

The Hearse is Home!

Great excitement in the Linden Household - we have a new addition to the family! This is the first of an occasional series on the restoration of our recently acquired 1954 Mark IV Humber Hearse, or perhaps it is a very large Humber Panelvan - it probably depends on how your youth was spent!

I have an interest in Mark IV Humber, and have the pleasure of owning a nice Mark IVB, the last of the Marks. Now, as many members know, one is never enough, and I have therefore kept watch for any other rare Mark IV that may appear on the horizon. There was a ute for sale a while ago, but its authenticity was doubtful, which was a pity as Humber made substantial numbers of utilities for the Kuwait Oil Company. And besides, the price was too high (\$8000 I seem to recall).



HCCV current leader, Bob 'Bloody' Kennedy, came back from Queensland with photos of a station wagon which was left under a gumtree, and probably had trees growing through it. The price was right - free to a good home - it just required transporting from Queensland to here. This was beyond me so I suspect it is still there. Then Bob mentioned a Humber Hearse in Bairnsdale that he had seen. The price was higher than he was prepared to pay, but the overall condition seemed reasonable. After much dithering, I gathered up the courage to actually go and see this beast last November. Photos were taken and shown to Lotte, who to my delight and amazement, agreed that it was a worthy addition to the ever growing fleet. Negotiations followed with the owner (whose name was Ray), and a mutually agreeable outcome achieved. Payment was sent in December, and I was left with the daunting prospect of getting the beast from Bairnsdale to Castlemaine.

Bob offered to pick it up for me for a more reasonable cost, but the busy schedule of the mayor of Glenlyon means that this hasn't been possible to arrange.

A fellow member, Wilson Bunton, gave me the name of a guy in Kyneton (Ray!), who does this sort of thing. I spoke to Ray (the truck driver) and accepted his very reasonable quote, and a time and date was arranged. I rang Ray (the former owner) in Bairnsdale to confirm pickup, and was pleasantly surprised to find that the Humber was under cover. He also reminded me of the size / length of the vehicle (around 19 feet long), and questioned whether it would fit on the truck. Just what I needed - another element of doubt.

The plan was for Ray (the truck driver) to leave Kyneton at 6am, to drop off a load of scrap metal at Dandenong, and then continue to Bairnsdale. We were to leave about 6:30am, drive to Bairnsdale, and meet up there. Mostly this went OK. We arrived at 12:00, after negotiating Melbourne morning peak hour, and having a couple of coffee breaks. I rang Ray (the truck driver), who informed us that he was running a tad late - 3 hours roughly.

Two local tow truck / panel beater companies said they could do it, but only in conjunction with a trip to Melbourne. The cost would be \$90 an hour for every hour from Melbourne to Bairnsdale and back to Castlemaine. The dollar signs were ringing loudly.





After informing Ray (the Hearse custodian), we had lunch and visited a local clock museum and antique shop, partly to look at the antiques, and partly to take advantage of the air-conditioning and clean comfort stations. It was one of those very warm days in early March.

Eventually Ray arrived, and we proceeded to the country shed to do the pickup. We introduced Ray to Ray, and the three of us got to work. The beast was still there, still very large, but to everyone's amazement, it did fit, with only about 6 inches hanging over the edge. A lot of loose bits and pieces were loaded into the back, a largish piece of timber was attached across the back to stop anything falling out, and the truck was on its way. Lotte and I bid our farewells, presented the former owners a bottle of wine by way of thanks, and headed for home. It was now approaching 4pm, which was about 3 hours later than I had planned. We kept a lookout for loose bits and pieces that may have fallen off, and didn't find any. Actually, it took us to Traralgon to catch up with the truck, such was his good pace. We eventually pulled up at Beaconsfield / Berwick to have a rest and something to eat. It had been quite a long day - with still some way to go.

ng Ray, and suggested that if it fitted in with him, a morning drop off was good rather than trying to unload in the dark. Given the speed with which he agreed, my suspicion was that he was thinking exactly the same thing. This also gave me an opportunity to round up a couple of willing helpers to assist in the unloading - thanks once again Wilson, and also to my father-in-law Kaj.

Ray and the truck arrived next day, the Humber rolled off, and the four of us placed the vehicle in its undercover storage facility.

After admiring it for a couple of days, inquisitiveness got the better of me as I wondered whether it would still run. The oil looked clean, like it had been changed recently. Ray (the previous owner), confirmed this. I took the plugs out, added in a battery from Sarge (the Series VA Super Snipe) and turned the motor over until oil pressure appeared. I added in some new petrol, put in new spark plugs, and attempted to start it, without success. Having recently been caught out by ignition problems at Echuca, I next went over the points and gave them a bit of a clean with emery paper.



