

- PETER NEAL -

- A Life with MG -

The MG Car Club has lost not only one of its most knowledgeable and respected members, but a dear friend, with the passing of Peter Neal.

For those of us fortunate enough to have known Pete, it is difficult to imagine Kimber House without him. Quiet, thoughtful and modest, he possessed an extraordinary knowledge of MG and its history, much of it gained not from books or second-hand accounts, but because he had actually been there.

Pete's association with MG stretched back more than 70 years. In 1954, aged just 16, he initially applied to Morris Motors at Cowley for an apprenticeship. While waiting for the next intake, however, a telegram arrived explaining that the MG factory at Abingdon was looking for an apprentice for its newly established Drawing Office. Pete applied, was accepted and started at Abingdon in October 1954.

It was the beginning of an extraordinary relationship with the marque.

The young apprentice suddenly found himself working alongside some of the most important names in MG history, including Syd Enever, Terry Mitchell and Jim O'Neill. Pete later remembered that when he arrived, work on what would become the MGA was already under way. One particularly vivid memory was being shown the EX175 MGA prototype beneath a dust sheet in A Building. Compared with the TFs then travelling down the production line, the sleek new sports car must have appeared to have arrived from another world.

Pete quickly became part of the fabric of Abingdon. His early duties included carrying drawings between the Drawing Office and Experimental Department, altering and cataloguing drawings and producing graphs associated with engine testing, including work connected with the EX182 Le Mans cars.

After completing his apprenticeship, Pete received his Certificate of Indentures from John Thornley before National Service took him away from Abingdon for a period with the RAF. On his return he became involved with the development of the Midget hood and contributed artwork during

the development of the MGB, helping Syd Enever visualise how the finished car might look.

His artistic ability was another of Pete's many talents. Syd Enever once bought an airbrush and asked Pete to produce an illustration of a proposed MGA colour scheme. Pete had never used an airbrush before, so simply taught himself how to do it – an anecdote which perhaps says rather a lot about him.

Pete remained an important member of the Abingdon design team until the factory closed in 1980. His engineering career did not end there. He subsequently worked as a consultant on SAAB projects and later joined Tom Walkinshaw at Kidlington, where his work included development of the Aston Martin DB7.

But MG never really left Pete.

In retirement he began volunteering at Kimber House, initially working alongside Colin Grant sorting boxes of photographs into some semblance of logical order. From those beginnings Pete became the MG Car Club's Archivist, a position he held for around 20 years.

What an asset he proved to be.

Pete possessed something no archive catalogue or computer database could ever replicate: first-hand knowledge. He knew the people behind the cars. He understood how Abingdon worked and remembered the personalities, decisions and circumstances behind so much of MG's post-war story.

Safety Fast! readers benefited



Pete at Kimber House, with a cut out of Cecil Kimber



Pete second from left behind the American racing driver and engineer, Carroll Shelby, taken in late 1950s.

enormously from Pete's knowledge. His series of 13 articles chronicling the history of MG at Oxford and Abingdon drew heavily upon his own experiences and conversations with those who had worked in racing, design and production.

Yet concentrating solely on Pete's knowledge and achievements tells only part of the story.

To us at Kimber House, Pete was simply Pete: a friend and familiar face who was always willing to help. He was never someone who needed to remind you that he had worked alongside some of the greatest figures in MG history. Indeed, his modesty was one of his most endearing qualities. You could ask a seemingly innocent question and discover, several minutes later, that the person answering it had actually been standing in the Drawing Office when part of that history was being created.

That connection with Abingdon made Pete very special, but it was his kindness, generosity and friendship that made him so greatly loved.

His passing represents the loss of another irreplaceable link with the MG factory and the people who made it such an extraordinary place. Pete devoted a remarkable part of his life to MG, first helping to create its history and, decades later, helping the MG Car Club preserve it for future generations.

We owe him an enormous debt of gratitude.

Our thoughts and deepest sympathies are with Pam, Catherine, Christopher and all Pete's family and friends.

Thank you, Pete, for the memories, the knowledge, the stories, the friendship and everything you did for MG and the MG Car Club.

You will be very greatly missed.