

In 1982 the decision of nine Rootes Car Clubs to join and form the Association of Rootes Car Clubs (ARCC) was to become a milestone event.

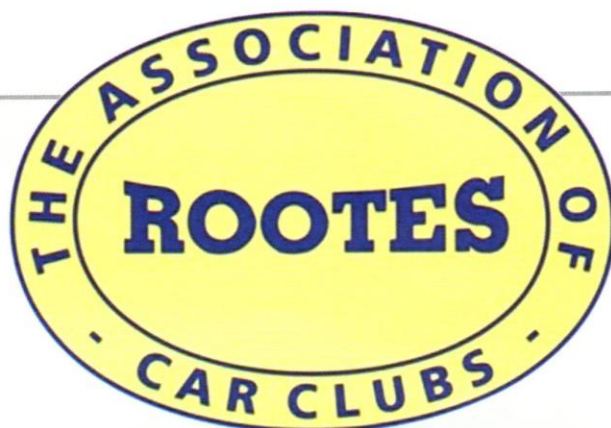
Little did they know the importance of this decision and the impact it would have on protecting the heritage of the Rootes marque for years to come.

Their plan, by joining together, had been to give the Rootes Car Clubs a bigger presence in the classic car scene and through co-operation between clubs enable them to get better buying power on member Insurance schemes and clubs liability Insurance.

In addition, given the number of common parts across the Rootes marques the idea was for clubs to work together on sourcing and producing common parts and with this increased demand be able to get better prices with suppliers.

The Association has also, over recent years, organised some major events on behalf of all the Rootes clubs such as the Millennium Rally at Blenheim Palace and a spectacular display of Rootes competitions cars at the Silverstone Classic to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Rootes Competitions department.

Membership now sits at 12 UK clubs with numerous overseas Rootes clubs linked in as well so that the majority of Rootes



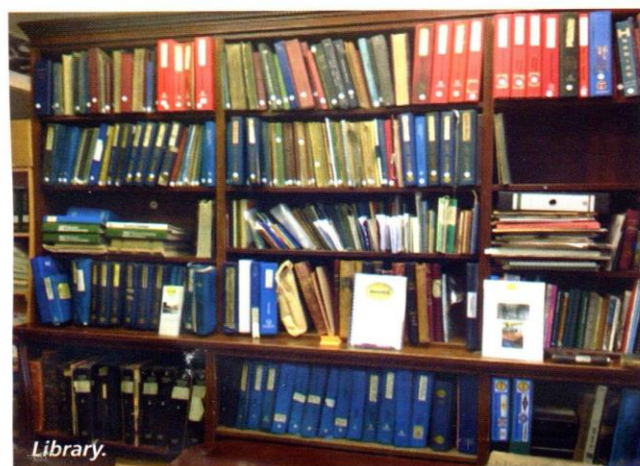
clubs worldwide are now involved. Through three meetings a year effective communication between clubs is assured and a spirit of co-operation prevails.

The formation of the Association though was just the start. In 2002 the ARCC Chairman took a call from the facilities manager at Peugeot who whilst clearing out the Stoke plant was faced with a warehouse full of old Rootes documents and drawings. As a car enthusiast he had done a quick internet search on Rootes and found the Association details and made the call. That call was to change history and was the pivotal action in saving the archives of the Rootes Group.

He advised that the warehouse had to be cleared quickly otherwise its contents would have to be scrapped. After a quick inspection visit, the Chairman organised two large trucks and the entire warehouse was emptied and taken to the warehouse of a member of the Association who had kindly agreed to store it short term or, so he thought!



Wescott Park.



Library.



Banbury entrance.



Drawing cabinets and tubes being installed.

Once unloaded the scale and historical value of the material collected was identified and the ARCC decided it had to be saved for ever.

Over the next two years the ARCC organised a preservation plan and some money to make it all happen.

In 2004 the Rootes Archive Centre Trust (RACT) was created and registered with the Charity Commission in early 2005 with five trustees being appointed.

All the material was transferred into the ownership of the Trust and a legal ownership agreement signed with Peugeot. The material was now protected for generations to come. When the Trust was registered with the Charity Commission its aims were:

- To preserve and promote the heritage of the Rootes Group and its successor companies.
- Use the information to help remanufacture parts to keep classic cars on the road.
- Use the information to help future generations keep classic cars on the road through a greater technical awareness.
- Provide and share data or information for historical research.

These aims are still as relevant today as they were back in 2005. The fantastic array of material saved and preserved for ever included:

- Original materials from Rootes/Chrysler Engineering departments from 1920–1980 and includes:

- 150,000 full size original engineering drawings
- 150,000 drawings on microfiche
- Extensive photographic library
- Literature and company documentation
- Artefacts of the company.

The first home for the Trust was at Wescott Park near Aylesbury and here the material was neatly organised in the large rented offices on an ex-military base. This was a fantastic location with not only plenty of space to display the archives, but it also had lots of outside space which was regularly utilised for events and displays.

