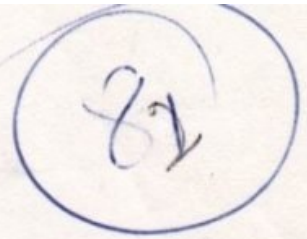


# HOW THE NAME GOT ON THE CARS—FRANK MANSELL 1981

WOLSELEY - HOW THE NAME GOT ON THE CARS

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by FRANK MANSELL



The Wolseley family who have their ancestral home at Wolseley Park near Rugeley in Staffordshire is one of few in England to trace unbroken male descent from Saxon times. The name has been attributed to the annihilation of wolves from the area in those early times

The present head of the family is Sir Charles Wolseley the Eleventh Baronet in the English line which received its first baronetcy in 1628. A son of the second baronet bought an estate in Carlow in south-east Ireland about 1700 and a hill on this estate was renamed Mount Wolseley soon afterwards. His son in due time received another baronetcy in 1744 and so initiated the Irish line from which Frederick York Wolseley was born three generations later in 1837 in County Dublin the man whose name is on our motorcars. The Irish line known as Wolseley of Mount Wolseley remains intact to this day though not with the same all-male lineage. Its present head is the Twelfth baronet who lives in Ontario

Motorists today mostly have some idea of the man whose name is on their cars. With Austin or Morris there must be people alive today who actually met the person concerned for Austin died as Baron Austin in 1941 and Morris as Lord Nuffield in 1963. This is not likely with Wolseley owners for F Y Wolseley died in 1899 when the first Wolseley cars had only just appeared. The story of how his name did get on the cars is indeed an interesting one. He was born the third son in a family of four boys and three girls. The family was of military stock and his eldest brother followed a military career to become Field Marshal Viscount Wolseley with many notable battles to his credit getting the thanks of Parliament when he retired and finally buried in St Bauls in London. But FYW did not follow an army life but instead emigrated to Australia in 1854 inspired it would seem by glowing reports of life in that country provided by a Scottish settler who had married one of FYW's sisters. He died back in England of cancer at the age of sixty-one and was buried in a cemetery in south-east London in a grave which remarkably remained unmarked for nearly a century!

On arrival in Australia FYW was employed as a beginner on his brother-in-law's sheep farm and when in 1868 the latter died FYW became manager. He had already seen that the shearing of sheep by hand was not going to be able to keep up with the rapidly increasing sheep population and had in mind some mechanical means to speed up the production of the excellent merino wool then in great demand for the mills of Britain America and elsewhere. He spent much money and time trying out different methods but these early efforts were not a success. After some twenty years he bought his own sheep station in northern New South Wales where he continued the development of his machine. He happened to learn of a young apprentice recently arrived from England and sought his opinion and advice. This young man's name was Herbert Austin and with his help a successful design was produced and finally patented in 1884. It was recognised throughout Australia as a satisfactory device for getting more wool off the sheep than the manual method and causing the animals less injury. The machines were installed on many sheep stations in the ensuing few years and were found to be what was urgently wanted to support the export trade

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The Wolseley sheep shearing machine undoubtedly made a great contribution to the economy of Australia a century ago when wool was one of the country's most important exports. Wolseley's success was remembered in the Bicentennial Celebrations in Australia in 1988 commemorating permanent European occupation of that country when a hundred or so Wolseley cars were paraded at the blacksmith's shop near the Queensland border where he finally produced his successful machine. It was at the instigation of the Australians as part of their celebrations and in the same year that a headstone was placed on the grave in Beckenham cemetery in London paid for by Wolseley car owners and enthusiasts around the world. It is daunting to reflect why this man lay unhonoured for so long after an early death when his well-to-do elder brother outlived him to a grave in St Pauls in 1913!

A company to manufacture the shearing machine in Birmingham was set up in 1887 and before long Austin was induced to return to England and was made manager. In addition to this particular machine many other items in regular use such as bicycles stationery engines electrified fences and the like were manufactured and we can assume that an engine-driven "horseless carriage" had occurred to someone as a possibility. We have reason to think that this idea came from Austin in the first place and that he worked on it to produce the first British motorcar in 1895. It was a three-wheeler later described by some as a stationery engine mounted on a tricycle! Four-wheelers followed and a new industry had been born. Unfortunately Frederick York Wolseley did not live long to see the cars that were already bearing his name. He had resigned from the company in 1894 and died of cancer five years later. The Wolseley Tool and Motor Car Company quite separate from the sheep shearing concern was set up in 1901 with Austin as its manager until 1905 when he left to start his own car company under his own name.

After 1901 the two Wolseley companies went their separate ways. The shearing company continued to manufacture its machines and export them to many countries. It later widened its interests becoming Wolseley Engineering. It survives to this day as Wolseley Limited having taken over many companies with many interests in many parts of the world! It is probably still supplying sheep shearing machines to people who want them back in Australia!

The car company became Wolseley Motors and before the first World War was producing more motor cars than any other British company. But in the late Twenties and in the face of economic difficulties it became part of Morris Motors then became NMC then became Leyland until the last car to wear the Wolseley badge proudly lit up in lights was produced in 1975 eighty years after the first!

Thus the man whose name is on our cars had achieved fame on the other side of the world for something not much to do with motor cars and certainly before the first motor car appeared anywhere. Like the shearing machine in Australia the finishing touches to the Wolseley motor car in England were almost certainly provided by Herbert Austin who courteously allowed his employer's name to go along with what he had himself master-minded. It is an amazing story Austin may have started the ball rolling and Morris may have come to the rescue. But we say that Wolseley was the first British car and that it remains pre-eminent to this day.