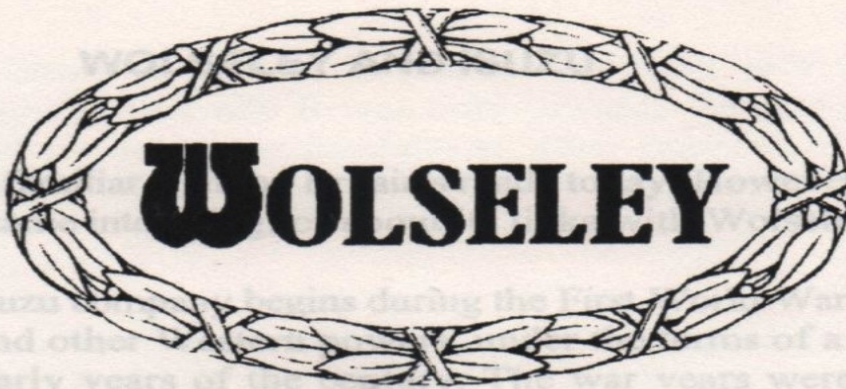


# WOLSELEY IN JAPAN



in  
**Japan**

**The first production cars in Japan were Wolseleys**

**built under licence by**

**The Ishikawajima Shipbuilding and Engineering Co.**

**now Isuzu**

**Bert Peniall - our man in Japan**

*with acknowledgements to:-*

**Chris Madeley and Old Glory Magazine No.68**

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**Bert Peniall's granddaughter - Bridget  
for photographs and diaries**

**22 March 1996**



## WOLSELEY AND ISUZU

Isuzu products are a familiar sight on Britain's roads today. However few will know how the Isuzu company came into being, or about its links with Wolseley in the early 1920s.

The history of the Isuzu company begins during the First World War, in which Japan was allied with Britain and other Western powers, under the terms of a series of agreements concluded in the early years of the century. The war years were boom years for the rapidly-industrialising Japanese economy, as demand for Japanese products and services was stimulated by the war in Europe. One aspect of this was the increased demand for shipping, which led to an increase in the size of Japan's merchant navy, and a boom in shipbuilding. The value of new ships increased from 120 yen to a 1918 peak of 800 yen per gross registered ton, and the Japanese shipbuilding industry, which had produced only eight vessels in 1915, was able to complete 174 vessels in 1918. One company which shared in these times of prosperity was the Tokyo Ishikawajima Shipbuilding and Engineering Company Limited. The size of the ships which the company was able to produce grew rapidly from 3000 tons to 8000 tons as a result of demand created by the war, and the company accumulated an unprecedented profit. However the company's directors realised that such favourable trading conditions would not continue for ever, once the war in Europe came to a close. Discussion ensued as to how to make the best use of the accumulated profits, and the outcome of this was that, as it was likely that road transport would grow in importance in the future, the company should seek to enter this new field by undertaking the manufacture and sale of motor vehicles.

It was very difficult however for a company with no experience of motor vehicle manufacture to begin production alone. For this reason the directors at Ishikawajima realised that they would have to enter into an agreement with an overseas company, and the search for a potential partner began. There were few overseas motor vehicle manufacturers trading in Tokyo at that time, and Ishikawajima approached just two companies - Fiat and Wolseley - to inquire about the cost and terms of a possible licensing agreement. Of the two, Wolseley offered the cheaper terms. In addition, Ishikawajima had experience of Wolseley products, as the company had a motor boat fitted with a Wolseley marine engine. This piece of equipment had always been reliable, so Ishikawajima were satisfied about the quality and durability of Wolseley products. Consequently the Ishikawajima staff entered into negotiations with Wolseley, and a licensing agreement was drawn up.

Under the terms of this agreement, Wolseley were to allow Ishikawajima to manufacture three of their products, the A9 type car, the E3 type light car, and the CP type one and a half ton truck. Wolseley would provide Ishikawajima with the necessary blueprints, and also provide training for Ishikawajima staff. On 30 December 1918 a group of six Ishikawajima staff set off on a one-year trip to Britain via the United States to undertake training at the Wolseley factory in Birmingham. While in America they visited car-manufacturing plants in Detroit, and were overwhelmed by the vast scale of the operations which they observed. They felt more at home when they arrived at Wolseley's Birmingham factory, where production was on a more modest scale, and hand tools were used in the finishing process. As the First World War had just finished when the Japanese



group arrived in Birmingham, the Wolseley company was still engaged in the manufacture of aero engines, and it was only towards the end of their stay that the visitors were able to see actual car production. They returned to Japan bringing with them the blueprints and patterns required to build the Wolseley A9 type car. In addition, a member of Wolseley staff, a Mr. Penniall was seconded to Tokyo for one year to help get production under way.

We now know that this was Bert Penniall, one of four brothers, and thanks to Fred Watts' knowledge of the long Penniall association with Wolseley he was able to locate Berts' grand daughter - Bridget- who had preserved all his photographs and diaries (42 foolscap pages) and kindly allowed us access to them.