Sadly, when the initial five-year lease came up for renewal in 2010 it was realised that the inflated cost of the new lease was too high and that the trust could not afford to remain at Wescott Park, so the search was on for a cheaper alternative.

After a nationwide search a new home was found at Cherwell Business Park in Banbury and whilst not as attractive on the outside it offered enough space and at 50% of the previous cost so the Trust moved in during 2010.

With a new home the trustees could return their focus to cataloguing, scanning the microfiche and developing the archive. At the same time an experienced archivist joined the team, and this really helped to ensure the material was protected and catalogued in the best way possible.

At Banbury though the Trust was faced with a rolling 12-month lease and every time it came up for renewal the rent had increased, and these increases were becoming unsustainable.



When the Trust inherited the material it sadly came with no dowry and Peugeot having bought Talbot did not feel that the Rootes era was really part of their heritage, so the Trust has no opportunity for support from a current manufacturer like some clubs.

The ARCC had generously supported the Trust over the years but could not easily continue to absorb the rent rises by increasing their contribution.

As Matt Ollman the trust treasurer says, "I could see the trend developing and quickly realised that without a drastic rethink the future of the Trust was in doubt, so I decided to present some options to the next ARCC committee meeting in October 2015".

The proposals Matt made were made:

- To call it a day with the Trust – the archive had been saved for 12 years and that maybe it was time for it to be handed over to another museum for safekeeping.
- To pack up the archive into a shipping container, so effectively mothballing the charity, and then see in a few years' time if anyone had the appetite to try again.
- Reduce the space at Banbury to a size that could be afforded but this meant limited or no access to the material or space for club meetings.
- Or to break the cycle of renting and buy a freehold property.

As Matt says, "There was a big discussion and clearly the only option that was palatable to everyone was to try to raise the money to buy a building and, so we started working on a plan to raise the money".

So, at the NEC Classic Motor Show in November 2015 the Trust launched their building fund to raise £165,000 and in fact long term Trust supporter Peter James Insurance even arranged Sir Stirling Moss to be on the RACT stand to launch the campaign.



NEC Fund Launch.



Wroston Archive front views.



Star cheque handover.

Cabinets being unloaded.



So, in November 2017 with the amazing support of the Rootes community the Trust have raised £105,000 and have secured loans from individuals and clubs to cover the £76,500 balance.

The fundraising started at a fast pace and by late 2015 the Trust identified a suitable site at Wroxton near Banbury where a developer was starting a build of 10 new units and interestingly it was on the same site as the new home of the Bentley Drivers Club.

Sadly, this phase of the development sold out quickly, so it was back to a property search again but the Trust had by now identified that as the building was for charitable purposes a new build property would be exempt of VAT and, so they focussed their search for a new build property as this offered better value.

So, in October 2016 when the Wroxton developer contacted the Trust to say he was applying for planning to build a further 10 units and coinciding with one of the ARCC clubs offering the Trust a loan to achieve their goal quicker they immediately jumped at the opportunity and put down a deposit.

The Trust made some changes to the specification and added additional floor space with a mezzanine as it was cheaper to do it at that stage rather than try to retro fit one in the future.

Consequently, their target rose to £181,500 but they were confident the additional 400 sq. ft. was worth the money and would allow the collection to grow in the future.

It's amazing how fast they have raised this money and the financial support has come from:

■ ARCC Clubs	£33,000
■ Individuals	£58,000
■ Companies	£3,000
■ Bucket Collections	£3,500
■ Gift Aid	£7,500
■ Loans	£76,500 from ARCC clubs and individuals

The Trust finally took possession of their new building on 27 October and the Trustees, ably assisted by a group of enthusiasts from the Rootes car clubs, moved all the archive material from the old Banbury centre into their new home at Wroxton over that weekend so that they could end the lease on their old building at the end of October.

They are now faced with completing the internal fit out of the building as and when they can afford it as well as continuing to fundraise to pay back the loans, so the pressure is not off the Trustees yet.

The new building will become the headquarters of the ARCC and many of the ARCC clubs will use it as their companies house registered address, to hold their committee meetings and already some clubs are planning events and spares days at the centre.

Lunchtime on the move.



The Trustees, along with their volunteer archivist, will continue with their programme of scanning drawings and cataloguing along with working with the clubs, parts manufacturers, authors and individuals to share the archive for the benefit of everyone.

Although the ARCC clubs will be using the centre for committee meetings immediately the official grand opening is planned for 22 April 2018 to coincide with the FBHVC Drive it Day.

The Trust are understandably proud of what they have achieved and are extending an invitation to any non Rootes clubs who are looking for a Midlands base, not far from junction 11 on the M40, as a venue to hold committee meetings, or for an event, or a staging point on a rally or tour. If you are interested, then get in touch with Trustee Matt Ollman. Please send an email to matthewollman@rootesarchivecentre.org.uk

We will watch with interest to see how the Rootes Archive Centre Trust develops and what exciting future developments they have planned.

We will carry a report on their official opening in the next edition.

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