

FOREWORD

by Lord Montagu of Beaulieu

This book finally fills a gap which I urged Amherst Villiers himself to fill more than 20 years ago!

I had long considered him a British motor racing hero. His name adorned the supercharger of the Blower Bentley which had done battle with Mercedes at Le Mans. His development work on a pair of little Bugattis had given his great friend Raymond Mays the capability to dominate the hill-climb and sprint scene of the mid-1920s. Thanks to Amherst, the car which began life as a Vauxhall TT, and became first the *Vauxhall Villiers* and then the *Villiers Supercharge*, enjoyed a longer spell on the front line of British motor sport than any other car.

When Amherst came to live at Palace House, my home at Beaulieu, for several spells during the 1970s, I came to appreciate the full breadth of the man. I learned how seriously he took his painting; his favourite medium may have been portraiture, but much of his time at Beaulieu was actually devoted to the depiction of a 13th century Italian miracle. He told me of his aero engine work before the War, of his design for a 6-engine, trans-Atlantic passenger plane during it, and of his contributions to rocket and missile development over the course of more than 20 years in the United States.

Amherst told his stories with such skill, such humour and such charm, that I felt that he should record his life for posterity. I introduced him to a journalist of my acquaintance to support him in the task of writing an autobiography. Unfortunately, nothing came of this, and in hindsight I think that Amherst was the sort of man who was so inspired by whatever project currently held his attention that

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he could not devote any time to look back and review his long and fascinating life.

That is why, when Paul Kenny first came to see me in the autumn of 2006, and told me of his plans to write Amherst's biography, I was only too happy to support him.

Paul has diligently researched each of the many strands of Amherst's life and woven them into a fascinating narrative. He has also caught the aspects of Amherst's complex personality which prevented him, in spite of his breadth of talent, from achieving true, lasting greatness.

Paul should be congratulated on a book which gives an authoritative, overdue account of an extraordinary man.

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