*Cecil Kimbers Birthday Breakfast. The MaG Feb/Mar 2016*

In April each year the club celebrates the birthday of Cecil Kimber, the creator of MG, with a breakfast. This tradition was initiated in 1993… when the Pre 56 MG Register grew from the T Register to include MGA, ZAs and ZBs A few years ago our club was gifted a number of Cecil Kimber’s personal items. At each Breakfast since, a trophy, incorporating these items, is awarded to a member/s, who are declared winners of a simple multi-question quiz. So you may find it helpful to remember some of the details below.

*This is a Very Brief Backgrounder for Newer members and those of us who have forgotten. It is a random selection of details about a special person without whom the MG marque would not have existed. It does not cover all of his life but runs from his birth through to the mid-1920s’.*

Cecil Kimber Born 12 April 1888.

Cecil Kimber was born into a family well established as manufacturers of printing equipment. The eldest of three children, Cecil, frequently known either as ‘Kim’ or ‘CK’ had a sister Phyllis and younger brother Vernon. On leaving Stockport Grammar School Cecil joined the family printing ink manufacturing company. As did brother Vernon a few years later.

This was not CK’s idea of the ideal job he was far more interested in things mechanical. He bought a second hand Rex motor-cycle that he dismantled and re-built in short order. Motor cycles were his great interest at the time, he owned a number of them, always working to improve their performance.

Whilst riding his brother’s-in-law motorbike he was hit by a car, suffering a broken knee and smashed right thigh. Three operations were necessary to repair the bone damage and he was left with a limp for the rest of his life. The driver of the car was held responsible and Cecil was awarded a significant damages, said to be between £700 to £1000. Of this he spent £185 on a new Singer 10, a significant small car of the time, taking delivery in February 1913. By August 1914 he had covered some 17,000 miles, using the little car 2/3rds for pleasure and 1/3rd for business.

 In 1914 CK now in his mid-twenties was being paid €1 a week selling printing ink. But because of his accident injuries he was considered unfit for military service. This year also marked a serious deterioration in the relationship with his father H F Kimber. The printing ink business was not thriving and ‘H F’ asked Cecil to put the balance of his compensation into the firm. Far from agreeing Cecil said he wanted an increase in salary as he wished to marry his fiancé Irene ‘Rene’ Hunt. His father, was furious at this rejection, refusing to have anything more to do with him. ‘H F’ never spoke to his eldest son again, though CK tried a number of times to heal the rift.

In September 1915 Cecil and ‘Rene’ were married and with Rene’s support CK turned to the motor industry. Over the following few years he worked for a number of companies before being appointed by William Morris as Sales Manager of The Morris Garages. William Morris owned two entirely separate businesses, The Morris Garages which serviced cars and Morris Motors Ltd which built Morris cars.

Early in 1922 the General Manager of Morris Garages resigned, then committed suicide, and CK aged 34 was appointed G M in his place. As well as administering the day to day running of Morris Garages Kimber began designing special coachwork that could be fitted to standard Morris Cowley (Chummy) two seater and Morris Oxford chassis, a four seater. It is interesting to note Cecil’s wife Rene played an important part in the designing of these cars. Under CK’s direction these two models met with such acclaim they could be sold at a price one third more than the standard Morris versions.

In May 1924 the MG motif enclosed in the octagon appeared for the first time in a print advertisement. The new Morris Oxford based model was marketed as the MG Super Sports and not the MG Super Sports Morris as had previously been the case.

Along with automotive engineering Kimber had a long held interest in motor sport events. Particularly as a means of market promotion, somewhat surprisingly this view was not shared by William Morris.

In pursuit of his motor sport interest, Kim entered the Land’s End Trial, in 1923 and 1924, arguably the toughest endurance event of its type in Britain at the time, winning a Gold Medal on both occasions. In 1923 he drove his own Morris ‘Chummy’ two seater and in 1924 he drove a modified version of the same model. This may not have been his original plan however. About this time, under Kim’s direction, work started on modifying a Morris Cowley chassis with the intention of building a ‘special’ car for that years Land’s End Trial. However the chassis was put aside and work did not begin again until later in the year. But it was not until early March of 1925 that Carbodies of Coventry started building the special narrow two seater body for the car. The body, once fitted to the completed chassis with Hotchkiss engine, was painted dark ‘shop grey’ which MG used for prototypes and experimental models.

On March 27 the car was completed and registered FC 7900, owner Cecil Kimber. The finished ‘special’ was described as an ingenious combination of standard and non-standard Morris components. Over the Easter weekend Kim and friend Wilfred Mathews, an Oxford Insurance broker, took FC 7900 on the 1925 Land’s End Trial. It proved both quick and roadworthy and Kim had no bother qualifying again for a further Gold Medal.

It was sold shortly after the event, passing through a number of hands before it was spotted and rescued in 1932 and returned to the MG Car Company Ltd. This was the car which has became known as ‘Old Number One’.

It is said Kimber considered this to be the first MG car. The car still exists, it is owned and maintained by the British Motor Heritage Trust and is usually displayed at the British Motor Museum at Gaydon.

Some further interesting details.

Cecil and Rene had two daughters, Jean and Betty, later called Lisa.

Kim always used Green ink when writing.

Cecil Kimber had two other great interests, beyond family and MG, yachting, he always enjoyed sailing his first yacht the Falcon and his second yacht the 5 ton Fairwind. He was also a very keen fly-fisherman.

In 1928 a new company, The M.G. Car Company (Proprietors; the Morris Garages Ltd.) was established.

In 1929 M.G. moved to Abingdon on Thames, establishing a new plant in part of the Pavlova Leather Company factory.

In early 1930 the son of Henry Ford bought an MG Midget for his own private use.

In July 1930 The M.G. Car Company was registered as the M.G. Car Company Ltd, Governing Director Sir William Morris, Managing Director Cecil Kimber. (This company was personally owned by Sir William Morris, it was not part of Morris Motors Ltd)

*The history of Cecil Kimber and M.G. is a fascinating one and our club library has a number of books on the history of Cecil Kimber and M.G..*

*Norm Harvey (Buzz.)*