Bert Penniall left England on 10th July 1920 and landed in Yokohama on 9th August, travelling via Canada. The company built him a fine new house "*in A1 European Style*" with its own garden facing the sea which he occupied within two month of landing. He wrote many colourful descriptions of the country and life of Japan but, as a family man he was at times, desperately lonely. He eventually met several Englishmen - Mr Howden of Alfred Herbert, their Tokyo manager plus Mr Senior and Mr Cartwright, also Mr Joines of Wards-Archdale.

The first Japanese built Wolseley was completed and - "*taken out for a satisfactory road test on 26th December 1921*"- which hardly tells the real story as the six people involved partook of a little too much sake at the lunch stop and managed to hit a telegraph pole ( property of the Police Department) which caused major problems with the radiator.

In February 1921 the first 15HP chassis was delivered and fitted with a temporary body for a test run - "*Very speedy, in fact too fast for Japan*".

The diary contains far more information than that recorded here, and we hope that someone will accurately transcribe all this data for posterity in the near future.

Ishikawajima had proved that they could manufacture a car, but to sell it was a different matter. Because the car involved a great deal of hand finishing its production cost was high, and it was difficult to compete with American companies selling cars in Japan at that time. The Wolseley cost over ten thousand yen to manufacture, while an imported Buick or Hudson could be purchased for around six or seven thousand yen. Consequently the company's attention was attracted to the subsidy offered by the Japanese Army to vehicle manufacturers who could build vehicles conforming to certain specifications. Representatives of Ishikawajima went to have the conditions and specifications explained to them. The Japanese Army had adopted this subsidy system from France, with the result that it was agreed that Ishikawajima would manufacture the Wolseley CP Type truck with a view to entering it for the subsidy qualifying trials.

Though Ishikawajima had purchased the right to produce the Wolseley CP Type truck in the initial agreement, it had at first only been interested in the cars covered by the agreement. A Mr. Murakami of Ishikawajima was thus dispatched to Birmingham to obtain the blueprints of the CP Type truck, and also arranged to have two trucks sent over to Japan. Work began as soon as the two trucks arrived in 1923, as the vehicle had to be ready before the end of the financial year in March, if it were to undergo the qualifying trials for the Military Vehicle Subsidy Law. One of the trucks was dismantled



to serve as a pattern, and work was in full swing, when on 1 September 1923 the Great Kanto Earthquake struck the Tokyo area, leaving the city in ruins. The Ishikawajima car factory was destroyed in the subsequent fires, along with about fifty Wolseley type cars which were waiting to find a buyer, the Wolseley Type CP truck which was serving as a model, the Ishikawajima Wolseley truck under production, and all the related plans and documents. Following the earthquake an important meeting took place at Ishikawajima's head office to decide whether the company should persist with car production, in view of the circumstances. It was decided that car manufacturing was an important industry for Japan, and that despite the losses suffered in the earthquake, vehicle manufacturing should continue. Fortunately the second truck which had been sent from Wolseley in Birmingham had been loaned to the Tokyo Shigai Jidosha KK, (which was to become the Tokyo Municipal Bus Company in 1942), and had survived the fires which had ravaged Tokyo. This was returned to Ishikawajima and formed the basis of production of the Ishikawajima Wolseley CP Type truck which was prepared for submission to the qualifying trials for the Military Vehicle Subsidy Law. The truck completed the ten-day, one thousand-kilometre test drive without incident, and was duly certified as meeting the requirements of the Military Vehicle Subsidy Law.

This law provided not only a subsidy for manufacturers, but also a subsidy for owner-operators, and consequently stimulated the market for commercial vehicles. In the years between 1924 and 1927 the Tokyo Ishikawajima Shipbuilding and Engineering Company Limited produced approximately 560 of the Wolseley Type CP one and a half ton trucks, and the smaller Wolseley Type CG one ton trucks. These found a variety of uses, and contributed to the growing awareness of the potential of motor transport in Japan. In 1927 the Tokyo Ishikawajima Shipbuilding and Engineering Company Limited annulled the licensing agreement with Wolseley, and in 1929 the vehicle-manufacturing section of Ishikawajima became an independent company under the name Ishikawajima Automotive Works Company Limited. This was subsequently changed to the Automobile Industries Company Limited, the Tokyo Automobile Industries Company Limited, and the Diesel Automobile Industry Company Limited. The company adopted the name Isuzu Motors Limited in July 1949.

The Wolseley CP Type truck on display in the foyer of the Isuzu headquarters building in Tokyo is said to be the one completed on 20 March 1924 and entered for the qualifying trials of the Military Vehicle Subsidy Law. It carries the chassis number CP0001, and is fitted with engine number ST0001. The early history of the truck is unclear, but after several years in use it was returned to the company, and stored at the Tsurumi factory.

In April 1991 the chassis was finally reunited with the fully-restored original engine and a replica cab and body constructed using period materials; brass, oak, mahogany and canvas. The restoration had taken a year and eight months and had involved countless staff at Isuzu, as well as those of twenty nine outside companies. The restored Ishikawa Wolseley CP Type truck is a monument to the pioneer days of the Japanese motor manufacturing industry, and a product of a little-known case of Anglo-Japanese industrial cooperation.