Pulled the choke on, turned it over, and lo and behold it started. No coughs, no splutters, no funny clunking noises, nothing. Just the sweet purring of a good old fashioned six cylinder motor. Sometimes fortune favours the brave.

Some details of the vehicle

Mileage: 25,331. I don't know whether this is genuine given that it is fifty years old, but it may be. It was a hearse, and probably didn't do a lot of work. There are other elements of the car that are amazingly original. The exhaust still goes sideways thru the chassis before heading to the rear, to the sideways muffler that only ever appeared on the original cars. Most of the systems were later replaced with a straight outlet.

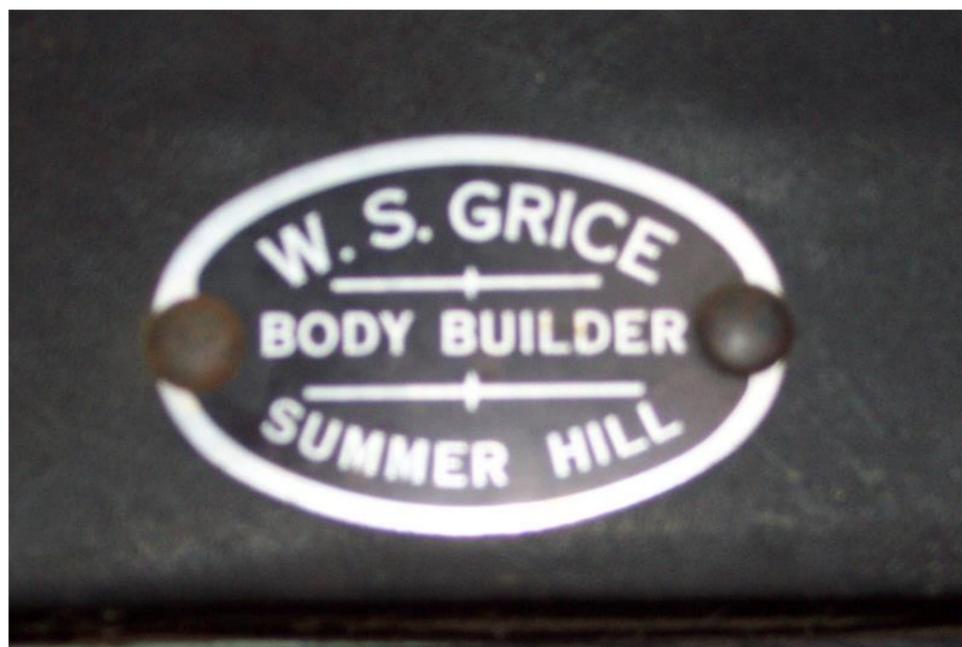
Humber manufactured chassis for both hearse and ambulance bodies, and it appears that this one has an original Humber chassis, rather than a stretched chassis. This one has a wheelbase that is nearly 3 feet longer than the MM4 (the Mighty Mark IVB) and actually makes it look quite small.



It is missing the front windscreen and some minor bits and pieces, but is otherwise remarkably complete. At some stage, the body had been stripped and prepared for painting.

The body was built by W.S Grice in Summer Hill, NSW. I checked on the internet and the company still exists, so I called them, but apparently all their historical records have been lost or destroyed.

So far - I don't have a name for it - any suggestions?



Ray's been trying to trace a bit of the The Beast's history. As you may remember from the June issue, we reached a dead-end with the body-builders. W S Grice still exist in Sydney, but sadly have not kept any of their historical records. Ray rang the previous owner, Ray from Bairnsdale, to see if he had any more clues.

- * Ray from Bairnsdale has owned The Beast for 2 years.
- * Previous was GP Motors, a panel-beating shop in Bairnsdale, who had it for 3 years.
- * Before that, Barry Anketell, who had it for 5 years. He bought it out of a paddock near Tathra/Bega, NSW, which takes us back to the mid-1990s.

Ray from Bairnsdale mentioned that there is some writing inside the hubcap. Ray looked, and there is!! Check this out - we were utterly amazed and delighted!

