

## The Melbourne Lord Mayor, The Rolls-Royce and The Top Hat

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The name of Melbourne City Council's new Lord Mayor, elected in November 1931, posed a problem. "Lord Mayor Gengoult Smith" was the heading in the *Tasmanian Advocate* on 15 October 1931. It went on, "Gengoult – how does one pronounce it? The first name (sic) of the new Lord Mayor of Melbourne is puzzling many people. This may give those in doubt a lead. Endeavour to capture a French accent, and make the name



"Jon-Jou". In fact, his first name was Harold and while his surname was Smith he embellished it by adding his middle name, Gengoult. Middle names are sometimes drawn from family members and this was the case here. Gengoult is a French surname and Harold's maternal great-grandfather was French – Louis Thomas Gengoult. Harold's father was Dr Louis Lawrence Smith (1830-1910) and Harold followed in his medical footsteps and commenced studying medicine in Edinburgh. At the outbreak of World War I, he joined the British Army as a lieutenant in the Dragoon Guards. After being wounded in France he returned to Edinburgh University where he graduated in medicine in 1917.

*Top: While a photograph of Melbourne Council's Rolls-Royce Phantom I has not been found, it would have looked similar to this 1926 Phantom I with coachwork by Martin & King. It comes from a 1935 advertisement for Melbourne's City Motor Service. To complete the picture, imagine a higher roof line to accommodate the Lord Mayor's top hat and the chauffeur and footman in plum coloured livery. [The Home, 1 January 1935, courtesy the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW]*

**Above:** Harold Gengoult Smith (1890-1983) was Lord Mayor of Melbourne 1931-34 [State Library Victoria IE707743]

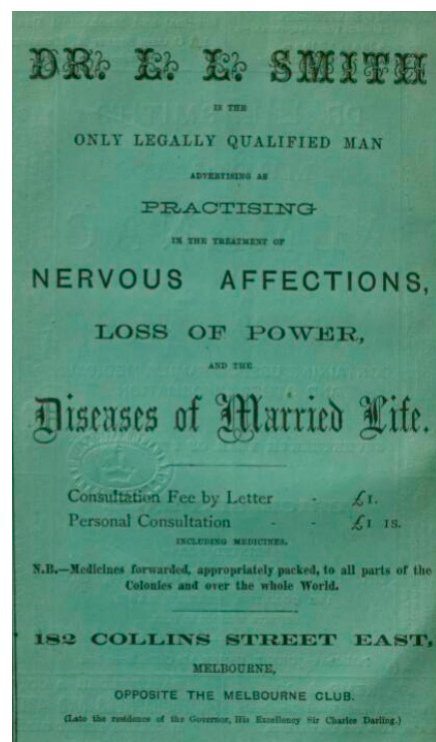
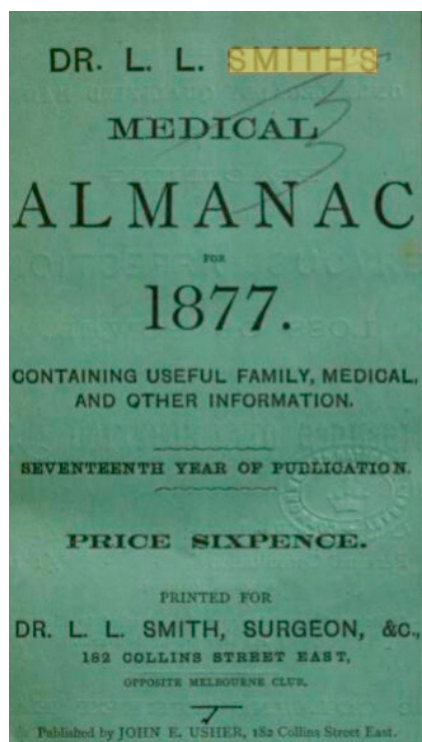
81	Baptisms solemnized in the Parish of <i>S. Peter</i> in the County of <i>Burke</i> Victoria, A.D. 1890							
Number.	When Baptized.	When Born.	Child's Christian Name.	Parents' Names.		Abode.	Quality or Profession.	Signature of Officiating Clergyman.
				Christian.	Surname.			
10371	28 September	25 July 1890	Harold Gengoult	Louis Lawrence	Smith	Collins St	M. R.	H. H. P. Handley

