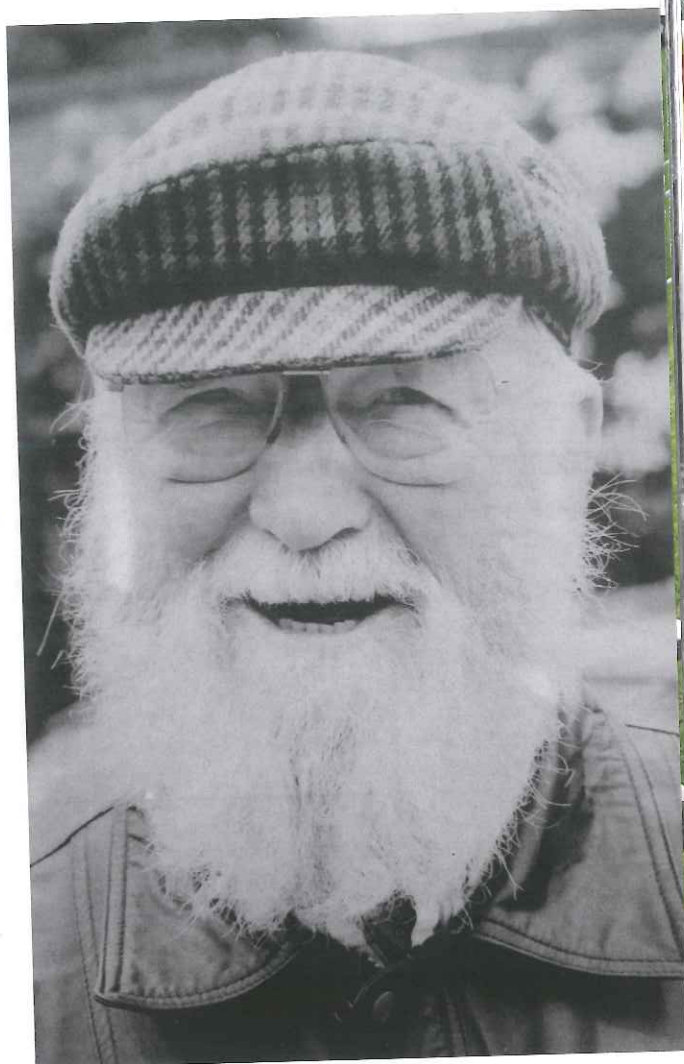
The old car world mourns the loss of one of its great figures with the death of John David Alan Thomas, who died peacefully on 27 December 2020. Johnny had been in hospital for several months following a fall earlier in the year. He was a giant of The Veteran Car Club, of which he served as president from 2001 to 2003, and carried out many civic duties in his native Carmarthenshire, at one time holding the office of High Sherriff of Dyfed. He was a good and reliable friend to all and will be very much missed.

Born in 1935 at home at Bryn Illtyd, Pembrey, he was educated at Wells House prep school in Malvern, then at Wellington College, Berkshire and Millfield, Somerset, where he had his first motorcycle. His first job was at Baglan Steel Works, working under his uncle, who later married his mother after his father's death. From there he joined the Red Dragon Garage at Pembrey, followed by Day's Garage in Swansea, and then a spell with hire purchase company Lombard Banking.

He had by then acquired his first of many Bentleys, which he later sold to pay for tickets to the hunt ball to take Binks. He met her at his best man's brother's 21st birthday and married her in 1959. Johnny and Binks were both part of the 'county' set, although they had a wide circle of friends from all walks of life, particularly in old vehicle circles. Their married life started in Capel Issa, Manordeilo, then Aynho, where he bought his first garage. Son Christopher was born in 1963, and then it was back to Capel Issa and the purchase of a Carmarthen garage. About this time he acquired the 1909 Alldays tourer and his 1896 Leon Bollée, the first of many trikes, on which he did his first London to Brighton Run in 1963. He took part in at least fifty Brighton Runs in a variety of cars and trikes. Their second son Rob arrived in 1966.

At various times Johnny owned a mouth-watering selection of early vehicles – three or four 3-litre Bentleys, a couple of Rolls-Royce Silver Ghosts (one of which served as my wedding car in 1981), three 4½-litre Bentleys and a beloved Speed Six. Alldays were always a favourite and he had five motorcycles dating from 1911 to 1920. Other bikes included a Brough Superior SS100 sold for £100(!), and examples (several at a time) of Rex, Premier, Triumph, Ariel, Roc, Ner-a-Car (five), Scott, Rudge, BSA, Douglas, AJS and many others. On one memorable occasion he was able to assemble about twelve pre-1915 bikes eligible for the 50th Pioneer Run, which he lent out to friends in the West South Wales Section of the Vintage Motor Cycle Club.

In fact Johnny's rally organisational skills were unsurpassed, and with a mixture of charm and guile he could be relied on to always obtain the best terms for participants. Those same skills were used effectively to defuse disagreements and arguments, and were used to good effect during



his VCC Presidency from 2001 to 2003 – a hectic time for him and Binks.

Whether it was organising Welsh Weekends for the Bentley Drivers Club, motorcycle runs for the VMCC, or rallies for the VCC, competing in hill climbs with the Napier at Prescott or participating in rallies in France, Holland, the USA and the Irish Republic, Johnny could always be relied upon to be efficient, helpful and cheerful, and as a result made many friends everywhere.

Having served as High Sheriff, he was deservedly appointed Deputy Lieutenant of Carmarthenshire, and on applying to the College of Heralds for a grant of arms, was eventually permitted to incorporate his racing Napier.

I shall miss his knowledgeable advice and his friendship, and the gap his passing will create will probably never be filled. God bless you Johnny, and I hope Valhalla is fully prepared for you with plenty of proper motorcycles and cars, including an Alldays, a Speed Six and a 1902 Napier racer.

Michael Worthington-Williams