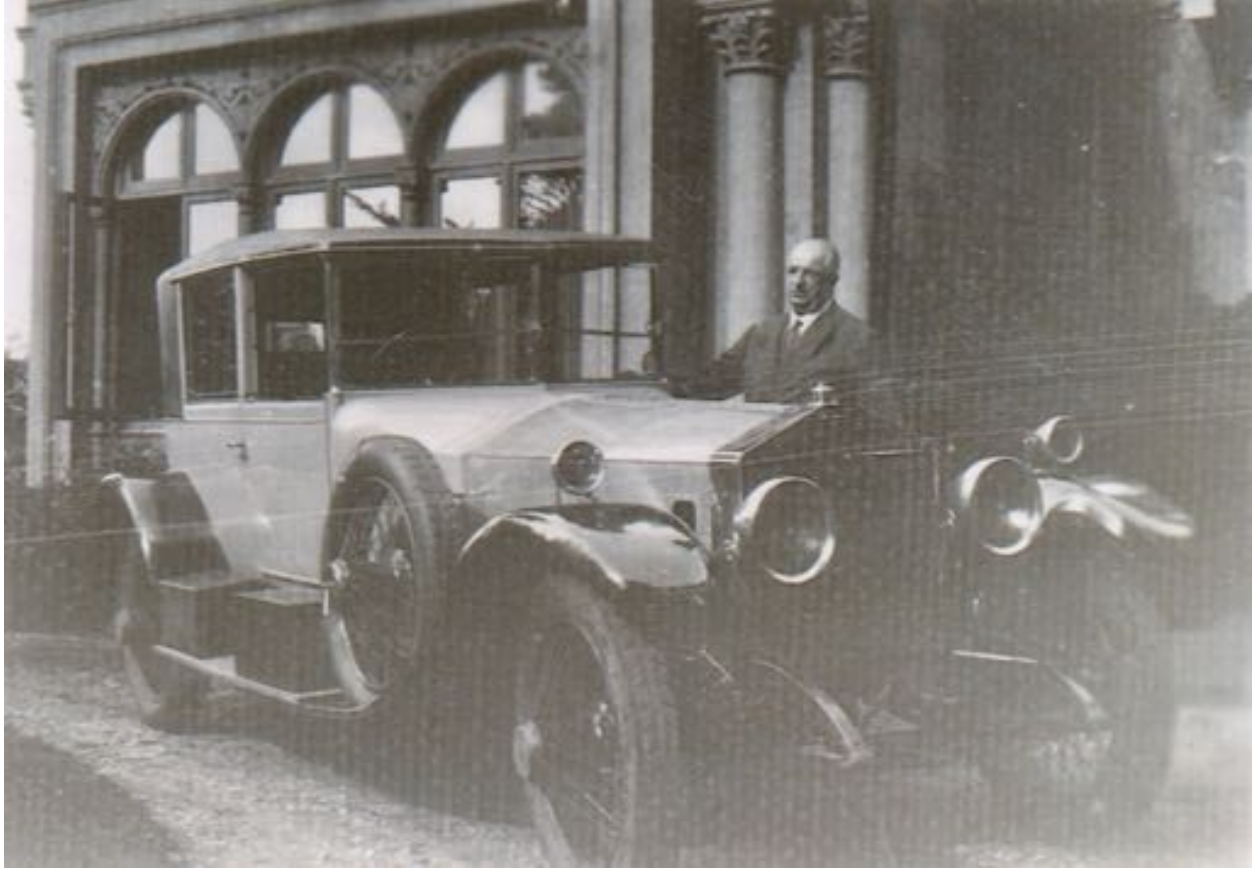




Ralph Falkiner of Kellow-Falkiner
The Melbourne Agents for Rolls-Royce and later Bentley