**Above:** The baptism record clearly shows Harold Gengoult as Christian names and Smith as the surname. [Ancestry]



**Above:** The residence of Dr Smith, 41 Collins Street, Melbourne about 1916. [Royal Historical Society of Victoria A129D]

**Below:** Portrait of Dr Smith in 1875. Dr Smith's Medical Almanac for 1877. Dr Smith advertised his medical practice very widely and offered consultations by mail. Treatment was available for "Nervous Affections, Loss of Power and Diseases of Married Life." [National Library of Australia 4557051 and Trove]



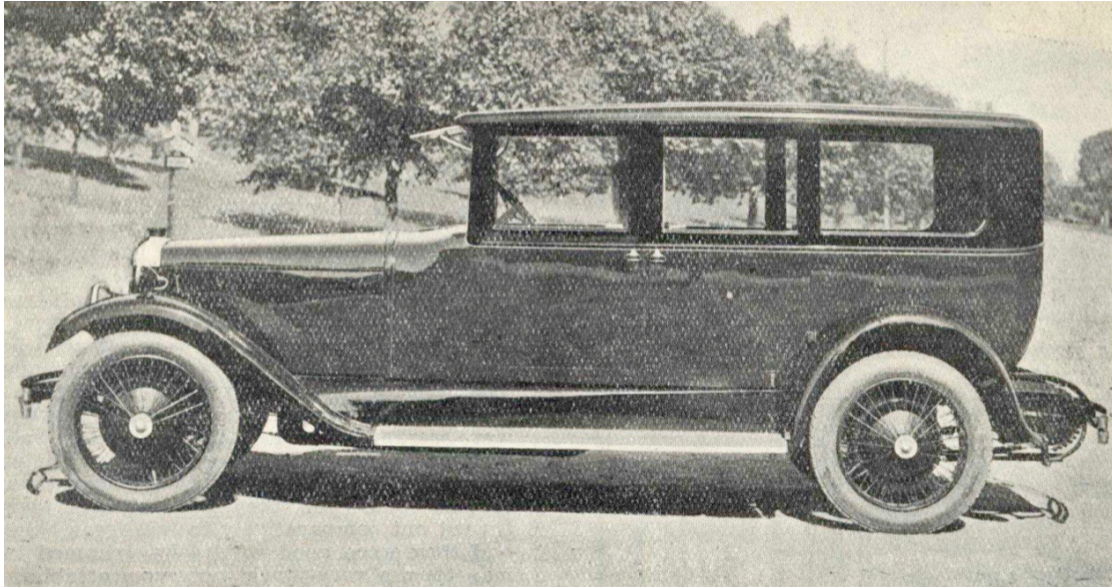


The title of "Lord Mayor" was conferred on the position of the Mayor of Melbourne by King Edward VII on 18 December 1902. Gengoult Smith was a bachelor when he was elected Lord Mayor. Initially, it was thought that his sister Louise (1883-1962), who had made her life in Paris, might stand in as Lady Mayoress. However, that did not eventuate and it was not until December 1933 when Gengoult Smith married that Melbourne had a Lady Mayoress during his three years in office. On 6 December 1933 he married Miss Cynthia Brookes (1912-1961), daughter of former international tennis player Norman (Sir in 1939) Brookes (1877-1968), who won the Wimbledon Gentlemen's Singles in 1907 and 1914. The groom was 43 and the bride was 21. They had two children.

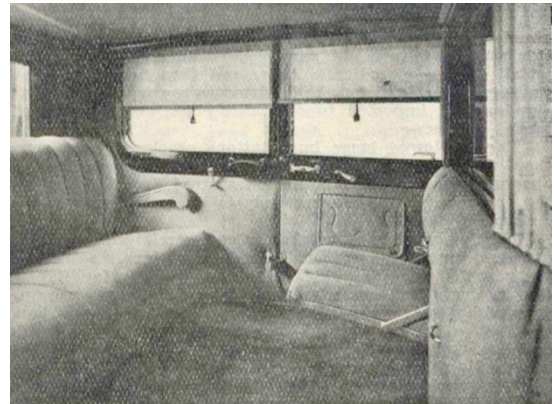


*Above: "The Lady Mayoress of Melbourne" was the title of this wedding portrait. The wedding was described elsewhere as "a 2,000-guest job". [The Home 2 January 1934]*

