

A Leonardo da Vinci of mechanical world

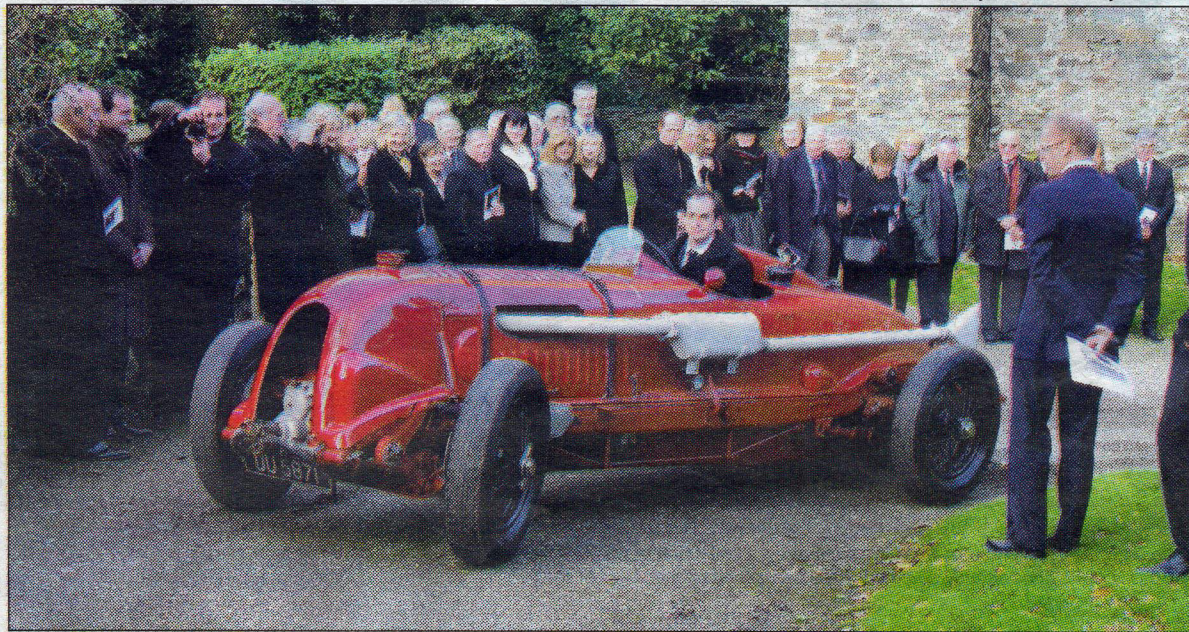
Tribute to watch and car expert George Daniels

THE funeral of the man hailed by some as a modern-day Leonardo da Vinci took place at Kirk Christ, Lezayre, on Wednesday.

Vintage cars driven by friends from the world of motoring formed part of the cortège that accompanied master watchmaker George Daniels to the church.

Philip Rushforth, director of music at Chester Cathedral, was the organist. Friends and colleagues paid tribute to Mr Daniels, who died last month, aged 85.

Roger Smith, who became his apprentice at the age of 18, spoke of his mentor and friend with warmth, affection – and awe. The tuition he'd received was flawless, given with time and patience. He spoke of Daniels' 'shovel-like hands' that transformed into those of an artist when caressing the precious metals used in his craft. He brought qualities of strength, usefulness, aestheticism, history and amusement to his creations. He was a wonderful mentor and friend.



ON TIME: The late George Daniels' Birkin Blower Bentley leaves his funeral service at Kirk Christ church in Lezayre

Another close friend, Roger Collings spoke of the camaraderie that Mr Daniel's enjoyed through the world of vintage motor vehicles. He recalled some of his long-distance motoring escapades, his quick, incisive wit and the importance of his friendship with Sam Clutton, who opened up for him a new world of contacts. It was through Isle of Man resident Mr Clutton that he, too, moved here in the 1980s.

As a watchmaker, he was a supreme mechanic.

'A 21st-century Leonardo of the mechanical world,' said Mr Collings. 'A national treasure. He was an enthusiast for watches, cars and life itself and he was an inspiration to many.'

The Reverend Brian Evans-Smith,

who led the service, described him as a fascinating man whose work combined both function and beauty.

George Daniels' life was the stuff of fairy tales. One of 11 children, he was born in Edgware, north London. His father, a carpenter, was a violent drunk. The family struggled, with barely enough to eat. He became fascinated by watches as a child of five when he found a cheap wristwatch in the street. He prised it open and was intrigued by the mechanism.

'It was like seeing the centre of the universe – I knew that's what I wanted to do,' he recalled.

His rise was meteoric: working by day in a mattress factory, he attended evening classes in horology and set up

on his own as a watch cleaner and repairer. A chance meeting in 1960 with Sam Clutton, a founder member of the Antiquarian Horological Society and Vintage Sports Car Club in Britain, introduced him to up-market and antique horology.

In 1969 he produced his first mechanical watch. He sold it to Clutton, who showed it to other collectors and Daniels embarked on his career as a specialist watchmaker. Each watch typically involved 2,500 hours of work over a year or more. He was bestowed with many awards and wrote several books on the subject. He was appointed MBE in 1981 and CBE in 2010.

He moved to the Isle of Man in 1982 and lived in Jurby Road, Ramsey.

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