Luke & Hogg Garages

David McLean (2026)



Luke & Hogg's motor garage in North Street
(Leslie Chappell Collection, probably around 1960)

Introduction

Over the first half of the twentieth century, few developments were as transformational of business, work and leisure as motor transport. While motor cars were originally the preserve of the wealthy, manufacturers on both sides of the Atlantic were soon building mass-produced vehicles which could eventually be afforded – in 'second hand' form, at least – by the working classes. Weekend trips to the seaside or to visit friends became increasingly popular by the 1950s. Selling, maintaining and repairing cars, as well as selling petrol, provided new opportunities for enterprising individuals. Like most other towns, Duns became home to a number of motor garages and the business of Luke & Hogg was one of the longest-running and most respected of them all. The original business (when it was just Luke) was located in Murray Street. It became Luke & Hogg when it moved to proper motor garage premises which were built at the western end of North Street in 1920. Then, in the early 1950s, a second garage was added at Brierybaulk in an aircraft hangar which had seen service at Charterhall Aerodrome during the Second World War. The re-purposed Murray Street premises remain. The garage sites in North Street and at Brierybaulk are today occupied by housing.

Alexander Luke

Isabella Luke was single and working as a domestic servant in Smailholm parish in Roxburghshire when she gave birth to a son in 1866; she called him Alexander and, in the harsh style of the time, his birth record described him as 'illegitimate'. Although Isabella Luke married three years later, Alexander may have been brought up by his grandparents – he was certainly living with them at Smailholm at the time of the 1881 census when, at the age of 14, he was working as a joiner like his grandfather. Ten years later, the 1891 census finds Alexander Luke (24) now married to Isabella Cochrane (19) and living with Isabella's parents, John and Mary Cochrane, at Eccles; Alexander was still described as a joiner.

Curiously, he took up blacksmith work as well over the next few years and it was this occupation which he followed by the time he moved to Duns. With improvements to comfort, safety and speed, cycling became hugely popular in the 1890s and Alexander Luke decided to specialise in selling and repairing bicycles. He saw an opportunity at the unused corn exchange building in Newtown Street which he rented in 1897 and turned into a 'cycle depot' with over 100 new and used machines in stock. Unfortunately, just a few months later, the exchange shareholders decided to sell the building and Luke was not willing to pay the asking price. So, not much more than a year after starting his cycle business, he was given notice to leave the exchange and he moved to new premises further along Newtown Street.

At the 1901 census, Alexander Luke, cycle agent, and his wife Isabella were living at 27 Newtown Street with their children George (6) and Mary-Jane (3). The cycle business was doing well enough since, in 1903, Luke commissioned town architect George Duns to design new premises for him on the site of an old coach-house in Murray Street. The Berwickshire News described this as a 'handsome block of buildings' which did much to enhance the street. It consisted of a large workshop with dwelling house above and a bicycle showroom extending to the south. The front was coated in 'Gilmerton sand', giving it an elegant appearance.



Luke's cycle workshop with house above (left) and showroom (right) today

It was not long before Alexander Luke was turning his attention to motor cars as well as bicycles. In the early twentieth century, the transition from horse-shoes to bicycles and then to motor cars was one commonly followed by blacksmiths whose skills were adaptable to these new technologies and so Luke was far from alone in replacing one type of horse-power with another. In 1903, he supplied the very first motor car for everyday use in Duns to Doctor John MacWatt of Morelands – a five horse-power, two-seater Humberette capable of 25mph on the flat and costing around £130. Luke had to travel by train to Coventry and drive it back to Duns. He had a licence from Duns Town Council enabling him to keep 300 gallons of petrol at his garage – it would have been stored in two-gallon cans.

The 1911 census for 15 Murray Street now records Alexander Luke (44) as 'motor engineer', together with his wife Isabella (39), son George (16) who is also listed as a motor engineer and daughter Mary-Jane (13).

Luke & Hogg

The story then takes an unexpected twist. In February 1918, the property and business of 'Messrs Alexander Luke & Son, Motor Engineers and Cycle Agents' in Murray Street was offered for sale. A week later, the Berwickshire News reported an event in the Swan Hotel when a presentation was made to Alexander Luke by local friends and businessmen since he was about to leave Duns to take up a post as estate engineer at Ochtertyre, a country house and estate near Crieff in Perthshire. One has to presume that this move did not work out since the 1921 census shows him back in Duns living in the Clouds with his wife and daughter, Mary-Jane, who was working as a clerk for Stephenson the ironmonger. Alexander Luke died in November 1922 at the age of 56 in the Chalmers Hospital in Edinburgh. The Berwickshire News described him as having been 'a pioneer of the motor industry in the county'.