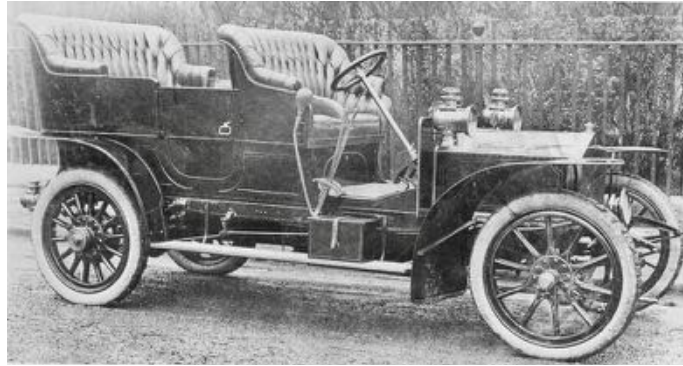
David Neely
History Consultant
The Sir Henry Royce Foundation, Australia

Ralph Sadleir Falkiner (1877-1946) was in the second generation of the family in Australia. Falkiner and three of his four brothers owned Rolls-Royces as did two of his nephews. With a dozen or so Rolls-Royces owned by half a dozen family members it is an automotive and genealogical maze.

Falkiner had 1920 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, chassis 35TW, a Harrison allweather tourer, which he purchased in London and brought to Australia in 1927. Additionally, in about 1933 he purchased 1919 Silver Ghost, chassis 63TW, a tourer by a Glasgow firm. He kept it in England when he lived there for some years.

Above: Ralph Falkiner with his 1920 Silver Ghost, chassis 35TW, at his UK home, Colley Manor, Reigate, Surrey in the 1920s. [Bill Falkiner, Queensland]

The most notable family connection with Rolls-Royce was when Ralph's brother, Leigh Sadleir Falkiner (1880-1952), was a passenger in the first Rolls-Royce to arrive in Australia. He was onboard 1906 Rolls-Royce Heavy 20 h.p., chassis 40509, when it undertook a 600 miles trial run around the Western District of Victoria in February 1907. Charles B Kellow (1871-1943), who imported the car, was at the wheel.



*Above: Leigh Falkiner was a passenger in this car, the first Rolls-Royce to come to Australia.
[Fasal & Goodman, The Edwardian Rolls-Royce]*

Kellow acquired the Australian Rolls-Royce agency in 1906 for the Kellow Motor Company. In 1913 Ralph Falkiner went into partnership with Kellow to form the Melbourne firm of Kellow-Falkiner. Kellow had by 1912 incurred some hefty fines from the Customs Department, equivalent to about \$1 million in 2023 value. Falkiner was wealthy and no doubt contributed financially to the enterprise. Falkiner also had a connection with Austin cars. He owned Austin Distributors with showrooms in Queen Street, Melbourne. His main interest though, perhaps forged from his childhood fascination with the blacksmiths on the family properties, was machinery. And that led to some ingenious inventions.

The Falkiner family's prodigious wealth began with Ralph's father. Franc Sadleir Falkiner (1833-1909), migrated from Ireland and arrived in Victoria about 1853. He married Emily Elizabeth Bazley (1841-1916) in 1856 and they had four daughters and five sons. Franc went to the Maryborough goldfields in Victoria and later opened a store in Ararat, where he took up land. The family moved to the drier western plains of NSW to benefit his asthmatic son Otway. In 1878 he became part owner of Boonoke station. Franc bought out his partners in 1882 and that became the foundation of the family's substantial pastoral enterprises. Between 1884 and 1909 Franc bought for over £1,000,000 the Riverina stations Moonbria, Tuppall, Moira, Morago and Pericoota. In 1899 all these properties were formed into F. S. Falkiner & Sons Ltd, with Franc, his wife and his sons as directors and each son the manager of one station. Later purchases by the company included the Wanganella stud and the Widgiewa estate, later called Boonoke North. Franc left an estate valued at £204,000, equivalent to \$36 million in 2023 value.

