

# Remembering RICHARD GARDNER WILLIAMS

**In** thinking of Richard Gardner Williams we ought to ponder why he came to play such a major part in the recent history of the Turners. What brought Richard Gardner Williams, who was born in Chester, educated there, started work at Crewe and worked initially in the North West, to the livery of the Turners' Company? There is one name and two words that offer an answer, Charles Cheers Wakefield, railways and oil.

Charles Wakefield presumably first met Gardner Williams when the latter joined the Vacuum Oil Company. Richard's job was selling lubricating oils to the railways of Cheshire and Staffordshire. In two sentences we have the name and the two words. Gardner Williams continued to sell oil to railways, subsequently being appointed special railway representative for South America, including Argentina.

**At** least twelve members of the Company then had connections with the railways of South America. Do you think there was any connection with many parts of a steam engine being turned, including their wheels and pistons? These twelve included Wakefield, who was to become Lord Mayor in 1915 having been Sheriff in 1908. At various times he was Master of the Haberdashers, Cordwainers, Gardeners and Spectacle Makers but, sadly, not the Turners. I wonder why not? Perhaps dinners then were not as good as the one we are enjoying tonight?



**So** who was Charles Cheers Wakefield? Born in Liverpool in 1859, he patented the Wakefield lubricator for axles of steam engines in 1890 and founded CC Wakefield & Co in 1899. The name was subsequently changed to the

Castrol Oil Company to reflect the use of castor oil in the lubricating oils. Subsequently many world famous motor driven events have been lubricated with Castrol oils, including Alcock and Brown's first crossing of the Atlantic by air, Malcolm Campbell's world land speed record and Le Mans wins by Bentley and Jaguar.

Having made a fortune in oil he became a generous philanthropist with an endowment of £50,000 to the British Museum. He also presented the Thomas à Becket Cup and Lord Nelson's Logbook to the Nation.

Perhaps his most lasting memorial was his establishment of the Wakefield Trust in 1937 together with the Reverend Tubby Clayton, the founder of TocH. This Trust exists to this day, now merged with the Tetley Trust.

Originally helping those within one mile of Trinity Square in the City, the terms of the trust has now been widened "to relieve the inhabitants of the Boroughs of the City, Tower Hamlets and Southwark who are in need by virtue of their age, financial hardship or sickness, by the provision or support of appropriate facilities, programmes or other initiatives. Any other charitable purpose in connection with the Parish of All Hallows by the Tower or Toc H". Certainly a look at the organisations supported by the Trust appear fully within these parameters.

Wakefield was also a considerable benefactor to the Borough of Hythe in Kent and it is this name he took when made a Baron in 1930 and a Viscount in 1934. He died in January 1941.

**As** you might recall, there were twelve members of the Company who were connected with South American Railways when Gardner Williams joined the Company. How come? During the second half of the nineteenth century, the time when Great Britain ruled the waves and half the land mass was painted red, Argentina was seen as a great economic future for British investment. Most of the railways there were owned by British Companies and run from the City of London, with imposing names such as

The Buenos Aires Great Southern Railway Company. These railways radiated from Buenos Aires, their basic purpose being to transport meat and grain to the ports for transmission to North America and Europe.

**In** the 1930s Argentina was in the top ten of world economic nations. Not only were most of the lines British owned (the others were French), but most of the locomotives and other rolling stock were made in Britain.

Even bricks were exported from here to build rows of suburban-type houses for British expatriates. During the Second World War things became difficult for British companies owning and managing overseas assets and, with the rise of nationalism, the Argentinian Railways were nationalised by President Peron in 1948. With years of despotic rule alternating with socialist policies, Argentina has been going down hill along with the railways ever since.

There has been speculation on how Gardner Williams amassed what was then a considerable fortune. He did not have children. Could he have made this from commission selling lubricating oil to South American Railways or did he make it by selling shares in a takeover?

**We** will probably never know. Suffice to say he was able to leave over £40,000 to the Turners in his will. In our history it is suggested that doing this and making this dinner on his birthday a first charge, was akin to the medieval practice of leaving funds so that masses could be said for the departed soul. I think I prefer the dinner. In remembering the generosity of Richard Gardner Williams, we should also remember our leaders at the time of the bequest. Firstly their appreciation and confidence in holding the first Gardner Williams dinner in 1948 (before the cash was in the bank) and secondly the decision, very brave at the time, to invest in equities rather than Government bonds and even Railway stocks.

*This article is based on the Sentiment delivered at the 2010 Gardner Williams Dinner by Past Master Andrew Hamilton.*