



Our up-coming two day rally at Strathalbyn gives us an excuse (if one is needed) to look at the first motor car in the district, the 8 h.p. De Dion Bouton built to the order of Dr. W. Vernon Shone, the Strathalbyn doctor from 1890 until mid-1904. The following item comes from the March 10, 1904 edition of the local weekly, the Southern Argus:

“A MODERN AUTOMOBILE”

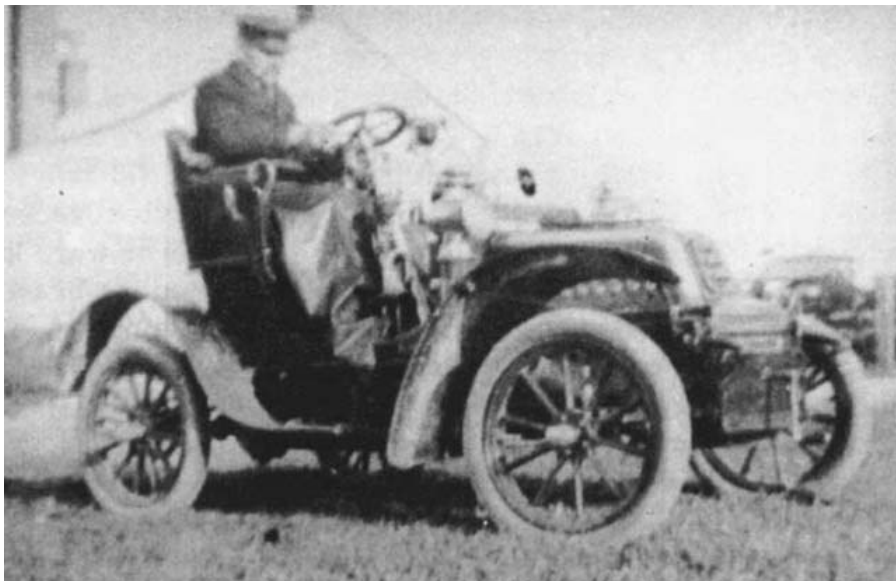
“...South Australia already owns a good many horseless vehicles, and scores of motor cycles, the hum and whirr of the engine being now no uncommon sound, but neither this state nor any of the sister ones has possession of such a thoroughly up-to-date car as that which Dr. Shone of this town has just imported through Mr. Vivian Lewis, of Adelaide, for his use, all of the very latest improvements being combined in this one. The frame, like the engine, is from De Dion, Bouton & Co's workshops on the Seine, the motor being nominally of 8 but capable of working up to 9 horse power, with every possible device applied for meeting with emergencies, coping with difficulties, and avoiding accidents. It is fully guaranteed for thirty miles an hour running, but on level roads can, if necessary, considerably exceed that speed, having been tested by experts up to over thirty-five miles, and its brake power is so great that with automatic reversing gear the machine travelling at its very highest speed can be stopped almost instantaneously – certainly in less distance than a horse and trap could be pulled up travelling at a quarter the rate. The steering gear is so accurately balanced that there is practically no limit to the driver's control of the car, a light pressure of the hand being quite sufficient to guide its movements. The whole management of engines, gear and steering mechanism is effected by two or three little lever handles which can be moved by the fingers of the hand holding the steering wheel, and two at the driver's feet, and Mr. O'Grady, Mr. Lewis's clever expert, has so thoroughly instructed Dr. Shone in the mechanism of the whole machine that he is conversant with the working of every part, the use of every nut, screw and bar, and perfectly capable of taking the whole to bits, and re-associating it. The body of the car is of South

Australian Build, Messrs. Duncan and Fraser of Adelaide having constructed it to Dr. Shone's designs, the front part being much more roomy than the average, and the tonneau being easily removable when only two persons are driving. The whole of the fittings are strong, beautifully upholstered and mounted, the metal parts being thickly nickled, and the workmanship being extremely creditable to the firm responsible for it. Prior to bringing the car on here Dr. Shone spent a fortnight or so in Adelaide having a course of practical tuition by Mr. O'Grady in its driving as well as in its mechanism, and since he has been using it here has travelled some hundreds of miles without even the slightest trouble of any kind. The car makes very little noise when running, and Dr. Shone has found that far from causing any great fright to horses they have taken kindly to it far more readily than their drivers, a fact which the writer had demonstrated to him last week in the course of a run of sixty miles or so. The whirr of the engine at starting, or while the car is stationary with motor running, is a bit noisy, but most horses appear to take very little notice of it after a moment or two. Last week Dr. Shone gave the car a very severe test by running it through Macclesfield and Meadows districts, and back via old roads and cross tracks, some extremely rough ways and steep hills being negotiated without the slightest difficulty, at much greater speed than would be possible with horses; and later on a trial run was made to Wellington and back with a view to testing speed on the lonely flat road between Langhorne's Creek and the Murrayside township. On this route there are stretches of flat country where the road is open and visible for miles ahead, with traffic almost nil, and under such favorable conditions speed tests were possible with safety, opportunity being also given of practically determining the time and distance of a pull-up from high speed running. All of these severe tests, were absolutely convincing, and a further one was successfully made of running through a sand drift in which the wheels sank for six or eight inches. Even at the highest speed the car runs so very easily and steadily that the speed rate is very deceptive until one notes the objects passed, while at a slow pace the comfort is complete.”



“Altogether Dr. Shone is more than delighted with his car, and can be congratulated on the possession

of so thoroughly modern and luxurious an automobile.”



This photograph appears in two published histories of Strathalbyn; in both it is captioned as showing Robert Thomas of Strathalbyn in his De Dion car c1905. Thomas was the local agent for Lewis Cycle and Motor Works as early as 1900, and by 1905 he owned a 6 h.p. De Dion, which differed from this car in a number of ways. Could the car shown be that of Dr. Shone, with the front “more roomy than the average” and the detachable tonneau removed? The search is on for the original print from which more information may be available.