

HAROLD CONNOLLY

1893 - 1973

I recently wrote an article in *The Automobile* (February 2008) on Harold Connolly see below. (It is reproduced courtesy of *The Automobile*). Since writing the article I have had chance to read the book 'Oxford to Abingdon' in which many Connolly advertisements are reproduced, particularly the black and white press illustrations. Some of his pencil line work in these advertisements is very bold and striking, not in a style that I would normally associate with Connolly.

592
THE AUTOCAR.
ADVERTISEMENTS.
PART THREE, 3 PUBLICISING THE SIX
JUNE 28TH, 1929.

Why MG ?



Out of compliment to SIR WILLIAM MORRIS, Bart., we named our production the M.G. Sports, the letters being the initials of his original business undertaking, "The Morris Garages," from which has sprung that vast group of separate enterprises including

The M.G. Car Company

Oxford

Image courtesy of Robin Barraclough and Phil Jennings

HAROLD CONNOLLY

Artist and Illustrator

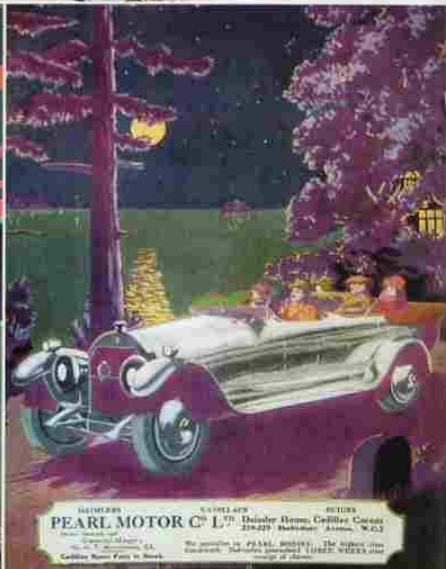
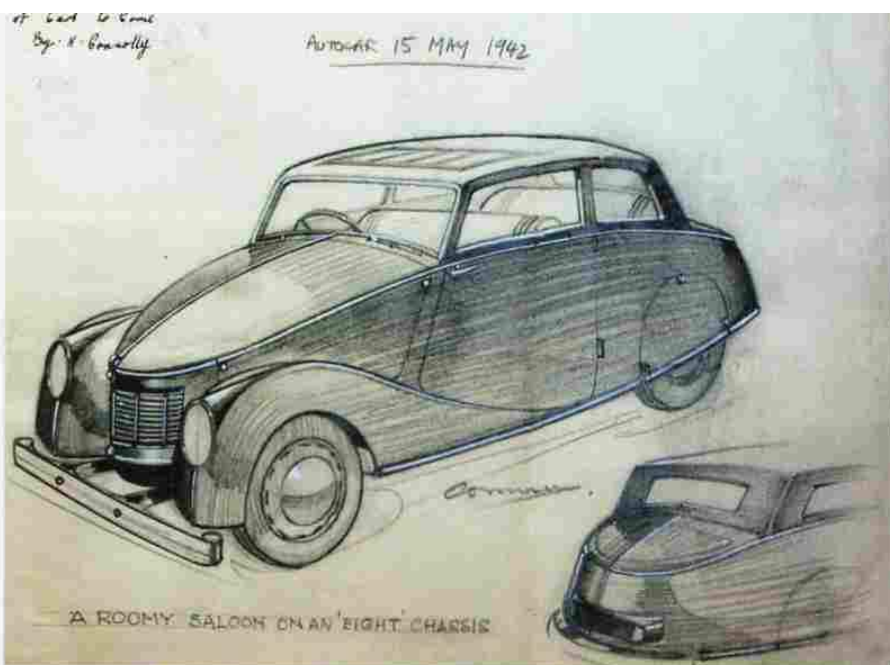
Although he is best remembered for his brochure illustrations for MG in the 1930s, Harold Connolly (1893-1973) provided illustrations for many other manufacturers and magazines, as **Tony Clark** recalls

Harold Connolly was one of the foremost commercial artists/illustrators of his time. We are very lucky that his son Louis has researched and gathered information about his father, and that quite a lot of his original art has survived, albeit mainly post-WWII.

Louis Connolly, with the assistance of others, has published two books entitled *The Motoring Art of Harold Connolly*. The first edition of 2003 was in soft-back format, but the second of 2004 is greatly expanded and hard-backed. The latest has considerably more detail of his artwork for both MG and other vehicle manufacturers. The books can be obtained at a cost of £20 plus p&p from Louis Connolly, Icon Publications, Bush Street East, Southsea, Hampshire PO5 3BL (02392870556) or via e-mail to louconnolly@tiscali.co.uk. The basis of both books is an illustrated hand-made volume produced by Harold in later life, when he chronicled some of the major events in his life with original paintings and text.