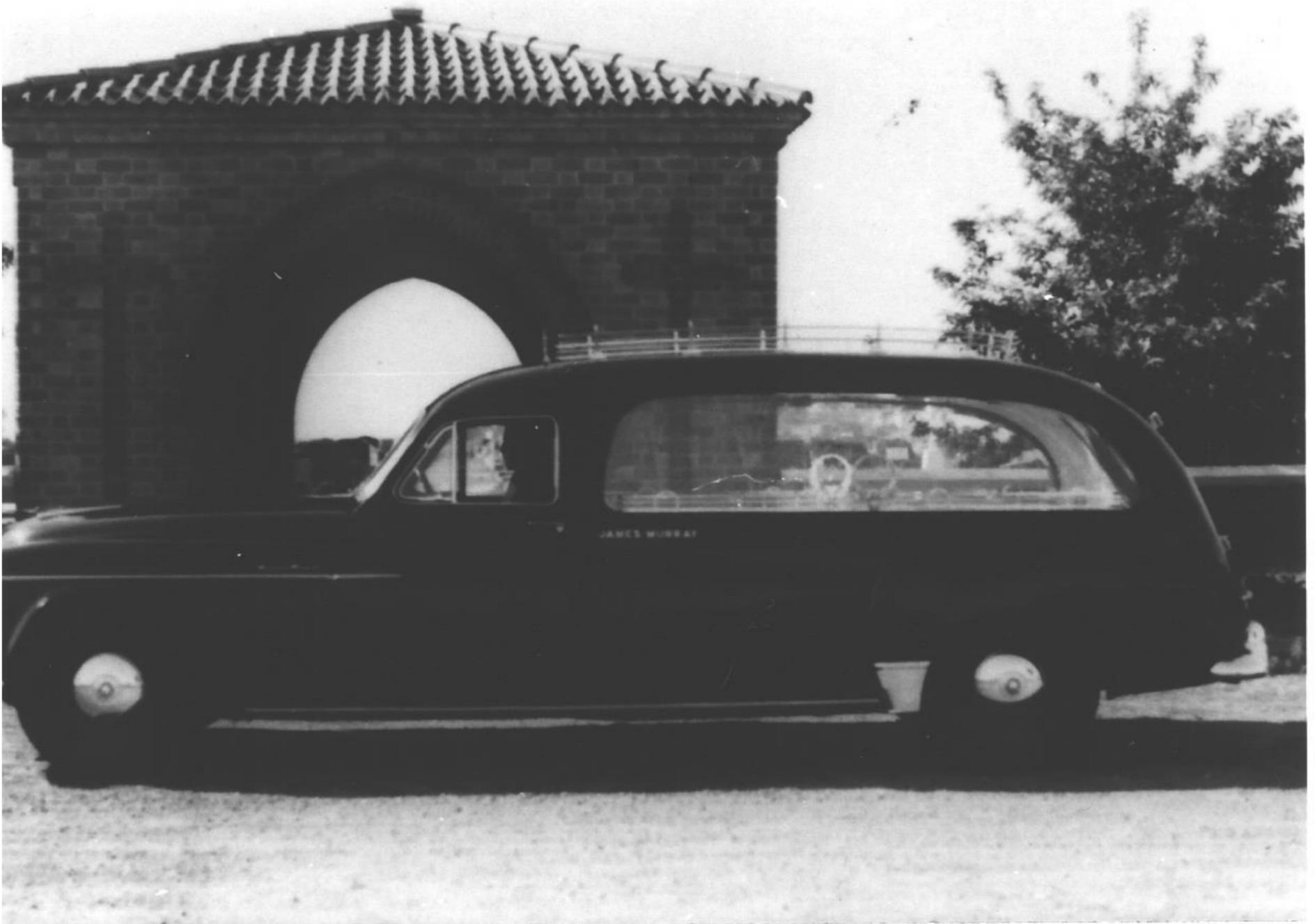
Lotte did a search on the Internet, and to our surprise, the firm of James Murray Funeral Directors of Newcastle appeared, their current phone number still retaining the last four digits listed on the hubcap. Turns out that this family firm has been in business for 125 years and is still going strong.



Ray spoke to John Murray, son of the late James Murray, who actually remembers driving this Hearse in the 1960s. They imported the chassis and everything from the windscreen forward from England. There was a box provided for someone to sit on, for the hearse to be driven to W. S. Grice for the body to be manufactured.

It's original NSW registration number was: UT251

So we are now missing the history from the late-60s to the mid-90s, but we know a lot more about it than we did before.



Name?

Some recent suggestions have been:

- * The Spectre (nice play on Humber words there!)
- * The Beast (seems to be our shorthand moniker for it at the moment)

We are now calling it the Mega Mark IVA (MM4A) to continue a theme. (We also have a Mighty Mark IVB sedan - MM4B).

Help Us! What Colour???

We like the idea of two-tone, as it helps to break up the huge body construction, and we're kinda leaning towards two-tone Smokey-Grey above Silver-Grey. Another possibility is Burgundy above Silver-Grey.

We're planning to check out the magnificent display at Marong in August for some ideas.



As it is now - Awaiting further motivation and finance...