

A Brief History of Sussex (East and West) Area SOC

Following a canvassing of opinions at the Alexandra Palace Classic Car Show in 1978 the Stag Owners Club was formed on 6th November 1979 by founding members Tony Hart (of Hart Racing Services) and Ken Hudson. The first SOC magazine was published in December 1979 when club membership was just under 100 people two of which had a Sussex address (Lewes and Shoreham-by-Sea). Membership continued to grow and by December 1982 new members were being allocated membership numbers around 1800 and 23 local SOC areas had been formed. Sussex was not one of these areas, the nearest area being Kent or South London/Surrey.

By the beginning of 1983 members with Sussex addresses totalled more than 35 and a Sussex member, Nigel Cooper, volunteered to create the new Sussex area and be the area coordinator, aided by Malcom Billings. The first meeting was held on 9th March 1983 at the Royal Oak pub in Wineham (near Henfield) and more than 40 people attended this inaugural meeting. Due to the large numbers expected the second Sussex meeting on 13th April was moved to a larger pub, the White Hart, in Henfield and again there was a good turnout. In September 1983 Nigel handed the role of coordinator over to Mike Tugwell who was again assisted by Malcolm Billings and the White Hart continued to be the venue for club nights.



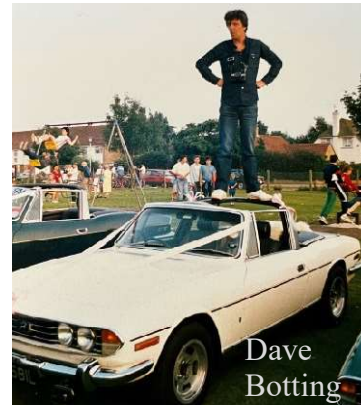
Nigel Cooper

Sussex is approximately 75 miles long and 25 miles wide so in July 1984 Mike Tugwell floated the idea that to get more members involved with the SOC Sussex area the area could be split into two sections, East Sussex and West Sussex so benefitting members residing at the extreme borders of the county. This idea was implemented in 1985 when John Mumford took on the role of specifically supporting East Sussex members under the Sussex Area umbrella. East Sussex, although not a separate area, initially used the Horseshoe Inn at Herstmonceux for meetings but this venue was soon changed to the Black Horse at Telham. (near Battle). For members in the west of the county the venue changed to the Red Lion in Ashington (West Sussex) from January 1985 and Mike Tugwell remained the coordinator of an area still called Sussex but, in reality, West Sussex. Mike remained coordinator until September 1987 and, after 4 years, handed over the role of coordinator to Richard Treacher who had been a long serving area member and was infamous for documenting many of the area activities on cine film. Richard was still supported by John Mumford as deputy coordinator but who's responsibilities were specifically to look after the East of the county and consequently organised many events out towards Hastings and Rye.

Richard's tenure lasted for one year as in September 1988 another very active and long-term member, Dave (Chatter) Botting was appointed as the Sussex Area coordinator. At the start of 1990 the west of the county moved their club night venue to Tottington Manor at Edburton (near Henfield) whilst the eastern members continued to use the "Top of the Hill" (Rye). With the Area still being under the Sussex Area name there were regular joint meetings between the East and West members and indeed some rivalry at some of these events such as games nights.

Club night locations continued to change on a regular basis with the Kings Head at Albourne being favoured from September 1992 but inter-mixed with returns to The Red Lion at Ashington and Tottington Manor at Edburton. From 1994 club nights moved to a new location – the Wheatsheaf just North of Henfield.

Finally in June 1994 East and West Sussex were reorganised into 2 separate areas with each area having their own section in the club magazine. West Sussex continued with Dave Botting as the area coordinator assisted by John Mumford whilst Mike Tugwell returned to be coordinator for East Sussex. For the 1998 season Dave Botting gave up the coordinator role with fellow long term area member Bob Heritage agreeing to take on the West Sussex Area coordinator job. Bob was assisted by John Mumford and Geoff Viney as deputy coordinators whilst East Sussex Area continued with Mike Tugwell as coordinator, with their club night location being the Halfway House at Isfield.



At the time of writing this note (January 2024) Bob remains West Sussex coordinator and is assisted by Martin Hoad and Philip Kerry as deputies. Club night venues have changed on a regular basis during Bob's 26 years in the role and included the Wheatsheaf, The Royal Oak at Wineham, The Bolney Stage, The Sportsman at Goddards Green, The Fountain at Ashurst, The Red Lion at Ashington and Tottington Manor. Bob's long service was recognised at the 2023 West Sussex AGM with a 25 year trophy and hand painted card. East Sussex have had five coordinators from the millenium with Doug Tourle holding the role from Sept 2000 to December 2006, Gordon Wilsher from January 2007 to December 2008, Kevin Read from August 2009 to February 2012. John Mumford from March 2012 to February 2018 and finally Bryan Gregory to the present day.



The information for this article is believed to be accurate and was obtained using the SOC Magazine archive and with additional input from Bob Heritage.

Martin Hoad