

The MORRIS GARAGES MARQUE of CARS (MG): CENTENARY

For many years across the MG community 1924 has been taken to be the year when the first MG cars were made and sold. Some have put the case for recognition in later years – 1925/6/7 – and have given reasons for doing so. In the main though, 1924 has been the accepted year and has been the basis of past anniversaries which have been celebrated by both MG clubs, and the various parent manufacturers of MGs.

The 1924 date has been based upon the modified 'Bullnose' Morris Oxford cars of 1924 which have been known as the 14/28s and accepted as the first 'MGs'. It has been known for a long time that a car prior to the 14/28 was commissioned by Cecil Kimber – founder of MG, and from early 1922 manager of the Morris Garage in Queen Street, Oxford. Kimber ordered six Morris Cowley chassis from the Morris works, had some modifications made to these chassis at the Alfred Lane workshop in Oxford, and ordered bodies from Raworth & Co. based in St. Aldates, Oxford. None of these six cars have survived, and nor – until 1998 – had details of the alterations made to these cars.

The MG community tended to be divided on the Raworths between those who felt the 14/28s and the 1924 date was the correct one, and those who believed that the Raworths should receive recognition as the first MGs – in concept, if not realisation. The 14/28 school had the advantage of surviving cars which could be compared to the standard Morris versions and the modifications identified, along with the very different Kimber-inspired bodies. The 14/28 school were reluctant to acknowledge the significance of the Raworths because there was an absence of evidence that they were more than bespoke-bodied Morrises. The 1923 view was not helped by the fact that the Raworths were a commercial failure, unlike the 14/28s.

It has become apparent that this difference over the Raworths vs. the 14/28s can now be resolved due to the considerable efforts of *The Early MG Society* and in particular researches in the Oxford County and City archives by the late Robin Barraclough and by Phil Jennings. Of the twenty-one mechanical differences between the standard Morris Oxford chassis and those sold as Morris Garages Sports (14/28), there is general agreement that the significant differences were in the lowering of the rear springs and the alteration of the angle of the steering column by relocating the steering box. In themselves these alterations do not appear very significant, but crucially it meant that the chassis sat lower, and the driver sat lower and further back. This in turn enabled the bodies to be different from anything currently available in the Morris Motors catalogue.

Research in the Oxford City and County archives, especially microfilm copies of newspapers and magazines – finally revealed some of the alterations which had been made to the Raworths prior to their bespoke bodies being manufactured. The crucial changes, which have allowed the 14/28s to be recognised so far as the 'first'

MGs, were, it has been shown, made also to the Raworths a year earlier. The documentation supporting this had lain in the archives for nearly 75 years. The Raworths were overpriced, lacked sufficient distinction, and were a commercial failure, but they were Cecil Kimber's first attempt – along with the support of his employer Sir William Morris – to create the first MG.

The current governing Board of the MG Car Club (UK) has made a careful and thorough examination of the evidence, and arrived at the conclusion that the year 1923 can indeed be regarded and celebrated as the founding year of the MG marque. While the available evidence is not absolutely conclusive, the first Raworth MG was most likely registered on 1st June 1923 with the Oxford authority as FC5581.

Serial No.	Name.	Address.	Particulars of Vehicle.	Date of Registration.
FC 5581	<i>Jensson J.</i>	<i>Pembroke College</i>	<i>Merri-Larkby</i>	<i>15 June</i>
		<i>Christchurch</i>	<i>11.9. 1923.</i>	<i>1923.</i>
			<i>Aluminium</i>	

It is also recognised however that 1924 was the year when the first successful MG was manufactured – the 14/28. Without the success of Cecil Kimber's second attempt at a sports car his employer, William Morris, would not have provided the £16,000 necessary to build the first bespoke MG factory in Oxford (Edmund Road) and ensured the future of the marque. It seems entirely appropriate therefore that the 14/28 and 1924 should also receive celebratory recognition. With these two aims in mind it has been decided that the centenary year should start in June 2023 and last until June 2024. In this way Cecil Kimber's vision as well as his successful realisation of the MG are both recognised.

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This summary is a brief overview of a far more detailed paper. Anyone who would like to read the full paper should contact me: – petercookdr@btinternet.com.