It was therefore his son George Luke who formed the partnership with Henry Hewat Hogg in 1919. This is borne out by the fact that, although the business was commonly referred to as 'Luke & Hogg', its official name was actually 'G Luke & Hogg'. Henry Hogg came from a farming family at Middlethird near Gordon where he worked with his brothers Robert and John. He then farmed in Canada for a short time before returning to this country and going into partnership with George Luke. It would appear, however, that Hogg also had a motor business of his own in Reston (Hogg Motors), at least for a time.

George Luke and Henry Hogg wanted larger, purpose-built premises and they identified a site at the western end of North Street. As the twentieth century progressed, more and more of the dilapidated properties in the oldest parts of the town were declared unfit for occupation and condemned. This was the case with some old houses at the end of North Street. One of them was supposedly the last house in Duns to have its thatched roof replaced in 1901; at that time, it was the home and workshop of blacksmith Davie Virtue. After it was declared unfit for habitation, it was used as a store by a grocer called Robertson. In 1920, a number of those buildings at the end of North Street were purchased by George Luke and Henry Hogg and some of them were demolished so that they could construct a modern motor garage on the site. As a later expanded and improved version, it is shown at the start of this paper.

1920 was also the year when George Luke (26) married Margaret McDavid (24) whose father was Director of Education for Berwickshire. At the 1921 census, George and Margaret Luke were living with the McDavids at 20 Newtown Street. In the summer of 1922, they had a daughter whom they named Sheila Alice. George and Margaret Luke lived for some years at number 60 Easter Street but they had purchased Cheviot View in Teindhillgreen by 1936.

After the Lukes sold their Murray Street motor garage in 1918, it was operated at first by John Malcolm and then bought by James Aitchison & Company in the spring of 1924. They stayed in the Murray Street premises until moving to their present location at the bottom of Bridgend in the early 1960s when the town auction mart closed and they were able to build a new garage on the eastern part of the mart site.

Luke & Hogg's North Street Garage



Inside Luke & Hogg's North Street garage (Leslie Chappell Collection)

Luke & Hogg were soon both selling and hiring not just motor cars and vans but lorries and tractors as well in the early days. They also advertised repairs, accessories, oil and tyres 'all at lowest prices'. The very first used car they ever advertised was possibly a 12 horse-power 1914 Rover two-seater 'with dynamo lighting and detachable wheels'. They became agents, at one time or another, for a wide range of manufacturers. Some of them are names long forgotten – Ruston Hornsby, Swift, Clyno, Humber, Belsize, Hupmobile, Bean and Whitehead. Others such as Citroen, Lancia and Dodge are more recognisable but it was their Austin dealership which was to prove the most successful and longest lasting. They normally had a decent selection of second-hand vehicles for sale as well, usually with fixed prices but occasionally open to offers. As with other motor businesses, Luke & Hogg placed adverts virtually every week in local newspapers, especially the Berwickshire News, listing their current stock.

Their efforts to sell cars extended to occasionally hiring the Volunteer Hall and offering townspeople free admission to watch films. In 1922, they presented a 'spectacular film' produced by the American Studebaker company entitled 'How a Motor Car is Built'. But a similar event in 1928 must surely have been a record – a 12-reel film on 'The Mechanism of a Motor Car' lasting well over two hours was watched in the hall by over 700 people!

Perhaps because the motor industry was relatively new and developing all the time, Luke & Hogg were soon extending and adapting their premises in North Street despite them being brand new in 1920. In the spring of 1923, they applied to instal a Bowser petrol pump and, aware of the narrowness of the street and pavement, they emphasised that it would be recessed into the wall of the garage and would have a flexible hose arm eight feet above the ground to avoid obstruction. In late 1925, they were already seeking permission to extend the garage and, a year later, they wanted to instal two additional petrol pumps and a double compartment petrol storage tank with a 500-gallon capacity. Within six months, they were seeking a licence for a three-section tank to hold 1000 gallons. The town council decided that the burgh surveyor should get involved to ensure that the tank design mitigated against the possibility of fuel leaks which might compromise the town's water supply.

In the later 1930s, Luke & Hogg were seeking a building warrant to alter their premises yet again. When Duns Town Council stipulated that the front wall of any new building work must be at least 25 feet from the centre of North Street, the partners appealed. They said that such a condition would greatly reduce the internal space of their garage and that their new plan provided for vehicles driving inside to access the petrol pumps instead of stopping in the street causing an obstruction. Councillors saw the logic and agreed the plans.

