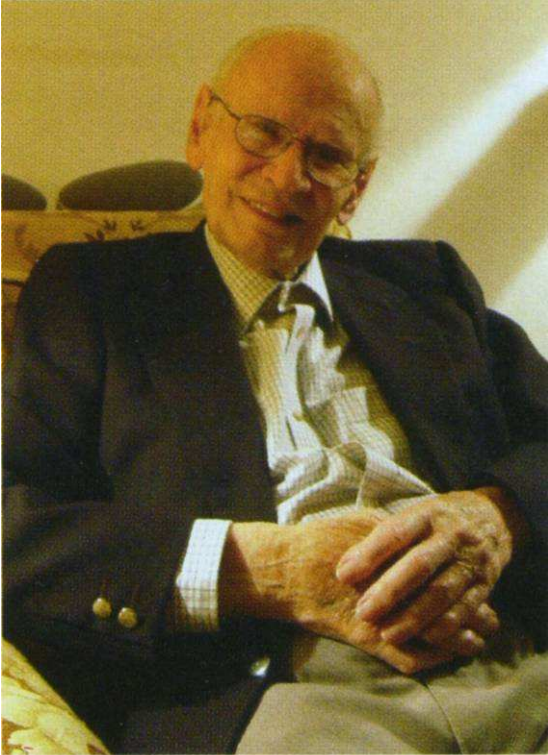


# JOHN BLATCHLEY

1913 – 2008



**John Blatchley aged 92 in 2005**

John Blatchley, who has died at the age of 94, had probably the longest active career of any automotive designer. He started drawing cars as a child while convalescing from rheumatic fever. This led him to study at the regent Street polytechnic and to serve a short period of practical work experience at Vanden Plas. Thanks to a friend who worked for J Gurney Nutting, he was taken on as a junior designer in late 1934. At Gurney Nutting John Blatchley worked under the great A F McNeil and succeeded him as chief designer in 1937, when he was just 24. He produced some of the most highly-acclaimed British body designs of the day, particularly on Rolls-Royce and Bentley chassis. Most of the fabulous Gurney Nutting designs of the late 1930s were his, including the highly

acclaimed sedanca de ville and sedanca coupé styles. His masterpiece was a stunning roadster body built on the last Duesenberg chassis for the Maharajah Holkar of Indore; to the end he proudly kept the styling drawing for this car on the wall of his delightful period cottage in Hastings Old Town.

When war broke out, Blatchley joined Rolls-Royce, initially in the aero-engine division, where his aerodynamic improvements to engine cowlings extended the range of Allied fighters sufficiently to enable them to reach Berlin. Towards the end of the war he was transferred to the Rolls-Royce motor car division, working on special projects in a converted squash court taken from chief engineer Rowbotham's garden and re-erected at Rolls-Royce's Belper experimental department. There, he put the finishing touches to the standard steel saloon bodywork for the 1946 Bentley Mk VI, the first in-house body design to come from Rolls-Royce, and made the first freehand sketches introducing the fastback concept that was developed into the continental under Ivan Evernden. He also adapted the standard steel bodywork for the 1949 Rolls-Royce silver

Dawn from this design. He followed this with the Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud (“The best thing I ever did”).

IN 1955 John Blatchley also took charge of design at Rolls-Royce’s own coachbuilders H J Mulliner and Park Ward. When Rolls-Royce turned to integral body/chassis construction in the 1960s, he designed the long-lived Silver Shadow and T-series Bentley. Though John retired as chief styling engineer in 1969, his last automotive design, the two-door Rolls-Royce Corniche was not phased out until 1995.

Honoured in retirement by the Rolls-Royce Enthusiasts’ Club, the lifetime achievement of this modest, charming man was recognised in 2005 when he was made a Liveryman *Honoris Causa* of the Worshipful Company of Coachmakers and Coach Harness Makers, the first car designer ever to receive this accolade.

The above is a copy of John Blatchley’s obituary written by David Burgess-Wise as it appeared in The Automobile April 2008 and is reproduced courtesy of the magazine.