

I first had the idea to start a branch of the MMOC in Manchester not long after I joined the club and received the first newsletter. I wanted to share the experience of Minor ownership with like minded people at a time when Morris Minor ownership was just starting to be gaining momentum and there was a high level of interest and affection for a car that was eight years out of production. A phone call to the then secretary of the national club gave me the encouragement to try and get things started - the club would pay for the first venue and so planning a few months in advance I booked a room in a large pub (The Royal Thorn in Wythenshawe - now an office block!) and placed an article in Minor Matters and waited to see if any one turned up.

I was surprised how many people arrived and there was certainly enough enthusiasm and numbers to justify further meetings. At that stage most people used the cars every day and the interest was as much around where to get parts and which scrap yards were breaking Minors. How things have changed - not many scrap yards now and so much easier to get parts from the many specialists.

The second meeting was almost the last. We held it in the same venue but couldn't afford a room and were almost thrown out for trying to hold a meeting in the public bar with twenty or so people. Not the first time I have been thrown out of a pub but perhaps a first (still) for Morris Minor owners. It was quite obvious that we couldn't hold a third meeting there and it was suggested that that the Bulls Head in Hale Barns had a small room that they didn't charge for and that other motor clubs used. A quick visit and chat to the landlord secured the fourth Tuesday of each month as the meeting date, a time which has lasted for 30 years.

I forget exactly how long we stayed at this venue for, several years at least. The numbers grew steadily and hit a maximum of 60 for a talk on drink driving by the Cheshire Police, (very cramped in a little room which was suited for about 30). When the landlord changed, the pub was decorated and he wanted to charge for the use of the room - so that forced the move to the current venue of the Ship Inn in Styal.

In the early days we had a small committee - chairman, treasurer and secretary and whilst there were plenty of ideas for talks and events most of the organising came down to the gang of three. The first rally was in March 1980 in Lyme Park a great venue but bitterly cold, we even had the press in attendance and an article with colour picture in the Stockport Advertiser. The most memorable of the early rallies was at Poynton Pool as part of the Poynton show. The mud made Glastonbury look like a picnic. The big four wheel drive tractor pulling the ordinary tractor pulling the Jeep all axle deep out of the mud still sticks in the mind. This was the first outing for the club banner, still in use today, and I am sure some of the mud is still on it.

The club funds in those days were used to purchase some tools that were loaned out to members, trolley jack, slide hammer, axle stands being part of the library. The branch membership split itself between those with concourse cars used for show and those that used their Minors as every day transport and this did cause some tension at times and made it hard to find activities and talks that suited - the adage that you can't please all of the people all of the time was certainly true but as ever there was a hard core of membership that wanted to attend, help and enjoy their cars with like minded owners. The early 1980's did see a number of people that saw their cars as an investment and even a way of making some quick money, thankfully that did not last. I personally made some very good friends through the branch, that I still keep in touch with to this day even though they no longer own a Minor. One of the real strengths I see of the branch today is the friendship that have been made on the back of this shared interest. I decided to stand down as the pressure of work and a young family meant it was a struggle to give the branch the time and energy it needed.

Whilst it is good to look back, looking forward is more important. I have nothing but admiration for how Dave Ward took on and keeps the momentum going as the Chairman of the branch, his infectious enthusiasm and sense of humour are legendary. Jeff Lawrence as long standing treasurer is a stalwart of sense and reason and with Tony Price, as secretary, bringing a level of organisation that was missing when I was "in charge". The current team compliment each other very well and it is good to see that the branch thrives around a strong core membership that are keen to get involved but more importantly are so welcoming of new members and owners. These core values are at the heart of the branch and whilst 30 years is a land mark achievement and should be celebrated, it is because of these efforts that I am sure that we will be celebrating many more anniversaries in the future.