

A new look at site where Canterbury car was made



BEST VIEW: David Lewis believes this panorama from Dane John mound looking south, is among the best in the city

ON A fine day the view from the top of Dane John mound must be among the best the city has to offer.

Of recent times, the foreground to the south has been dominated by a large disused garage site (until recently a Peugeot garage) awaiting development. Most viewers will be unaware they are looking at the manufacturing site of one of the earliest English motor cars,

Way We Were



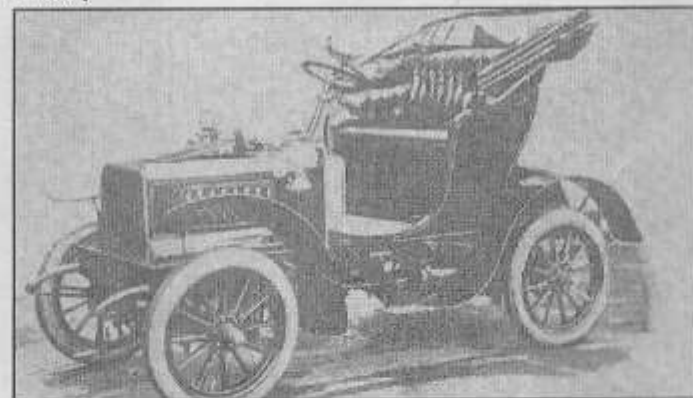
David Lewis
Canterbury
Historical and
Archaeological
Society

known as the Canterbury.

The most prominent building, showing fancy Victorian bargeboards on each gable and

standing on a mound, was built in June 1856 as the St Mary Bredin primary school. The school closed in the 1940s. Buildings to the left include the agricultural hall, built in 1878 with electric lighting, then a novelty. A new use for the hall was found in 1909, with the opening of Canterbury roller skating rink. Despite the 14,000 sq ft floor of "finest prime-rock maple", and some initial enthusiasm, the venture was not a financial success and it closed in April 1911.

All of which brings us to the "almost silent" Canterbury car. The Canterbury Motor Car Company was formed in 1903, run by engineers Henry Dawson and Henri Pavillet. Dawson had moved to Canterbury from



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survived, active not in manufacturing but in car sales and engineering services.

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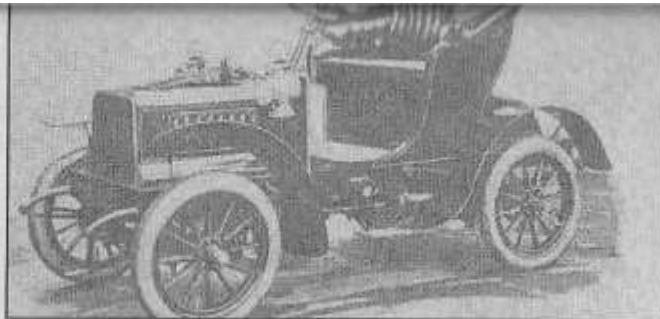
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All of which brings us to the "almost silent" Canterbury car. The Canterbury Motor Car Company was formed in 1903, run by engineers Henry Dawson and Henri Pavillet. Dawson had moved to Canterbury from Clapham, where he had run a car manufacturing business. The new car production works were located at Rhodaus, then known as the Pavilion site. The company also had sites in Best Lane (now Multiyork) and in Stour Street.

A 1904 advertising brochure describes four models, each called The Canterbury. The smallest (type A) was a two-seater, 8 HP, selling for 175 guineas, while the largest (type D) had four seats, 20 HP and cost 500 guineas. The sales figures are not known, but were apparently never high (possibly 25 in all), and by 1906 production had ceased.

A telling feature of model A was provision for a "mother-in-law" seat that folded neatly into the car boot!

The business and its name



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The roller skating site was absorbed into the business in 1911. Henry Dawson applied his engineering skills in a variety of new areas, some more successful than others.

In 1909 the new local cinema in St Peter's Street, The Canterbury Electric Theatre, made use of his Multicheck ticket machine.

A light aircraft, built in 1910 and trialled on St Martin's Hill, refused to rise more than a foot off the ground. Later uses for the Pavilion site included the manufacturing of car seats for Rootes (destined for Sunbeam Rapier, Humber Sceptre and other models), and more recently the Peugeot garage.

Henry married Jessie Nash at St Mildred's church in 1913, and died in 1963 in Tankerton.

So, what could future views from the Dane John mound look

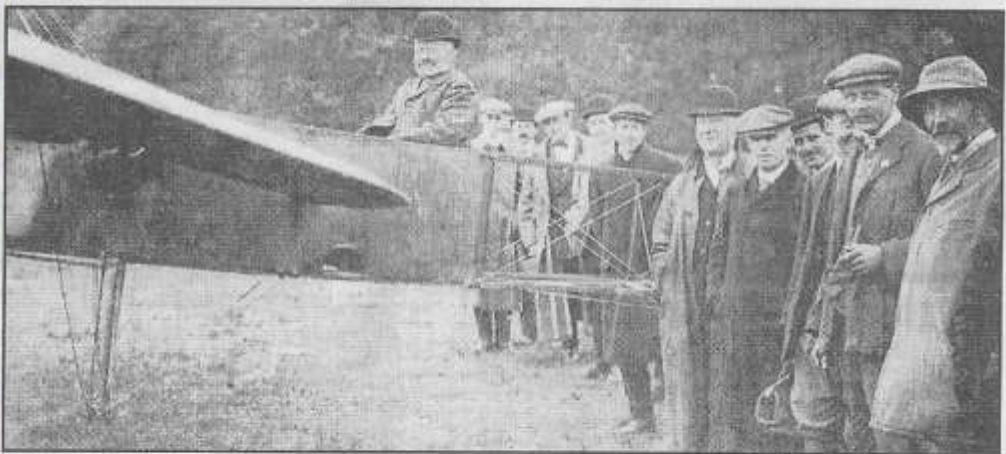
like? The current planning application is for a five-storey block of yet more student accommodation, surprisingly for the use of any students and not just those from Christ Church.

Let's make sure that a) the new building does not detract too much from the visual appeal of the new Augustine's House and b) a productive future use can be found for the attractive St Mary Bredin school premises.

■ Much of the research on which this summary is based was carried out by Michael Worthington-Williams – for more details see the research section of the CHAS website at www.canterbury-archaeology.org.uk



■ Find more tales from Canterbury's past online at canterburytimes.co.uk/nostalgia



ENGINEERING: Henry Dawson in the plane that refused to fly