The society’s main activity was ‘the preparation and racing of one of the three MGAs built for the 1955 Twenty-four Hour Race at Le Mans’.

Stabulum de Balliolo

In 1959, a newly constituted College society, the Stabulum de Balliolo, submitted its first report. The society’s purpose was to arrange pleasant successful car racing in such a way that it is combined with wide travels and the best chances of meeting people in the places visited. Thus it is as gipsies that we travel about in our three van – to those who cut [sic] up waiting to see a Ferrari disgorged from our van only to find our good looking red MG inside we offer coffee by way of compensation.

Wilson Southam (1957) was the society’s president and driver, Michael Thornhill (1956) its secretary and social convener; and John-Christopher Spender (1957), who recently discovered the 1959 report in his papers, was responsible for transportation and accommodation. The group included Nicholas Ouroussoff (1956) and Angus Clydesdale (1956), as he was known then (later the 15th Duke of Hamilton and 12th Duke of Brandon), and others whose names we now seek. In the Annual Record 1959 the society described its main activity as ‘the preparation and racing of one of the three MGAs built for the 1955 Twenty-four Hour Race at Le Mans; the Stabulum de Balliolo raced another one of the three, with the same registration number.

One of three pre-production MGAs entered for the 1955 Le Mans race; the Stabulum de Balliolo raced another one of the three, with the same registration number.

After the last race, the members rebuilt the inside of the van. By the time of the report the van included an aluminium covered work bench: 6 built in storage cupboards: 7 Personal Wardrobe cupboards: Cooking equipment cabinets: Fold down cooking tables: individual homes for differentials: a roof rack for tires: sleeping place for seven people: radio: 4 electric lights including outside lighting for working on the car at night: a winch: ramps and filing drawers for small parts.

Plans for the future were enthusiastic. About the car, the report says: Eyes are being cast longingly and lovingly at twin cam engines but plans are also going ahead to race it in 1500 c.c. events with the old engine reworked. On entries Experience has taught us to enter fewer races and to plan very carefully to the last detail for those who entered. Now that we are in possession of a national class licence, this will be particularly true. On the size of the society: One Cambridge man and several Balliol men may be availing themselves of the services of the transporter during the coming season. It promises to be great fun. And on the transporter: Miss Cary Nichols and Mr’s Beverley Southam will continue to maintain their excellent cooking standards.

Wilson who had been loaned the MG, bought it in February 1959 and raced it again that year; having had a new steel body fitted, in red. Pip Darby (1958) recalls that in 1960 he and Alastair Mack (1958) were responsible for getting the car to the track and then back to the workshop. After a race meeting at Crystal Palace, Pip suggested to Alastair that the quickest way out of the circuit would be around part of the track, forgetting that there was a low bridge crossing the track. The Commer transporter never recovered! Pip says.

It seems that after Wilson went down in 1960, taking the car back home with him to Canada, the Stabulum folded. Today at Balliol, while there are students involved in the related sport of karting, only in the Master, who holds a current racing licence and is Vice-President of the UK Motor Racing Club, does the Stabulum’s motor-racing spirit live on.