

A Dozen Rolls-Royce Owners in South Australia in 1926
"M. Symons, Walkerville"
1922 Silver Ghost, chassis 70SG, Sphinx (SA) Open-drive Limousine

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"Rolls-Royce Owners – Twelve in State" was the heading of an article in the 26 January 1926 edition of the Adelaide newspaper 'News', which was published from 1923 to 1954.

It continued: "There are 12 owners of Rolls-Royce cars in this State so far as can be ascertained from records. On account of this rather small number casual observers usually look twice if they happen to see a Rolls-Royce purring along. Among those who are stated to own one of these cars, which are regarded as the aristocrats of the road so far as the British automobile industry is concerned are Messrs T. E. Barr Smith, Glen Osmond: T. Tait, Oaklands: C. H. Angas, Angaston: G. Milne, Brougham Place, North Adelaide: J. M. Reid, Victoria Avenue, Unley Park: J. P. Lewis, Nelyambo Station, Wilcannia: Napier Birks, Park Terrace, Parkside: Mesdames W. T. Mortlock, Martindale Hall, Mintaro: L. Hughes, Lee Lodge, Strangways Terrace, North Adelaide: M. Symons, Walkerville: T.R. Scarfe, Eden Park, Marryatville: and Miss M. F. Simms, Moseley Street, Glenelg."

Dr Mark Johnston Symons (1854-1927) was a distinguished ophthalmologist. He was born at Dumfries, Scotland, and gained his medical qualifications in Edinburgh in 1875. He later studied at the Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital, Moorfields. Dr Symons arrived in South Australia in 1883. He married Ida Theresa Spicer (1860-1943) in 1894. He was appointed as lecturer in ophthalmic surgery at the University of Adelaide in 1886 and later was Dean of the Faculty of Medicine. Dr Symons was Honorary Ophthalmic Surgeon at Adelaide Hospital and Adelaide Children's Hospital. He was president of the local medical association 1891-1892. He retired in 1913.



Left: Images of Dr Symons from this portrait appeared with his obituaries in Adelaide newspapers in March 1927.

Right: Dr Symons wrote this letter on 4 December 1886 accepting the appointment of lecturer on Ophthalmic Surgery at the Adelaide University. [Source unrecorded.]

27 North Terrace
Adelaide.
Walter Lyster Esq:
Sir, I have the honour to
acknowledge receipt of your
communication informing me
that your Council had been
pleased to appoint me Lecturer
on Ophthalmic Surgery at the
Adelaide University; which
appointment I gratefully
accept.
I have the honour to be
Yours obedient servant
Dec 4th 1886 M. J. Symons

Dr Symons engaged prominent Adelaide architect, Edward J Woods (1839-1916) to design a neo-Gothic residence and consulting rooms on North Terrace in 1901. Woods had designed 'Martindale Hall', Mintaro, the one-time residence of the Mortlock family and Silver Ghost 2104. The premises were leased to Dr Symons's partner Dr Alexander Matheson Morgan (1867-1934), a fellow ophthalmic specialist, in 1909 and the title was formally transferred to Ida Symons in 1931.

