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Conspicuously Marked: Vehicle Registration in Gloucestershire 1903-13. Edited by Peter Barlow and Martin Boothman. Bristol, Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 2019. xxxiii + 413 pp. Illustrations, index. ISBN: 978-0-900197-97-0. £30.00.

Published transcripts of motor vehicle registration records are no longer the preserve of the motoring anorak, now that local, family and social historians have discovered their potential. With studies for Wiltshire, Cheshire and other counties already published, Peter Barlow and Martin Boothman's edited volume brings vehicle registrations for Gloucestershire into the fold. From 1904, legislation had obliged the registration of 'light locomotives' (those under three tons), and for Gloucestershire the marks of AD and FH were allocated, for the county and borough respectively. For that year, 427 registrations were allocated for the county and 131 for the borough, taking in all new vehicles, and those already on the road. This volume takes us to the end of 1913, by which time 3,667 (county) and 758 (borough) registrations had been allocated, indicative of the expanding motor vehicle use prior to the First World War.

The volume is a painstaking piecing together of hand-written records into a form which allows any one registration to be mapped against a vehicle and its owner, and to follow the life of that registration as owners and assigned vehicles changed. The indexes – by owner's name; occupation; make of motor car or motor cycle; and town of registration – are superb.

Vehicles were registered as a 'motor car' or 'motor cycle'. Also recorded were make, model, weight and horsepower, and for motor cars alone, body type and colour. 'Heavy

motor cars' (which usually meant lorries or charabancs), while recorded in records for other counties, are missing for Gloucestershire.

This transcript has also involved the gleaning of occupations for the registered owners, using local directories and census records, and this really brings the records to life. For the county, more registrations are allocated to medics than any other occupation, suggesting that that group needed to be mobile to do their rounds. Army officers follow, then those in the cycle trade, motor trade, and then farmers. For the borough, it is the cycle trade people first, then the motor trade, then medics, engineers, and builders. As vehicles were passed on to successive owners, it is clear just how far down the social scale motor vehicles were already permeating. For example, motor cycles were registered to footmen, clerks, tailors and farm labourers.

Getting a sense of just how much women used motor vehicles is difficult for historians, and here the records are no different to other counties in that the vast majority of registered owners are men. However, we do know from reports in the motoring press that women drivers and riders were prominent, suggesting the registered owner was, in many cases, not necessarily the user. Here, for first registrations, women accounted for 5 percent in 1904, rising to 8 percent by 1912. Women also registered more cars than motor cycles. Where women's occupations were gleanable, those in the medical professions led.

The most popular motor vehicle brand was Darracq of France, then Ford, Humber, and Sunbeam. For motor cycles, it was Triumph, then the local make Douglas, followed by Humber, Minerva and Rex. A handful of 'home-made' vehicles are identified too – this wasn't so unusual at the time.

My gripe is the method of presenting the information. I just felt that it would be much easier to follow if carriage returns were used for the reissuing of a number to a different

vehicle. Similarly, when a number is transferred within the same ownership, this is usefully marked by (1), (2) etc, but again, why not use a new line for each one? That said, this is a model of care and attention and I applaud the editors for their diligence and staying power in assembling this fine work.

Craig Horner

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