Harold Connolly was born in 1893 in Wolverhampton. From very early days his father had a car, starting off with a de Dion Bouton, so Harold was brought up in a prosperous motoring family. Following army service in WWI, he left for London to work as an artist. This would appear to have been a bold decision as he had no formal art training and was entirely self-taught. There is evidence that at least as early as October, 1919, he was producing commercial advertisements that appeared in *The Motor Owner*, so it is likely that he had built up a portfolio of artwork for local advertisements for the motor industry centred on the Midlands.

It is often difficult to trace the careers of commercial illustrators because so little of the artwork is signed, due to the constraints of the client or publishing house. Fortunately, Louis Connolly has been able to track work from his father's early period for such magazines as *Motor Cycling*, *The Light Car* and *Cyclecar*, *The Motor Owner*, *The Morris Owner* and *The Motor*. Harold also had early commissions from motor manufacturers, including Austin, Cadillac, Crossley, Morris and Triumph. He produced his first catalogue artwork for MG cars in 1929, and



Top: Illustration for 'a roomy saloon on an Eight chassis' from *Cars to Come* in *The Autocar* of 15th May, 1942
 Centre: An early Connolly after the style of Montaut
 Above left: An advertisement for BTH Magnetos
 Above right: Illustration for the Pearl Motor Company, specialists in Daimler, Cadillac, Buick and Pearl coachwork

A Jaguar SS100 against a Brooklands back-drop



**THE M.G. MIDGET
SPORTS FOUR-SEATER
Model J1**
Unsupercharged £220
as Works

This smart Sports Four-Seater body has been designed to meet the need for more room than is provided in the two-seater model, without sacrificing that excellence of road-holding and high standard of sporting performance.

The body, which is available in a pleasing range of colours, is extremely smart with its low build and long bonnet lines. The general ease of handling and the amazing way in which it corners justifies our well-known "Safety Fast!" M.G. slogan.



SAFETY FAST!



THE CAR WITH THE RACING PEDIGREE



MIDGET

Entirely new
body design
Two carburetors
Ten miles
an hour faster
More commodious
cockpit
Twelve volt
lighting and
starting
Brakes better
than ever
Racing type
wheels on
all models

Far left: An advertisement for the MG Midget J1 four-seater with the same Brooklands setting as in the Jaguar illustration. Left: Another MG Midget showing the sports car against a ghosted image of the then current racing car.



The M.G. Magnette K3 Racing Model. Unsupercharged £595. Supercharged £695. With Pre-selector Gearbox.

TANGYE JACKS

SAVES TIME, WORRY
AND MONEY

Obtainable from all
Motor Agents, Garages
and Factors.

Representative Dealer from:
IMPERIAL
ROTOR INDUSTRIES
(1911) Limited,
DENMARK ST.
LONDON,
W.C.2



Inset far left: Connolly's vertical signature style. Left: Illustration for MG Magnette K3 at £695 supercharged. Above: An advertisement for Tangye Jacks which appeared in *The Motor Owner*, November 1919. Notice the vertical signature to the left of the front wheel.



THE 1933 M.G. MAGNETTE 'K' SERIES



expanded his client base to include AC, Chevrolet, Chrysler, Dodge, Lagonda, Lancia, Renault, Singer and Wolseley. He must have been extremely busy managing such diverse demands, particularly around Motor Show time, when manufacturers would want their new models illustrated.

The second war effectively ended his flourishing career. During the war years he did some work on posters, illustrated manuals and wrote articles about future trends in car design. For a short time, he was also a cartoonist for the *Sunday Chronicle*. Immediately after the war there was little need for motor publicity as the industry struggled with shortage of materials and most of the vehicles produced were exported. By then, the camera was making continual inroads into advertising.

These must have been difficult times for a motoring illustrator, but by 1949 we know he was back in the field, drawing motorcycles for *The Motor Cycle* and car drawings for a variety of clients, including a run of front cover illustrations for *Car and Car Topics* in 1952. He also produced two series of 24 cigarette-type cards depicting different types of vintage and veteran cars, which were issued by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) in 1957. Special albums were printed so card-collectors could assemble their sets. The original artwork for these sets appeared about 15 years ago broken into several lots in an Onslow's London auction. Although it has been dispersed it is still in existence. Harold also illustrated a book called *Pioneer Motorcycles*, which consisted of 50 black and white illustrations with text by C E Allen, published in 1962. The original illustrations for this, too, survive.