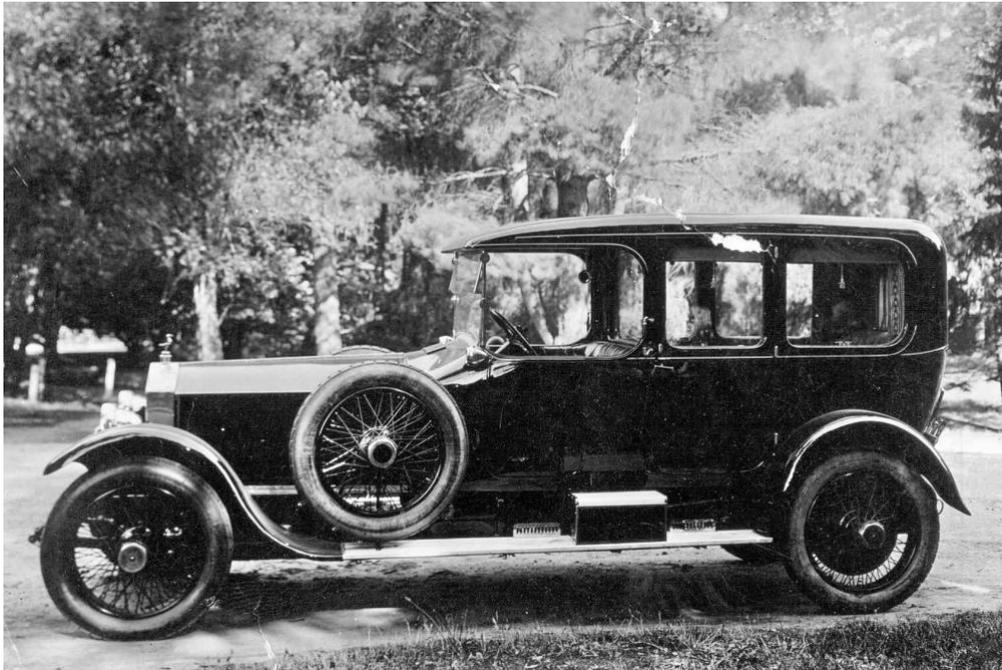


Left: This was the residence of Dr and Mrs Symons and his consulting rooms from 1901 to his retirement in 1913. Prominent Adelaide architect, Edward Woods's design, with the façade from Murray Bridge limestone, continues to add exuberance and diversity to the character of North Terrace, Adelaide. It is one of the few remaining Gothic secular structures in the city. [aquilareen via Flickr, 2019.]

Below: Dr Symons's residence was noted as at Walkerville in the 1926 newspaper article and this is most likely the property and possibly the home to which he retired. The residence where he died in 1927, 'Lincluden', Palmer Place, North Adelaide, was on a very much smaller block of land. [Source unrecorded.]



Dr Symons was the first owner of 1922 Silver Ghost, chassis 70SG. It was ordered from Motors Limited, Adelaide, via Dalgety & Company Ltd, London. The chassis was shipped in January 1922 and arrived at Motors Limited in April 1922. Sphinx Motor Garage, 141-143 Waymouth Street, Adelaide, constructed an open-drive limousine body and in July 1922 Silver Ghost 70SG was registered and delivered to Dr and Mrs Symons.



Above: 1922 Silver Ghost 70SG shown here when new with the Sphinx Motor Garage open-drive limousine for Dr and Mrs Symons. An image of this photograph appeared in the 13 January, 1923, issue of 'The Mail' under the heading "High-Class Body Work". The caption read, "The coachwork of this Rolls-Royce car was designed and built by the Sphinx Motor Body Builders ... to the order of an Adelaide client."

The Sphinx Motor Garage, founded by 1919, was financed by members of the Angas family and several of their cars were bodied by this firm. The company was established as a partnership between Archibald Malcolm Bartholomaeus (1891-1963), H Basedow and John J Beetles. Bartholomaeus was the motor engineer and Beetles was the body builder." Bartholomaeus previously worked for Murray Aunger Motor Co Ltd and Vivian Lewis Limited the oldest South Australian bicycle and motor cycle firm. Beetles formerly worked for Autocars Ltd, which took over from Murray Aunger Motor Co Ltd. Basedow was with the AIF in the mechanical transport division.

OPENING ON JUNE 16.		
SPHINX MOTOR GARAGE		
141-143 WAYMOUTH STREET, ADELAIDE, JUST EAST OF BROWN STREET.		
MR. MOTORIST. MOTOR BODY BUILDERS, TRIMMERS, AND PAINTERS.	OUR DEPARTMENTS ARE BEING EQUIPPED TO PRODUCE AT A PRICE AND QUALITY THAT WILL PERSUADE YOU TO BECOME A CUSTOMER. ALL TYRES, OILS, AND ACCESSORIES.	MR. REPAIRER. MOTOR ENGINEERS, MACHINISTS, BATTERIES, STARTING AND LIGHTING SYSTEMS.
↓		↓
John J. Beetles, late with MURRAY AUNGER MOTOR CO., LTD. AND AUTOCARS, LTD.	H. Basedow, LATE MECHANICAL TRANSPORTS, A.I.F.	Arch. Bartholomaeus, late with MURRAY AUNGER MOTOR CO., LTD. AND VIVIAN LEWIS, LTD.

