

Christmas Card from Cecil Kimber.

(CR5094/24)

December's Document of the Month focuses on a festive theme. We have chosen this Christmas card from the Managing Director of MG Car Company Ltd, Cecil Kimber. The card, dating from 1938, features a metal cut out design of an MG 1100CC on the front. Inside is an inscription, which reads:



Front of Christmas Card, Warwickshire County Record Office, CR5094/24

“With best wishes for a happy Christmas and in 1939 may you eclipse every record for health, happiness and prosperity!”¹

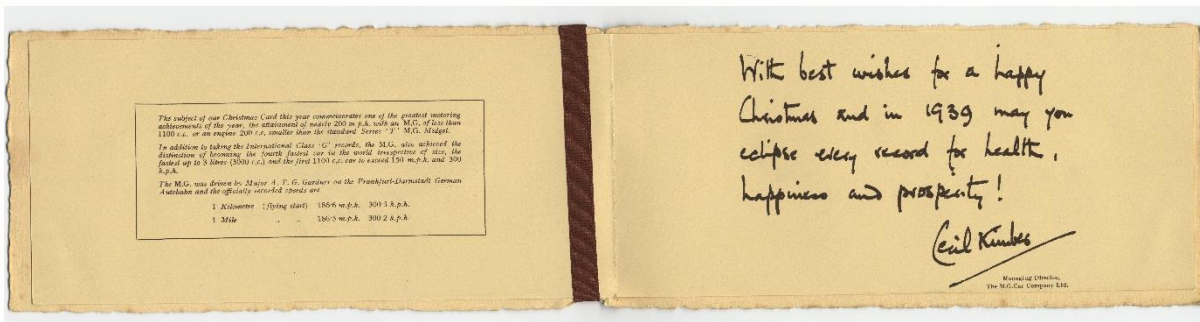
The inside also features an inscription, explaining that the image was chosen to commemorate “the greatest motoring achievement of the year, the attainment of nearly 200 m p h with an MG”.² The card was found in a collection of documents relating to a Mr Anthony J Clarke of Barford, Warwickshire, so we believe the card was sent to him from the company.

¹ Christmas card from the managing director of the MG Car Company Ltd Cecil Kimber, Warwickshire County Record Office, CR5094/24.

² *Ibid.*



Inside of Christmas Card, Warwickshire County Record Office, CR5094/24



Inside of Christmas Card, Warwickshire County Record Office, CR5094/24

Christmas cards have been a festive tradition since the Victorian era. The introduction of the Penny Post made the postal system a more affordable commodity, with the first commercial Christmas card being developed by Henry Cole in 1843. A more detailed history of the Christmas card can be found on the Postal Museum website.³

Cecil Kimber

Cecil Kimber – Managing Director from 1930 to 1941 - is not generally associated with the company’s “golden age”, a period of booming sales during the “sports car

³ The Postal Museum, *The First Christmas Card*, <https://www.postalmuseum.org/collections/first-christmas-card/#> [accessed 03/11/2022].

craze” of the 1940s and 50s.⁴ But, without him, the most successful sports car-builder in British history would never have been.

Born in 1888 he went to Stockport Grammar and Manchester Technical schools before training as an apprentice printer under his father.⁵ After a near-fatal motorbike crash in 1910, Kimber discovered what was to evolve into his lifelong passion: fast cars. Indeed, his daughter, Jean Cook, recalls that he "drove like the clappers"⁶ - MG's legendary advertising slogan 'Safety Fast!' embodied this enduring fascination.

Cecil found work with tycoon William Morris in 1921, and just one year after was made general manager of the Lord Nuffield-owned Morris Garages chain in Oxford. With a view to increasing turnover, he soon developed his own special models, and so launched the sporty £268 Morris Garages Chummy in 1923.⁷

Kimber continued his tinkering with designs and by 1924 had renamed the cars MGs (short for Morris Garages). It was not until 1925, though, that he would drop Morris altogether and opt for the sleeker MG Super Sports. In 1929, shortly after becoming a company in its own right, MG moved into the now famous factory at Abingdon, and in July 1930 the sports car enterprise that seemingly emerged from nothing was baptised MG Car Company, with Kimber its managing director.⁸

Kimber's creative autonomy did, however, not last long. Up until 1935, MG had been personally owned by William Morris, rather than existing under Morris Motors, the public limited company, which Nuffield owned.⁹ William Morris had been relatively content with MG's arm's length autonomy. Indeed, 'with some models turning in a healthy profit he had allowed Kimber to produce specials for competitive events; Kimber ran a full-scale works racing programme for around five years from 1929.¹⁰ But come the mid-30s it formally integrated into the main company. From that point Kimber was again answering to Lord Nuffield, a far less tolerant proprietor. With the outbreak of World War II, the civilian car industry ceased, and Kimber was tasked with negotiating wartime contracts. In 1941 he secured a contract to build aircraft cockpits but, having been reprimanded for not seeking higher approval first, found himself dismissed from the company he had almost single-handedly created.¹¹

⁴ Sweet, L. (2018). *The history of MG*. [online] Arnold Clark. Available at: <https://www.arnoldclark.com/newsroom/2650-the-history-of-mg> [Accessed 3 Nov. 2022].

⁵ Chapman, G. (2005). *The MG and Cecil Kimber*. [online] The Independent. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/motoring/features/the-mg-and-cecil-kimber-221758.html> [Accessed 3 Nov. 2022].

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Chapman, G. (2005). *The MG and Cecil Kimber*. [online] The Independent. Available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/motoring/features/the-mg-and-cecil-kimber-221758.html> [Accessed 3 Nov. 2022].

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Cook, P. (2020). *The Life of William Morris, Lord Nuffield – Part 2*. [online] MG Car Club. Available at: <https://www.mgcc.co.uk/articles/the-life-of-william-morris-lord-nuffield-part-2/> [Accessed 3 Nov. 2022].

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Chapman, G. (2005). *The MG and Cecil Kimber*.

On Sunday 4 February 1945, during a business trip with a new firm, he boarded an express train at King's Cross, London. Shortly after leaving the station, the final carriage was derailed, and Cecil Kimber was one of two fatalities.¹²

By 1980, MG was the world's top selling sportscar.¹³ In honour of his great innovations, Kimber was inducted into the British Sports Car Hall of Fame in June 2017.¹⁴

¹² www.oxonblueplaques.org.uk. (n.d.). *Cecil Kimber*. [online] Available at: http://www.oxonblueplaques.org.uk/plaques/kimber_cecil.html [Accessed 3 Nov. 2022].

¹³ Whitfield, P. (104AD). *Cecil Kimber Steered MG Roadster To The Fast Lane*. [online] Investor's Business Daily. Available at: <https://www.investors.com/news/management/leaders-and-success/cecil-kimber-designed-mg-roadster/> [Accessed 3 Nov. 2022].

¹⁴ Carnell, M. (2017). *Cecil Kimber - The Man Behind MG - Hall of Fame Inductee*.