The Lord Mayor's car was a Daimler when Gengoult Smith took up the duties. The limousine body was built by the Melbourne firm of Kellow-Falkiner. The Melbourne *Argus* reported on 5 August 1933, "Rolls Royce for Lord Mayor. After nine years in the service of various Lord Mayors of Melbourne a Daimler limousine, which cost slightly more than £1,700, is considered to be obsolete. The council at its meeting on Wednesday will discuss a recommendation from the general purposes committee that a second-hand Rolls-Royce, with an Australian body, be bought for about £1,500 for the use of the Lord Mayor. The car is a 40-50 horsepower Phantom model. The committee recommends also that authority be given to sell the Daimler car. It is understood that the Daimler has been written off the books for some time."



*Above and right: In 1925 this limousine body on a Daimler chassis was built for the Lord Mayor by the Melbourne firm of Kellow-Falkiner. [The Coach and Motor Builder 15 March 1925]*



The proposal went ahead and the 1926 Phantom I chassis 84DC was purchased. Originally a Hooper bodied cabriolet in England, it was imported as a chassis by a Melbourne syndicate. The Melbourne firm of Martin & King was commissioned to build the body and there was a least one requirement as noted by the *Advocate* in Burnie, Tasmania, on 23 August 1933, "Special Car Body for Lord Mayor's Top Hat. Melbourne, Tuesday – The 40.50 h.p. Rolls Royce car which, it was announced to-day, had been bought for use of the Lord Mayor (Cr. H. Gengoult Smith) will have a body specially built to allow the passengers to wear top hats."

Marking Gengoult Smith's election to a third term, Hobart's *Mercury* on 11 October 1933 observed, "Though there is no hard and fast rule of etiquette on the matter it has hitherto been the custom for a Lord Mayor who has completed his third term of office to receive a knighthood from the King, and, apparently in anticipation of glories to come, the Lord Mayor has ordained that in place of the sombre navy blue uniforms worn by officers of the City Council they shall be apparelled in a rich claret shade to match the colour of the new Lord Mayoral Rolls-Royce, that will be placed in commission shortly, and will sport a chauffeur and footman clad in the same festive hue."

Seemingly, taking a cue from “festive hue”, three days later, Melbourne’s *Argus* on 14 October 1933 joined in with this ode by “Oriël”,

When the big drums growl, “Boom! Boom!”  
When the trumpets blare, “Room! Room!”  
When the cymbals say  
“Make way! Make way!”  
You may ask, “Make way for whom?”

When the whole band shouts, “Rejoice!”  
We acclaim the Council’s choice!  
Loud hail! all hail!  
On a stately scale  
To the Lord Mayor in his Royce!

For he moves with the might of storms,  
With lieges and squires in swarms,  
With servitors  
To open the doors  
Clad in glittering uniforms.

And the eager thousands swoon,  
O’ercome by the gracious boon  
Of the thrilling sight  
Of the Mayoral might  
In a Rolls enamelled maroon.

Let the glad bells clash their laud,  
And the thronging crowds applaud,  
And the bugles bray  
On the gracious day,  
When the Lord Mayor rides abroad.

The Lord Mayor was awarded a knighthood in the King’s Birthday Honours in June 1934 and completed his term as Sir Harold Gengoult Smith.

The *Adelaide Advertiser* reflected on Sir Harold’s time as Lord Mayor in its “Melbourne Gossip” column on 14 February 1935 as he was about to depart for a trip to England, “He will be much missed from the city. He introduced a new element into municipal affairs. Before him, the majority of mayors had been solid burghers of much worth but little flamboyancy. Sir Harold Gengoult Smith, while being equally worthy, changed all that. His exquisite morning coats, his cravats and his grey topplers were the joy of tailors. He put the Town Hall staff into plum colored livery and drove majestically in a plum coloured Rolls Royce. His faultless manners and his general bearing showed Melbourne what a Lord Mayor could really be when he set his mind to it. The city was not only interested, but it came to regard its chief citizen with considerable affection.