Harold died in 1973, but prior to that Louis Connolly had tried to record his father's memories with the aid of a tape recorder in 1970. This was not entirely successful. It resulted in Harold writing his own précis of his career, which proved an invaluable source of information for the book, particularly when added to that contained in the hand-written, illustrated journal. The only regret is that Louis did not start compiling the publication until 1999, so other source data and photographs which would have been available within the family had been lost.

So what of Connolly's art? One can see a considerable change from the fairly heavy, bold gouache colour work of his early period to the later thin watercolours typified by the ROSPA series. The style also moves with the times from art deco realism to more of a cartoon style. The one thing that characterises Connolly's work is the flat treatment of the body panels of the vehicles. At times they have the appearance of a single colour applied by airbrush; the reflections are concentrated on the metal folds and wings. Not for him the fussy details of shadows and reflections beloved by many of his contemporaries. The relatively plain and flat colour he used assisted reproduction in print, while the lack of visual complexity allowed the illustrations to be easily reduced to smaller sized images for the brochures. There is one advertisement signed by Connolly, though, for the Pearl Motor Company in 1919, which does show multiple reflections.

Unfortunately the relative inactivity of the war years took its toll on his art, as his post-war work has lost strength and vitality, and is somewhat a pastiche of his hey-day. Although these works are instantly recognisable as the work of Connolly, they have been reduced by simplicity to near-cartoon style.

Connolly was a complete master of vehicle

illustration. Without doubt, his finest portfolio was the art for MG cars during the 1930s. He would have been fully aware of the work of Gordon Crosby and Leslie Grimes, who both contributed to early MG publicity and company designs. His watercolour illustrations for MG sale brochures over many years are well known and widely copied. The front cover rendering for the sales brochure of the MG Midget (J1 and J2), showing the sports car against a ghosted image of the then current racing car, is particularly effective.

However, possibly his best MG works are the pastel illustrations (a medium not normally associated with his art) for the sales brochure of the 1937 MG VA 1.5-litre. Fortunately the original art of several brochure illustrations survives in collections.

We are fortunate, too, that most of the MG art and a large number of his other illustrations are signed with a horizontal upper case CONNOLLY with an exaggerated stroke to the y. Around 1919, the signature is in a vertical format. In addition to the two Ls being superimposed there is a strange circular device in the middle obliterating the double N. Initially this was thought to be a flourish of the two Ns, but is now felt to show JSD in a circle, presumably the logo of a design agency. The same has been seen superimposed on another artist's signature and on other unsigned advertisements. Some of the later pieces of Connolly's art are signed with the abbreviated form of CON/. The diagonal line at the end seems to reflect the exaggerated stroke to the y of the full signature.

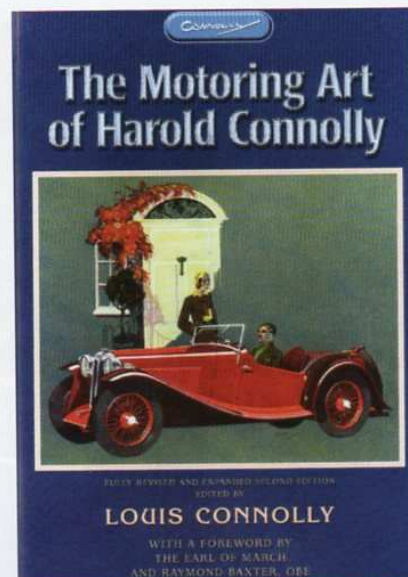
The value of original Connolly pieces of artwork is possibly not as high as one would expect from its interest and relative scarcity. Black and white illustrations can be bought for around £100, and colour artwork for £200. However, as always, the price is dependent on the subject material. For example, the colour MG catalogue illustrations might cost more than £1000 when they come on the market.

The legacy of Harold Connolly in the development of automobile illustration is extremely important. He exhibited excellent draftsmanship together with a simplistic style that properly conveyed the right sales image.

Special thanks to Louis Connolly for permission to use some of the information in The Motoring Art of Harold Connolly, and for the photograph of Harold himself



Harold Connolly with cigarette, wife and Morris



Many Happy Returns!

Top: Louis Connolly's *The Motoring Art of Harold Connolly*. Centre: Protecting a 1912 Star from the elements. Above: F D Roosevelt's 62nd birthday sketch

MORRIS LIGHT VANS



Morris Light vans sales brochure circa 1933. Image courtesy Peter Card – Transport Collector Auctions

FURTHER REFERENCE

The Motoring Art of Harold Connolly by Louis Connolly published Icon Publications. Two editions, softbound 2003 and revised hardbound 2004

Oxford to Abingdon by Barraclough and Jennings published Myrtle Publishing 1998