Luke & Hogg in the 1940s

Petrol was rationed from the very start of the Second World War in September 1939 and George Luke was clearly a trusted figure since he was appointed organiser of petrol rationing for the local transport group. The possibility of German air raids caused consideration at all levels of such matters as bomb shelters, gas decontamination centres and fire-fighting measures. Dummy runs were organised to gauge the town's response to a serious conflagration. Duns had a fire engine, of course, but it was basically a hand-operated pump wagon and was not self-propelled. Luke & Hogg, together with local haulage contractor David Spouse, agreed to supply lorries when needed to tow the fire engine. But there was no guarantee that these lorries would be quickly available in an emergency and so Duns Town Council were soon considering the purchase of their own lorry; perhaps it could double as the town refuse cart. A high-powered used motor car was also a possibility. How this dilemma was resolved is unknown but the townspeople's fears of fire bombs and poison gas were fortunately never realised and, perhaps equally fortunately, the town's fire-fighting capability was never seriously tested either.

In 1946, Luke & Hogg sent a letter to Duns Town Council's streets and roads committee, protesting strongly against the proposal to make both North and South Streets one way. They feared this would affect access to their garage. They suggested alternative advisory signs to encourage motorists to use one street for travelling east and the other for heading west – it is unclear how this would have been much different to an official one-way system. The roads

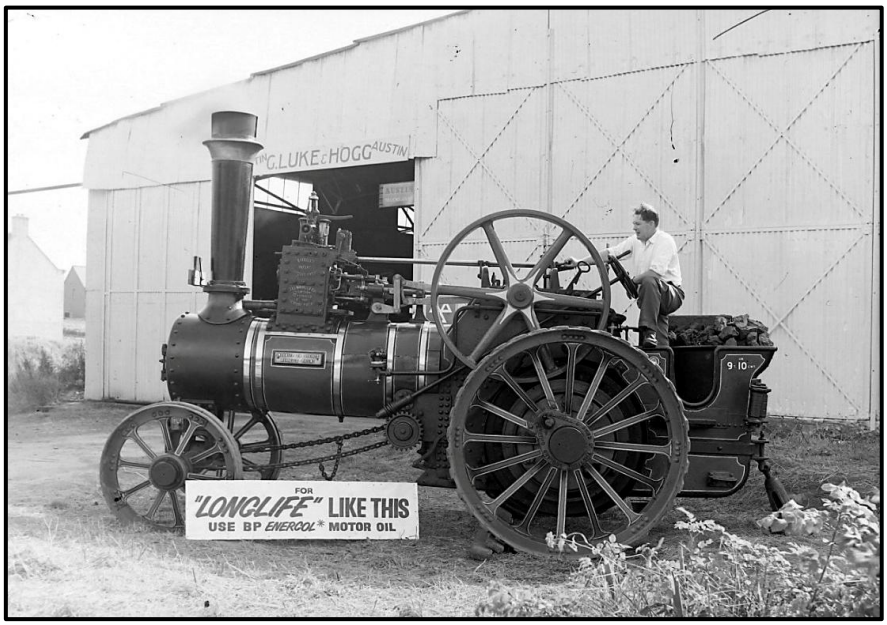
committee stuck to its recommendation (which also included making Willis Wynd and South Castle Street one way) but nothing actually happened at that time.

Luke & Hogg's concern, however, was evidence that the constricted nature of the North Street garage site was becoming increasingly problematic. In May 1946, they submitted proposals to the Berwickshire Planning Committee to develop a site at Brierybaulk, off Langtongate, as an engineering workshop, garage and filling station although it would be another six years before that plan materialised.

In March 1948, George and Margaret Luke's daughter Sheila (who worked in the National Registration Office in Duns) married Ronald Thornton who came from Fraserburgh and had been appointed to the staff of the Berwickshire High School (then in Newtown Street) in 1939. Anyone who attended the new BHS after its opening in 1958 will perhaps remember Ronald Thornton as head of the English Department.

A year later in April 1949, Henry Hewat Hogg (who was married twice) died at the age of 59 in his home at Woodside in the Clouds. Thus ended one of the most successful business partnerships in the town's history, stretching over some thirty years. And it was not just a Duns success because Luke & Hogg also had a branch in Edinburgh from the late 1920s, originally in Gayfield Square Lane but soon moving to East London Street. That business was re-incorporated as Luke & Hogg (Edinburgh) Ltd with two additional city-based directors in 1946 and was only wound up in 1995. Henry Hogg was also owner of another business called Electrical Services (Duns) Ltd in Newtown Street. He had enjoyed fishing, shooting and curling. The 'Harry Hogg Trophy' was later presented in his memory for a competition in curling at the Border Ice Rink in Kelso; it is still played for today.

Luke & Hogg's Brierybaulk Garage



Jimmy Lyle (technical education teacher at BHS) with his steam traction engine outside Luke & Hogg's Brierybaulk hangar garage

As we have seen, lack of space of one kind or another became an increasing problem for the North Street garage. The Austin company was producing an expanding range of cars and commercial vehicles and so Luke & Hogg, as main Austin dealers, needed adequate showroom space to promote these. Considerable space was also needed for service and repairs, for stores, for offices and for parking the garage's own vehicles. And, with increased traffic, the narrow street outside was always an issue for access. When some old houses at the nearby Barn End were demolished, George Luke hoped that he might be allowed to use the space for parking while a new garage was being built at Brierybaulk but, realistically, that was never going to be allowed.

