



NWMMOC NEWSLETTER

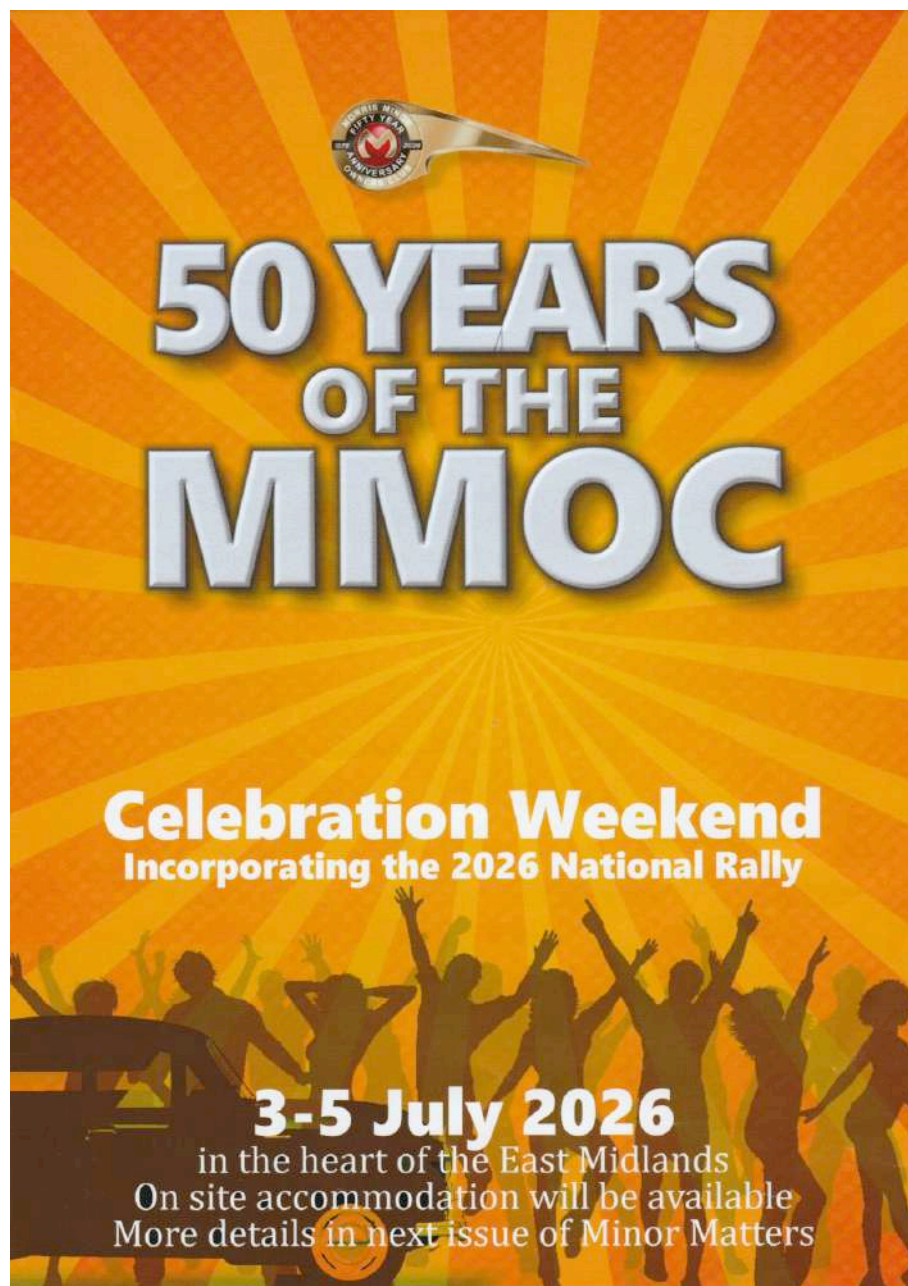
December 2025

Looking to the future - a date for your diary.

Words: Pam Holmes

At the National Rally in 2025, North Wiltshire were well represented on both days and even though the temperatures were high and the sun blazing, I think we all had a good time.