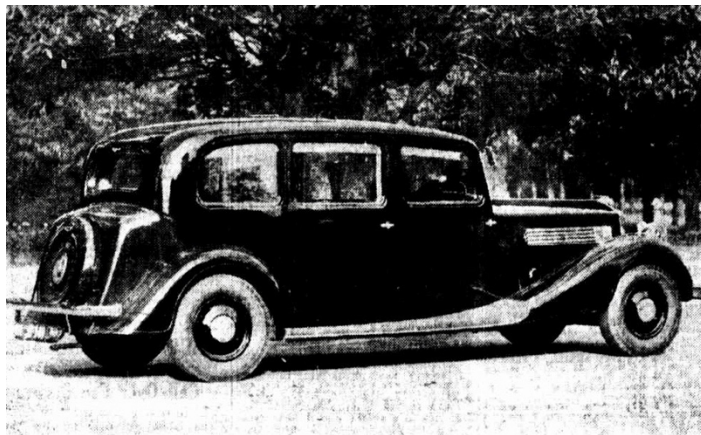


With a kind and friendly word for everyone, Sir Harold Gengoult Smith was, perhaps, the most popular Lord Mayor Melbourne has had. Incidentally, it is rumoured that, in his generous entertaining during his term, he spent a large portion of his private resources.”

Not only were Sir Harold’s personal attendants and Rolls-Royce plum coloured he registered the “all claret” colours with the Victoria Racing Club for his yearling filly, *Lady Cynthia*, reported in Melbourne’s Herald on 19 June 1934.

The Gengoult Smiths spent time in England and Scotland in 1935 where Sir Harold undertook post-graduate studies after which he was elected to the Royal College of Physicians, Edinburgh. Lady Gengoult Smith took a flat in Edinburgh while her husband was studying and was quoted as saying, “Housekeeping in Edinburgh is simplified by the excellent service, and £1 a week is considered sufficient for the best of maids.” They played a lot of golf she added, “There is a wonderful club in Edinburgh called the Braid Hill Club, where one pays an entrance fee of 2/6 and 6d for every round. It has two perfect courses in perfect condition.”

*Right: Sir Harold and Lady Gengoult Smith. This portrait was taken in London in April 1935. [National Portrait Gallery, London, NPGx151618]*



*Left: In May 1937 the City Council approved the purchase of a 25 h.p. seven-passenger Wolseley limousine for £803 after an allowance was made for the Rolls-Royce. The Wolseley had an English body. [The Age 20 May 1937]*

Sir Harold personally owned six Rolls-Royces, recorded in *Rolls-Royce and Bentley in the Sunburnt Country*, though none from new: 1923 Twenty 44G8 in the 1930s; 1926 Twenty GUK68 in 1947; 1936 25/30 h.p. GUL12 in 1950; 1928 Phantom I 43CL in 1950; 1934 Phantom II 60SK in 1946-57; Phantom III 3AZ56 in the 1950s. Lady Gengoult Smith owned 1936 Bentley 4¼ litre B172HK in 1946. Sir Harold died in 1983 aged 92 so he may have had later model Rolls-Royces.



When Sir Harold was in his seventies a journalist described him as, “The last dyed-in-the-tweed romantic.” Although Sir Harold appropriated his French ancestry into his surname, he was very British and more likely to slap his knee and exclaim “By Jove!” than press his palm to his forehead and cry out “Sacré Bleu!”.

*Left: Sir Harold on the left dressed with top hat, morning suit and spatterdashes with gloves to match. Pictured here with Lady Gengoult Smith at a Government House garden party hosted by the Victorian Governor Sir Winston and Lady Dugan in April 1948. [The Age 2 April 1948]*

### Postscript That Damn Top Hat

Burnie's *Advocate* reported on 8 March 1946, “A new Rolls-Royce car to be bought for the Lord Mayor of Melbourne will be built high enough to permit the wearing of a top hat with ease. Purchase of the car has been approved by the City Council. The new car is expected to cost between £3,500 and £5,000. It will not be obtainable for nine to 12 months.”

The car was 1947 Silver Wraith, chassis WVA71, a Park Ward limousine in maroon delivered by Kellow-Falkiner in December 1947. A pennant, of blue silk with a six-pointed red star surmounted by a gold crown was flown on the Silver Wraith. The English College of Heralds, by letters patent, granted the City Council the right to use the pennant in 1908.

But ... that damn top hat! “Rolls-Royce Too Small” was the heading in Perth's *Daily News* on 18 March 1948, “The Melbourne City Council's £5,000 Rolls-Royce car, bought for the use of the Lord Mayor, is now in the agent's garage undergoing structural alterations to provide more space above the back seat. It was found when the car was delivered there was not clearance for the Lord Mayor's plumed hat or the toppers of distinguished visitors.”

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