

Charles Ware 1936-2015



Charles Ware is probably best known for his establishment of the Morris Minor Centre in Bath in 1976 with the express philosophy of preservation of these cars.

Originally trained as an artist, he went on to teach at Art College. During this time in the 60's he developed an interest in historic buildings and was involved with a London based building company working on small housing conversions in Islington. Having an eye on market potential, he built up a considerable portfolio of property. Whilst visiting Bath, he took a dim view of the tendency for older, historic property to be cleared in favour of unsympathetic, shorter lived properties being built in their place. He tried to convince people that it was a sensible proposition to renovate their homes and save the city for future generations to enjoy. Taking an active role, he would buy and renovate properties, many of which had been earmarked for demolition as well as several major projects including a large former hotel and a 100 acre estate on the edge of the city. His main residence was a grand, Georgian house in the Royal Crescent, where the parties he hosted were legendary, earning him the nickname 'Champagne Charlie'. He purchased the city's Theatre Royal and during this time he befriended the band 'Roxy Music' who were trying to make their way into the music business and agreed to give them financial backing. Sadly, though, the property market crashed in the mid-seventies and Charles was declared bankrupt. Charlie, his wife and young son were loaned a basement flat to live in.

Charles then turned his attention to cars and applied the same philosophy of preservation to cars and started off with a handful of them in a small back yard. He later moved to a site west of Bath and gained national publicity after an article in the Sunday Times, when the business really took off. In 2006 the business moved to bigger premises in Bristol and now employs a dedicated workforce of about 20.

The idea that an old car was worth saving and repairing had not really caught on in the seventies and Charles did a lot to convince people that, just like repairing your house, rather than replacing it, it was economically and practically sensible to do this. His book 'Durable Car Ownership' was first published in 1982 and explained in detail how this could be done over a period to spread the cost to end up with a valuable asset and breaking the cycle of throwing cars away and buying new ones every 10 years or so. In 1991 the 'Durable Car Company' was opened in Sri Lanka, where panels were produced by the local workforce using traditional hand-forming techniques.

If there is one name that almost everyone who has an interest in Morris Minor has heard of – it is Charlie Ware. Next time you go to a car show and see the Morris Minors there, just think how things might have been very different had it not been for this man.

Charles Ware died on Saturday 4th July 2015.

(some information from The Bath Magazine September 2011)