Next year we could again plan to make it a "Branch Event".



Suspension work on Steve Chater's van

Words and photos: Bill Reed.

Steve and I had two trips out to Minorparts of Oxford, the first to leave his van for work on the front suspension, and the second to collect it.



It found itself in good company.

The red van is being recommissioned, and the Traveller, which is a runner, is on sale for restoration.

Steve is very pleased with the work done.





After collecting his van we stopped for a coffee at the Classic Motor Hub, where my Triumph appeared to acquire tiger stripes!

GHR 800N - A Unique Occasion

by Bill Reed

The Morris Minor built in Swindon - GHR 800N - has been owned by just two families in its 50-year life, and it was a great pleasure to welcome both of them to our AGM. It was also a pleasure to witness the warmth of feeling between them - having only met each other for the first time just a few weeks before!

Rod Law, who ordered the car to be built in Swindon for his father in 1974, and his daughter Denise, came down from Northamptonshire. Andy Smith and his daughter Sophie, in whose family the car has been since 1992, came down from Derbyshire. We were privileged to have their company and to hear their stories.

We were also joined by Robert Harrin, nephew of Patrick Harrin who built the car at Dutton Forshaw's Victoria Garage in Swindon; and by Pete Cosslett, who took part in the Charity Car Pull for Cancer Research in 1982.

We heard that Rod's father Edwin, who had learnt to drive on a Bullnose Morris, only ever owned Minor saloons - nine of them before this one - between 1954 and 1974. His wife Gwendoline wrote to British Leyland's Austin Morris Group in April 1973 to order another one and received the following reply: ... *"this model was discontinued some three years ago now*

and there are no new Minors remaining unsold anywhere in the country. I am sorry to have to disappoint you..."

Rod however took this as a challenge. He went to see Percy Gerrish at Victoria Garage and persuaded him to task his new storeman with listing all the parts required to build a Minor saloon from scratch - about 1800 of them. This list was then sent to Unipart in Cowley, who confirmed that they could all be sourced. Rod told us, "Percy fell off his chair when I said, *Right, get on and build it!*"

Body, trim and paint work were done by Bampton Brothers Coachbuilders in Swindon. The mechanical work was entrusted to Patrick Harrin and carried out in the showroom on Victoria Hill, where passers-by could watch. The build was used by Dutton Forshaw and Leyland for publicity purposes and thanks to Rod and Denise we were able to see some photographs that we had not seen before. One of them shows Patrick and Rod surrounded by a mass of parts. The one part they couldn't source was the turnbolt on the passenger door lock, but an appeal in the media resulted in a deluge of them!

Regarding the colour, Rover Bronze Green, Rod told us that he took current Leyland colour samples up to his father and that was the one he chose. In one or two places a white patch is visible because the shell was delivered as "body in white", with Bampton's doing the spray job.



Photo: Patrick Harrin and Rod Law with parts at Victoria Garage, 1974: British Leyland

Robert Harrin told us his uncle was a conscientious and reserved man who never swore, but one of the few occasions when he used bad language was

when the photographer moved parts around which he had carefully placed where he needed them!

Edwin did see the car completed but sadly died before he could drive it. GHR then lived in Halifax with his widow Gwendoline, who learnt to drive on it. One of the mysteries of the car was explained - the dip switch was moved from the floor to below the dashboard at Gwendoline's request.

In 1982 Rod, who was then Chair of North Wiltshire Branch of the MMOC, had another ambitious idea. This was to use the car to raise money for Cancer Research by pulling it, on foot, from Swindon to Cowley. The car was driven down from Halifax for the purpose and members of Leeds Branch helped. It was pulled in teams, with ropes also attached at the rear to retain it on the downhill stretches - "If we had used the brakes it wouldn't have been a true car pull," said Rod. The report at the time records only a lunch stop at the Lamb and Flag in Longworth, but Rod said, "We stopped at every pub!"

