

## THE PRE HISTORY OF THE MOTOR CAR 1550 – 1850

The Pre History of the Motor Car 1550-1850 is a private collection of books, prints, photographs and memorabilia and is the fruit of a life-time's passion. The Antiquarian Book Fair, Edinburgh 2008 is delighted to be able to display a portion of Keith Fletcher's astonishing collection. A long time member of the prestigious Antiquarian Booksellers Association and exhibitor of many of the ABA's fairs, Keith first started collecting books on motor cars over 50 years ago.

His first book which he found as a young boy in his father's book shop in Cecil Court, was *Road Racing 1936* by Prince Chula of Siam, printed by the Sun Engraving Co 'For Private Circulation'. Having read the tales of derring-do, and having been seduced by the fine printing and exotic imprint, he put it on his own shelves and immediately began adding similar titles. By the time he bought his first car at 21 (a 1927 3-litre Bentley tourer), he already had a substantial group of books on vintage and historic cars. Although the story of the motor car is usually regarded as beginning in the last quarter of the nineteenth century with Daimler and Benz, Keith soon discovered that most histories touched on the ancestors of the automobile and the germs of the ideas that were to contribute to its development.

In the 19th century there were 'steam carriages for common roads' and before that back to the fifteenth century, there were all kinds of passenger-carrying vehicles moved by cranks, levers, cogs, pedals and even windmills or sails. Although Keith continued to amass material on the combustion engine motor car, he became increasingly intrigued by the pre-history of the car, and soon realised that this was a new and uncharted field of collecting, from then on there was no stopping him.

The earliest illustrated printed suggestions for mechanical vehicles are those of the Italian Roberto Valturio, whose *De rei militaria* was first published in 1472 and which Fletcher still does not have, however he does have an unillustrated incunable edition of Vegetius (Rome, 1487) and the first edition in English (London, 1572).

In 1600 Simon Stevin the mathematician and military engineer, built a wonderfully eccentric giant sand yacht or 'windtwagen', for Prince Maurice of Nassau. Fletcher is proud to have bought the very rare and large engraving by Gheyn and Swanenburch showing Prince Maurice

demonstrating his new machine to a group of stunned and distinguished passengers on the beach at Schreveningen.



*Simon Stevin's Wind-carriage built for Prince Mauritz of Nassau on the beach at Schreveningen, 1600*

This print proved to be a catalyst and Keith has since added other engravings of this occasion as well as eye-witness accounts. Stevin is responsible for many of the more incongruous items in his collection, maps of China being one of them. Early travellers in China reported the use of sailing wagons; early Dutch cartographers, having scant knowledge of China used sailing wagons (and sometimes elephants!) to fill spaces on their maps and after 1600 these sailing wagons were modelled on Stevin's 'windtwagen'.

Books of 'scientific amusements' often have suggestions for mechanical vehicles. The earliest is probably Wilkin's *Mathematicall Magick* (1648), various editions of which are in Keith Fletcher's collection.



*Wilkins, John : Mathematicall Magick... London 1648 1st. Edition.*

The best known of the genre are the various 19th century titles such as *Curiosities for the Ingenious*, *The Wonders of Nature and Art* and *A Million of Facts*.

The Pre History of the Motor Car is the icing on the cake of the Edinburgh Book Fair. Not only is this fascinating private collection educational, but it will also bring a smile to the face of anyone who enjoys and savours the eccentric and the delightfully implausible. Keith Fletcher's life-time hobby is our gain.