

SOCIETY OF BEXHILL MUSEUMS

A charitable Limited Company, formerly the Bexhill Museum Association and
Bexhill Museum of Costume & Social History Association

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Elva “Bexhill’s Racing Car”

Frank Nichols, owner of the London Road Garage and founder of Elva Engineering was born in Bexhill in 1920 and in 1955 the town became the birthplace of the first Elva car. Frank Nichols’ engineering firm produced these successful racing cars in Bexhill between 1955 and 1959; the car became particularly popular in the United States. From 1959 to 1961 production moved to a new factory in Hastings and then on to Rye. Currently there is very little in Bexhill to mark its important association with Elva. Only one of the two workshop sites on London Road, where the cars were originally produced, has survived and this is under threat by a road improvement scheme and is likely to be demolished in the near future.

With the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund the Bexhill Museum and Bexhill Museum of Costume and Social History amalgamated to form the Society of Bexhill Museums in order to develop a larger integrated site. There will be greatly improved visitor services, a fashion gallery and also a social history and motor racing heritage gallery. It is proposed that a permanent exhibition about the Elva be constructed in the new motoring gallery. Previous displays have included photographs, ephemera and items kindly loaned by Roger Dunbar of the Elva Owners Club, but because of lack of space we have never been able to include what must be the ideal exhibit – an actual Elva car. With your support we hope to acquire an original Elva, preferably one of the early models produced at the Bexhill works, to be exhibited in front of a reconstruction of the London Road workshop.

The exhibition would also include an Elva converted engine, images, audio (based on oral history recordings) and scale models of other examples of Elva cars throughout the range. It would show the specifications of the different cars, the races that they entered and the trophies won. The Elva will be used as an example of a car propelled by an internal combustion engine and will be compared with an electric car (Volta) and steam driven car (reconstruction of the Serpollet ‘Easter Egg’). The Society of Bexhill Museums will be working closely with the Elva Owners Club throughout the project to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the completed exhibition. The following figures represent likely costs in achieving an appropriate and fitting tribute to all that Elva achieved, and donations or sponsors will be acknowledged. We would also be delighted to consider the long-term loan of a suitable car or other associated items considered important to the Elva in Bexhill story.

Funding required:

Acquisition of an Elva for display	£30,000 (or vehicle donation, or long-term vehicle loan)
Acquisition of additional parts for display	£5,000
Exhibition design and fit out	£15,000
Audio visual equipment	£5,000

Total project cost **£55,000**

Do please make contact with me or Roger Dunbar at www.elva.com if you feel you could help.

Julian Porter
Curator

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