

SPECIALIST



Fiennes Restoration

Clanfield Mill, Little Clanfield, Bampton, Oxon OX18 2RX | +44 (0)1367 810438 | enquiries@fiennes.co.uk | www.fiennes.co.uk

When you are brought up as a 'VE Day' baby, during those post-war years when Austin 7 Opals and Brough Superiors were family cars, it becomes difficult to ignore the allure of pre-war sports cars.

Fiennes Restoration's managing director Will Fiennes remembers when the Brough Superior was considered very fast and exclusive, Austin Tens and Hillman Minx Estates were everyday cars, and university students bought 1936 Riley saloons.

Today, Fiennes Restoration specialises in coachbuilding, mechanical restoration, manufacture and supply of spare parts for all 1906-1940 Rolls-Royce and Derby Bentley cars.

Oxford University Physics student 'Spanners' Fiennes joined the VSCC and the Riley Register, then the Tribology Department (part of the Mechanical Engineering Department at the Imperial College in London) after his degree.

With a PhD in this new branch of engineering, and a fully-fledged nuclear physicist, Will Fiennes founded Fiennes Engineering and soon focused on the Derby Bentley, the first car with the Bentley name built by Rolls-Royce after the take-over in 1931. There were few - if any - specialists in this area,

and the supply of important spare parts from Rolls-Royce was starting to dry up.

Fiennes Engineering set up in Little Clanfield, a small village in Oxfordshire, in 1980. The premises have since been enlarged and expanded, but they still include the original workshop.

Fiennes' reputation for manufacturing scarce and often complex parts led to the company taking over cylinder head manufacturing for the smaller-engine pre-war Rolls-Royce car range, as Fiennes had already been making cylinder heads for Bentley. This justified the company moving to CNC (computer controlled) machining: the first CNC milling machine was bought in 1988. Today Fiennes has five CNC machines, with a sixth on its way.

Rolls-Royce parts and restoration work increased during the recession-stricken '90s. The value of historic and classic cars had been hugely inflated by the auction houses before the crash and the cars had been seen as 'blue-chip' investments, but overnight values plunged and the market was flooded.

Despite that, Fiennes took over struggling coachbuilding neighbours Clanfield Restorations in 2000, and became Fiennes Restoration. Nowadays, the business can reproduce coachwork from period photographs or drawings, using traditional skills; parts are manufactured or refurbished to original patterns.

Later, Fiennes Restoration took over another business which dealt with larger-engine cars: from 2005 the range of activities has covered 20hp to 25/30hp Rolls-Royces, Wraith, Silver Ghosts and Phantoms 1 and 2, as well as the Derby Bentley.

Fiennes is a continuously growing business, despite dealing with a relatively small and finite number of historic cars. "Fiennes' restoration to original standards helps improve the value of vintage Rolls-Royces and Derby Bentleys," points out Will Fiennes. "Just as demand has risen for luxury vintage automotive best offering, so has our work to preserve and increase its worth."

With a workforce of 28 engineers, machinists, panel beaters and painters, and very low staff turnover, the business continually outgrows what is available. Mechanical work undertaken includes suspension, steering, braking, engine, gearbox; wiring and electrical plus fuel and cooling systems.

Will Fiennes never forgets that he was, once, a scientist. "I used to make a part to an exact size until I found out that parts are designed or made to come within a tolerance band! The discovery was a shock to me, but it is both gratifying and reassuring to find that virtually all the reverse-engineered parts made by us are both correctly dimensioned and often specified with tighter tolerances than Rolls-Royce had originally applied."