Eventually, in 1991, Rod's family decided to sell the car and took it to Hampson's, a specialist auctioneer. It remained there for a year, registered under another name. Rod thinks it may have been used as collateral in the auctioneer's business. At any event it then came under the hammer in 1992, when it was bought by Andy Smith's father-in-law Eric, a keen car enthusiast and rally driver. Andy said, "I was with him at the auction, we both said, this is so unique, it was just perfect. Luckily won it, and he drove it home."

So it was driven to auction by Rod and driven away by Eric, an almost tangible contact between the two families which Rod has reinforced by giving Andy one of his father's club ties which he wore when driving!

Since Eric's death the car has been in storage in Andy's garage. It still has all its original components. It has appeared at a number of big shows and Andy brought it back to the Swindon area for our North Wilts Branch Rally at Lyneham in September 2022.

Until mid-2025 we did not know Rod's whereabouts and Rod did not know that the car was still in existence. Denise, who was born in Swindon, was scrolling through some local social media sites and came across the story of the build of the car in "Strolling in Swindon". Curious to find out if the car still existed, she found its DVLA listing online and then contacted the MMOC, who put her on to Andy. The upshot was a visit in October 2025 by Rod and Denise to see Andy and the car - the first time Rod had seen it since he drove it to auction in 1991.

Our sincere thanks to Rod and Denise and to Andy and Sophie for so generously travelling down to share their stories and answer our questions. It was a unique occasion indeed.



Photo: Rod and Denise Law in Derbyshire, 2025: Andy Smith

Malmesbury Christmas Fayre

Words and photo: Bill Reed



This is the mulled wine and mince pie stall in the Christmas Fayre at the Ratcliffe Foundry premises in Malmesbury, with their E-reg pickup looking on.

North Wilts. MMOC Branch Christmas Picnic

The photo of the Malmesbury Christmas Fayre is a useful reminder of our imminent Branch Christmas event, to be held on Sunday, 14th December in Castle Eaton Village Hall. Arrivals from 12.00 noon.

There will be food :- a picnic (bring your own)

- complimentary mulled wine, soft drinks, tea coffee.
- a Christmas Cake made by Kath.

The afternoon will include: - a team quiz

- feely bag quiz
- a raffle
- and plenty of time to socialise!

At the Christmas Picnic, we shall again as a Branch be collecting food to pass on to the Swindon Night Shelter, reflecting the spirit of Christmas. Foods should be non-perishables to provide nutritious meals for those struggling with everyday living.

If you have not already done so, then please email Gill Waters to confirm that you are attending the picnic.

If you would be willing to help prepare teas, coffees and soft drinks then please let Pam know, help would be greatly appreciated.

pamlynnholmes@icloud.com

North Wilts. MMOC Branch January Meal at the Freke Arms, Sunday, 18th January 2026.

This event is being organised by Steve Chater and Gill Waters, watch out for information being circulated and ensure you have signed-up for this event with Gill.

North Wilts. MMOC Branch Event for February

On Sunday, 22nd February in Castle Eaton Village Hall there will be our February Branch Event. Planning is still in progress but there will be games amongst other things!

November Fun Run

Words: Gill Waters. Photos: Clive Frost, Bill Reed & Sarah Bracher.

On Sunday 16th November, North Wilts members drove their Morris's and some modern cars in a Fun Run. We started at Studley Grange Garden Centre - coffee first - then about 11am all the cars left in a loose convoy.

We travelled through beautiful countryside in the Pewsey Vale and many of our members commented on the lovely views. The run lasted about an hour and a half, finishing at The Cross Keys in Wanborough for a Carvery lunch which was superb.



A really great run out with thanks to Sarah, Andrew and Becca for organising.



Final note of thanks for your contributions to this newsletter to:

Sarah Bracher
Steve Chater
Clive Frost
Bill Reed
Gill Waters

And last but not least many thanks to those Branch Members who agreed at the AGM to be voted onto the Branch Committee for the year ahead!

Please would everyone make a commitment to contribute to the Branch in the year ahead: we need members to help with organising:

Drives, a treasure hunt, meals or other refreshments at pubs and cafes, visits to places of interest both car related and of wider interest, quizzes, social events, speakers. Your ideas for programme events would be welcomed. Talk to any of the committee members.

Pam