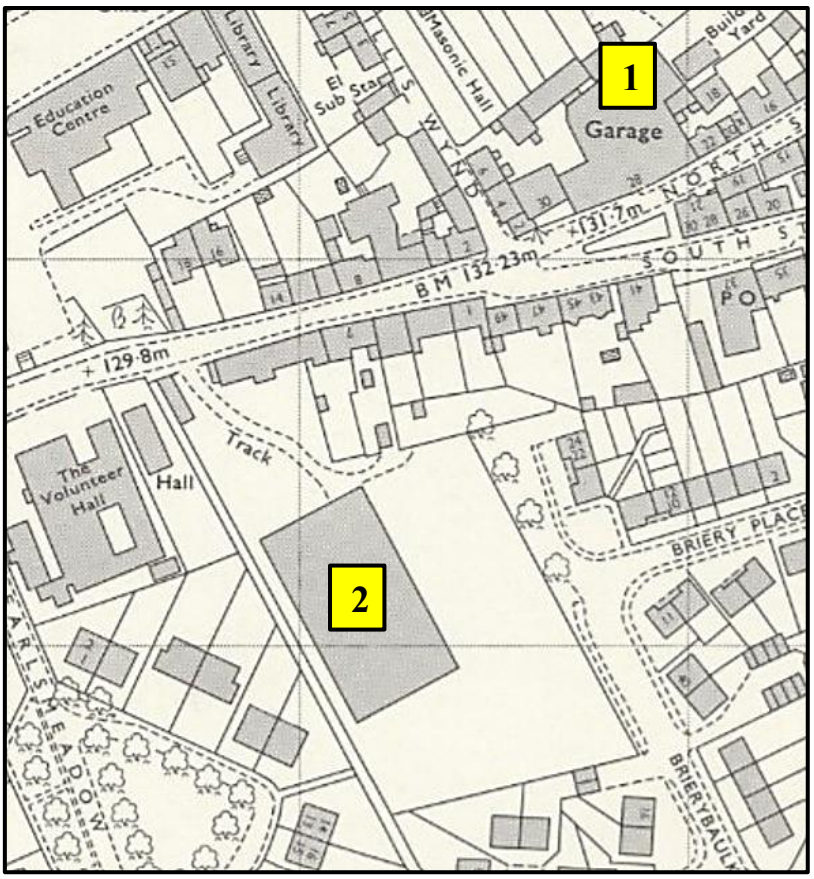
In April 1951, Luke & Hogg were granted a warrant to demolish some old buildings on the Brierybaulk site and, that same month, advantage was taken of the temporarily empty space to collaborate with Rodger Fish & Son Ltd of Kelso and put on a week-long exhibition of caravans. George Luke erected his hangar garage on the site the following year.

During the Second World War, an aerodrome had been constructed at Charterhall near Fogo for the purpose of training pilots and navigators in night fighting. The airfield's infrastructure included four large hangars, each 60 yards long by 30 yards wide and made from corrugated iron sheets; two of them are still there today, used for grain storage. Designed for speedy use in war, they were straightforward to construct and dismantle and were easy to transport. Although the RAF maintained a presence at Charterhall for a time after the war, they left in 1947 and one of the hangars was purchased from the Air Ministry by Luke & Hogg – a huge, cost-efficient, ready-made garage which could be erected in a couple of months and then fitted out as desired. It was transported to Duns and put up around the turn of the year, late 1952 into early 1953.



Display of Austin cars in the hangar including an Austin Healey, centre (Leslie Chappell Collection)

George Luke carried on the Luke & Hogg business at both the North Street and Brierybaulk sites but the last advertisement which can be found for his garage appeared in the Berwick Advertiser in 1968. It seems that the business closed around this time since George Luke was described as a 'retired garage proprietor' when he died at the age of 76 in 1970; his wife, Margaret Whyte Luke, had died aged 73 the previous year. The Brierybaulk hangar was dismantled and removed in 1972 to make way for the Turnbull Court supported housing complex. The North Street garage (which was used for storage after the closure of Luke & Hogg and became a target for occasional vandalism) was purchased by Berwickshire District Council and demolished in 1978 to be replaced by council housing.



Luke & Hogg's North Street garage (1) and Brierybaulk hangar (2) in OS map of around 1960 (National Library of Scotland)

The information in this paper has been researched from various newspapers of the time (especially the Berwickshire News) and from public records – census; valuation rolls; and birth, marriage and death records.

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