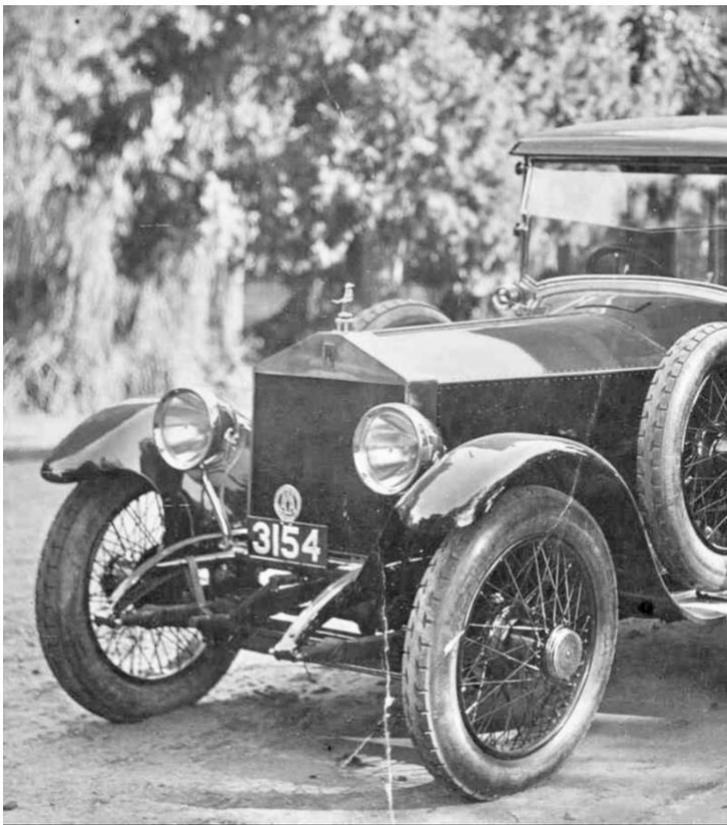
Above: The opening was announced in this advertisement in the 7 June 1919 edition of 'The Mail'.

The Sphinx Motor Garage was described in the 5 July 1919 edition of 'The Mail', "The garage is so equipped that it can overhaul a car, build a new, complete body, or trim and paint a car, all under expert supervision and under the one roof." The Sphinx Motor Garage was last listed in directories in 1925.

There was an earlier, though unrelated, Sphinx Motor Company established by Alec D Tyler in 1898 with the agency for De Dion Bouton. It operated in Peel Street, Adelaide, but only lasted about two years. Tyler later manufactured Sphinx motorcycles from 1903 to 1912.

WE SPECIALISE IN REPAIRS AND OVERHAULS.
Our Charges are Very Low.
Our Overhead Expenses are Small.
SPHINX MOTOR GARAGE,
MOTOR ENGINEERS, TRIMMERS, PAINTERS,
BODY BUILDERS,
LIGHT SQUARE, S.E. 'Phone 1903.
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Left: This advertisement appeared in the 5 November 1921 edition of 'The Mail'.



The construction of 70SG was described in 'The Mail' on 13 January 1923, "The interior is trimmed in pale buff tone Bedford cord, with excellent laces to match. All the latest fittings, such as mechanical window lifts, reading lights, neatly folding extra seats, lady's companion, gent's ashtray, arm-slings, speaking tube, roof rack, trigger spring blinds, etc., having been included...painted in a blue-and-black colour scheme." Dr Symons, who was now in his late 60s, no doubt enjoyed the luxuriously comfortable coachwork. There was however an unusual adornment to the radiator cap.

