



William R. Morris

William R. Morris was born October 10, 1877, in Worcester, Worcestershire, England to Frederick and Emily Ann (Pether) Morris. He was the first of seven children, but only two of his siblings lived into adulthood. His family lived in the Headington and Cowley areas. William attended school until age 15 with the intent of studying medicine. He left school to support his family when his father became ill and he took the path of an apprentice to an Oxford bicycle maker.

Morris valued competition and independence, and at age 16 he opened his own cycle business in his parents' house, gaining a reputation for building quality bicycles for a reasonable price.

In the 1890's, William showcased his bicycles by competing in road races in Oxford and surrounding shires. As he won races, he promoted his bicycle product, The Morris, and his business. Morris began tinkering with motorcycles, and in 1901 began the Morris Motor Cycle company. His bicycle business grew to include car sales, repair, and rental and it moved to Longwall Street in 1902. William married Elizabeth "Lizzie" Anstey a dressmaker and a cyclist, on April 9, 1903.

In 1910, he changed the name of his business from The Oxford Garage to The Morris Garage. He expanded to a second location on Queen Street, henceforth the business was called The Morris Garages. The first bullnose Morris was designed in 1912 and then W.R.M. Motors assembled vehicles from other company's parts, including components manufactured in the US. During WWI, W.R.M. Motors expanded its production capabilities by producing munitions. Returning to car production in 1919, now as Morris Motors Ltd., the company sold 56,000 cars by 1925. Morris became an OBE (Officer of the British Empire) in 1918.

Morris studied the mass production and vertical integration techniques of Henry Ford. Vertical integration enables a company to better control their end-to-end supply chain manufacturing stages. Morris began his vertical integration by adding car assembly space in Abingdon and other locations.

Morris was aware of the financial condition of his suppliers and when they experienced difficulties, he made purchase offers from his personal finances. He later sold the acquisitions to Morris Motors.



His next integration was Hotchkiss, a French company started by an American, who built a factory in Coventry, England during WWI. In 1918, the factory agreed to manufacture pushrod engines and gearboxes, copied from American designs, for Morris Motors Ltd. Bullnose Morris Cowleys and Morris Oxfords. Morris purchased the business in 1923 and renamed it Morris Engines Limited. No wonder we have Whitworth, Metric, and SAE bolts and nuts on MGs.

Morris added E.G. Wrigley and Company, an axle company, naming it Morris Commercial Cars Limited to expand into commercial trucks and buses. He purchased Skinner's Union Carburettors in 1926.

Morris's purchase of Wolseley Motors Limited and their overhead camshaft engines in 1927 enabled MG Midgets, Magnas, and Magnettes, built from 1929 – 1936, to have high horsepower output per cubic centimeter displacement.

M.G. Car Company Limited was incorporated in July 1930 by William Morris. MG remained privately held until July 1, 1935, when Morris sold MG and his other private holdings to Morris Motors Ltd.

Morris tried to incorporate Pressed Steel Bodies into the Morris Motors fold but the English High Court sided with Edward Budd, owner of Budd Company. Budd and his Pressed Steel English subsidiary supplied an all-steel sedan body to auto manufacturers. Morris lost his investment and board seats on the joint venture with Pressed Steel.

Morris purchased Riley (Coventry) Ltd. in 1938. Morris Motors merged with Austin Motor Company in 1952 to become British Motor Corporation. Morris retired as a director and honorary president of BMC on December 17, 1952, at the age of 75. Leonard Lord succeeded him as chairman.

William Morris became Morris of Nuffield (a baronet) in 1929, Lord Nuffield (a baron) in 1934, was created Viscount Nuffield in 1938, Fellow of the Royal Society in 1939, Knight Grand Cross of the British Empire in 1941, and Companion of Honour in 1958. He took his title from the village of Nuffield in Oxfordshire, England, where he and Elizabeth lived. Their house has been preserved and can be toured.

Lord Nuffield passed on August 22, 1963, in his home. He is recognized for motoring manufacturing success as the founder of Morris Motors and as a philanthropist, particularly in Health Care.

Lord Nuffield's philanthropic activities began in the early 1930s. As he and Elizabeth had no children, most of their estate was donated to the following beneficiaries: the Nuffield Institute for Medical Research, the University of Oxford; the Nuffield Trust; Nuffield College, Oxford; and the Nuffield Foundation. Lord Nuffield's interest to provide private medical treatment for those of moderate means led to his financial backing in 1947 of the British United Provident Association (BUPA). By 1948, BUPA had 38,000 customers, an 80% share of Britain's private health insurance market.

- Alan Magnuson