

*The following article has been sent in from **Neil & Lyn Wakeman**, members in Australia.*

Several years ago, I set out to collect every book written on the life of Lord Nuffield – there are not that many, as he was an apparently a very private person. In fact, one book I have, ‘The Nuffield Story’ by Robert Jackson (1964) notes on the fly leaf inside the front cover, that “While he lived, Lord Nuffield’s threat of law suits precluded any objective criticism of him being made: now it is possible to probe deeply into his character.”

In his book “Nuffield A Biography” by Martin Adeney, 1993 echoes those thoughts “But then here is a man whose life was full of contradiction, a man who even revised accounts of his early life, discouraging and threatening legal action against potential biographers

But I digress – Lord Nuffield had his detractors over the ‘iron lung’ donation – Adeney writes that the decision by Lord Nuffield to make 5,000 iron lungs was “a typical Morris decision – spur of the moment, idiosyncratic and blockbusting” and that “The device was still only experimental and Morris was bitterly attacked by the medical press for jumping the gun and forcing the iron lung on the profession”

MOTOR CARS, IRON LUNGS AND VENTILATORS

In the past couple of weeks, we’ve seen news reports about car makers and others turning their attention and facilities over to the production of life saving ventilators, items of medical equipment of vital importance in the treatment of people with COVID-19.

US car giants Ford and General Motors, Japan’s Nissan, Volkswagen and Italy’s Ferrari and Fiat group are reportedly working to expedite the manufacture and development of hospital ventilators and other devices to treat those impacted by **COVID-19**.

In UK, Dyson, the British technology company best known for its high-powered vacuum cleaners, hair dryers and fans, has reportedly started to produce ventilators and closer to home, last Saturday’s Age newspaper reports that Holden Special Vehicles in Melbourne is poised to produce ventilators using its facilities and equipment, such as sophisticated 3D printers.

It is said that history often repeats and in this case, that’s pretty right.

As most of you will know, I am a bit of a car enthusiast, whose main interest is in cars made by Morris Motors, including Morris, MG, Riley and Wolseley. I have also developed a keen interest in the life of William Morris, the founder and owner of the company for more than 40 years.

Morris was an amazing man - he not only built up one of Britain's largest companies, but he was also a great philanthropist reputed to have made £30 million during his lifetime, and for giving away £27 million of that to different British charities, especially universities and hospitals. We're talking about 1930's money - according to the UK Office for National Statistics, after inflation, £27m in 1930 would be worth "about" £1,776,449,175.47 (don't forget the 47p!) in today's terms. Morris was awarded about every honour that could be bestowed upon him for his dual roles as an industrialist and philanthropist, including a knighthood and admission to the peerage (Viscount, then Lord Nuffield).

During the 1930s and 1940s, polio was cutting a swathe across the UK and the rest of the world. The vaccines developed by Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin were still years away. Polio affected people, especially children, in different ways. As an infectious disease affecting the central nervous system, some people would experience temporary or permanent paralysis of the limbs, or of the chest muscles. For the latter, the only treatment option was an iron lung. Few hospitals were able to afford the £1,000 each machine cost at that time.

Lord Nuffield began his mission to spread iron lungs across the world and in 1938, after hearing a plea for an iron lung on the radio, he set up an area in one of his factories to manufacture 5,000 of them. The company actually produced 1,700 of the Australian designed* Both-type iron lungs, before WWII intervened and the factory was turned over to the war effort.

These life support machines were donated to hospitals all over Britain and the Commonwealth, including many hospitals in Australia. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NR-HcKmLjiA> for a very interesting and amazingly clear 1930s era newsreel on the subject.

*The Australian connection:

Two years before World War II there was a severe outbreak of poliomyelitis in Adelaide and South Australian engineers, brothers Ted

and Don Both, were asked by the SA Health Department to develop an iron lung”, although their machine was built mainly from wood. They soon produced the “Both Cabinet Respirator” in their work room behind the Adelaide Museum.

There had been an earlier American version, but the Adelaide design was much simpler and cheaper to manufacture. During the summer of 1937-38, such was the demand for the iron lung, that within an hour of each one being completed, it was being used by a patient. Both designs soon won world acclaim.



Acknowledgements: *British Museum; South Australian Medical Heritage Society Inc, 'The Life of Lord Nuffield' by Andrews and Brunner (1955)*