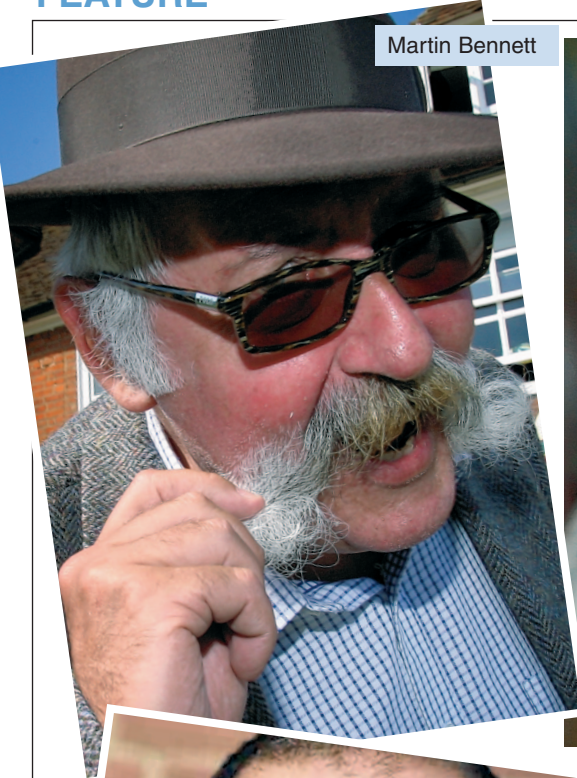


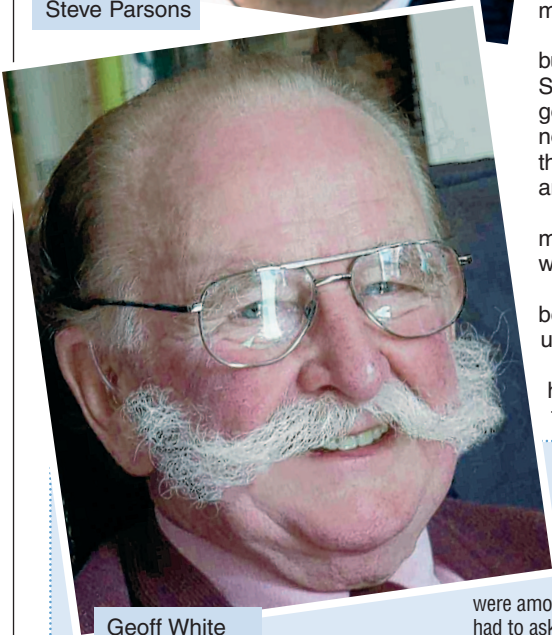
Martin Bennett



Getting a handle on



Steve Parsons



Geoff White

THERE is one thing that members of the Handlebar Club all have in common – apart from the obvious of course. “We’re all mad, you wouldn’t go round with this on your face otherwise!” is how secretary Steve Parsons sums it up.

He’s right. Deciding to grow a handlebar moustache isn’t the best look to adopt for the shy and retiring type. For these chaps cause a stir, pretty much wherever they go.

“You get a lot of attention from people but it’s always nice attention,” says Steve. “There’s the classic thing of going on the Tube in London – where nobody ever looks at each other – but they always look at me, and come up and chat! It’s great fun.”

But not just any old moustache can make it into this prestigious club, which was established in 1947.

The qualification is – and always has been – ‘a hirsute appendage of the upper lip, with graspable extremities’.

You basically have to be able to get hold of the thing and give it a good tweak.

GEOFF WHITE, 89, is a former Spitfire pilot and press photographer from Denmead.

“I flew throughout the whole war. Handlebar moustaches were much more common then and they certainly were among the RAF. If you were in the Navy you had to ask permission to grow one.

“After the war I worked as a photographer on

And beards are strictly prohibited. “Moustaches are more exclusive,” explains Steve. “There are lots of people out there with beards and goatees. We like to give credit to those people who have the balls to grow a handlebar.”

But he is quick to stress that the club is definitely not “anti-beardist”.

In fact, people without tweakable ‘taches – even those with beards – need not despair. They are quite welcome to become a ‘friend of the Handlebar Club’ instead.

The society was born 63 years ago in the dressing room of comedian Jimmy Edwards, pictured right, at The Windmill Theatre in London.

Its objective was, and still is, to bring together moustache wearers socially and to raise money for charity.

Membership peaked at about 200 in the 1950s and 60s, but hit a sticky patch in the late 1970s when facial hair went out of fashion.



the *Daily Sketch*. The only time I ever shaved it off was when I was away on a foreign assignment. When I walked back into the office, no one recognised me. It was quite astonishing. I didn’t realise it was that important so I grew it back immediately.

“I thoroughly enjoy the club. They are a marvellous bunch. At this year’s AGM I was voted Handlebar of the Year 2010. They did me proud.”