Left: The unusual mascot on Silver Ghost 70SG. The number plate 3154 had been issued to Dr Symons earlier on 20 February 1913. [Courtesy Stephen Menadue and National Motor Museum.]

Silver Ghost 70SG when new had a mascot of a pixie seated on a mile-stone rather than the Spirit of Ecstasy. Barrie Gillings, RROCA Foundation Member, wrote in the April 1961 issue of the American Club's 'The Flying Lady', the directors of Rolls-Royce announced in March 1911 that they, "were somewhat appalled in noticing that a few owners of Rolls-Royce cars had attached to the water caps of the radiators very grotesque forms of mascots, such as gollywogs, policemen and black cats." Accordingly, in 1911 Charles R Sykes (1875-1950) designed, "the graceful little lady ... as the figurehead of the Rolls-Royce." Would Dr Symons's pixie mascot have incurred the displeasure of the Rolls-Royce directors? Absolutely.



Above: "Early mascots - undignified and flippant." was the caption for this image from Barrie Gillings's article, 'The Spirit of Ecstasy', in the April 1961 issue of 'The Flying Lady'. They were examples of mascots that appalled the Rolls-Royce directors and led to Charles Sykes being commissioned to create what became known as the Spirit of Ecstasy.



Above: Dr Symons's mascot, a pixie sitting on a milestone, survives. Whimsical or grotesque? [Courtesy of Phil Keane, via Roly Forrs and Gavin Sandford-Morgan.]

The registration of Silver Ghost 70SG was transferred to Ida Symons in 1927 after the death of her husband. By 1930 Wood Coffill Ltd, funeral directors, Sydney, operated Silver Ghost 70SG as a mourning car and then fitted a hearse body in about 1938.

Right: Silver Ghost 70SG as a mourning car was one of the Wood Coffill funeral vehicles at the enormous 1930 funeral procession of John Brown, coal magnate, ship owner and racehorse breeder in Newcastle and the Hunter Valley of NSW. The hearse is 1912 Silver Ghost chassis 2177. [Courtesy of John Hughes.]



It was with the 1938 hearse body that Barrie Gillings acquired 70SG in about 1955. The hearse body was replaced with a vintage period Crossley tourer body.



Above: A side view of Silver Ghost 70SG with the Wood Coffill hearse body when Barrie Gillings acquired in about 1955. [Courtesy of Margaret and Barrie Gillings.]

Right: Silver Ghost 70SG with its late 1930s hearse body at a petrol station on the approach to Sydney Harbour Bridge. [Courtesy of Margaret and Barrie Gillings.]





Above: Silver Ghost 70SG in chassis form after the hearse body was removed. [Courtesy of Margaret and Barrie Gillings.]

It was sold to Kevon Kemp, also a RROCA Foundation Member, and 70SG was fitted with an early 1930s Humber saloon body. The succession of RROCA members continued as Ian Irwin noted in 'Silver Ghosts of Australia and New Zealand Cameo Histories of the Post-War Cars'. It was next with Tom Cattell, Mt Druitt, Sydney, from about 1967 to 1997. Then to Ben Bronk's Motor Museum at Watsons Bay, Sydney. Jim Redman next fitted a tourer body by George Williams, Sydney. In the 1980s it went to John Carter, Moss Vale, NSW and in about 1985 Carter built a single-seater boat-tailed body of his own design. Bill Maunsell, Sydney, purchased it at auction in 1987 and it was again sold at auction in 1999. Then 70SG went to George Blenkhorn, Pakenham, Victoria, with its seventh body, a May Bros tourer, and is now with his daughter, Ruth Roberts. Silver Ghost 70SG now has a Spirit of Ecstasy mascot. Would those Rolls-Royce directors from 1911 have approved posthumously? Absolutely.



Left: Silver Ghost 70SG at the 1987 Wemyss auction now with the single-seater boat-tail body that John Carter built. [Courtesy of Margaret and Barrie Gillings.]

Below: Silver Ghost 70SG with its seventh body a May Bros tourer. [Courtesy of George Blenkhorn.]