Soon after he finished at Geelong Grammar School, Ralph Falkiner was made manager of Moonbria Station, a property of over 100,000 acres. He purchased Groongal Station in 1911. It was one of the largest freehold properties in the Hay district of New South Wales. It comprised 116,500 acres and included 50,000 sheep, 174 horses and 640 cattle. It had a water frontage of seven miles on the Murrumbidgee River. The following year he bought Fairgeld, a property to the north of Groongal. Falkiner's financial means to invest with Kellow in 1913 now become apparent. Later, in 1924 he decided to subdivide and a clearing sale of the stock, including 36,800 sheep and plant, yielded £63,000, equivalent to \$6 million in 2023.



Above: Groongal homestead with a Napier in the driveway. [*The Pastoral Homes of Australia*, Printers John Andrew & Co. Sydney, 1914.]



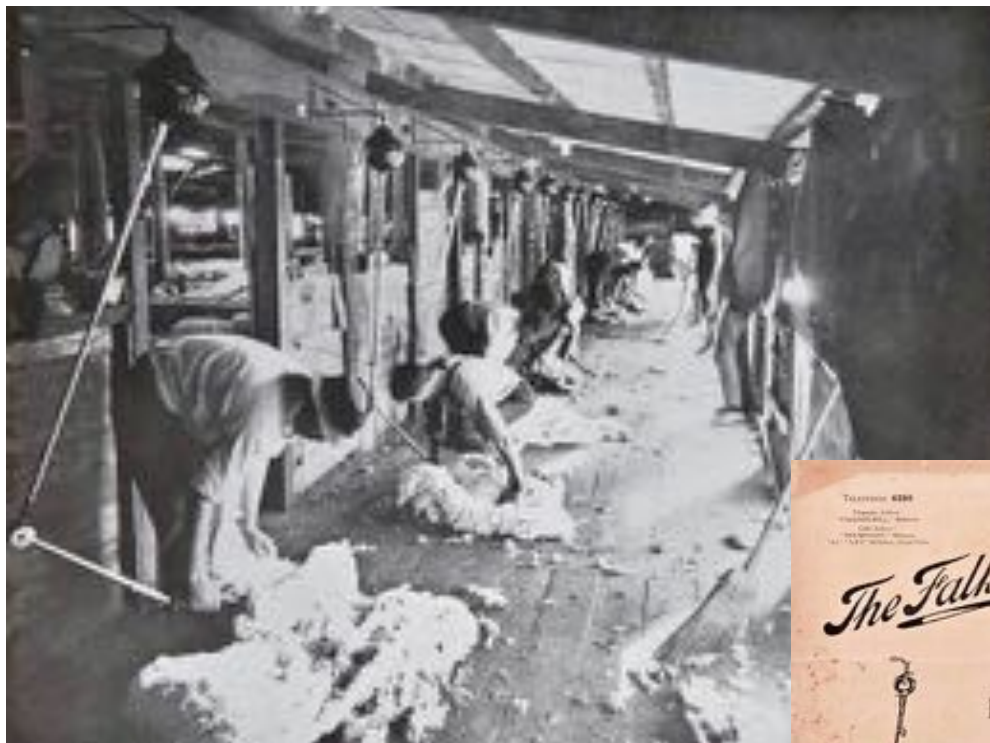
Centre: Portrait of Ralph Falkiner.



Right: The gardens at Groongal. [*The Pastoral Homes of Australia*, Printers John Andrew & Co. Sydney, 1914.]

Falkiner had a broad, practical knowledge of machinery and of course the sheep industry. Both came together in a collaboration with Paul Boll, an electrician. A "New Sheep-Shearing Machine", was the heading in Broken Hill's *Barrier Miner* on 7 August 1909. It continued, "Visitors to the annual stud sheep sales at the wool warehouses of Goldsbrough, Mort and Co., Melbourne, were much interested in a demonstration of shearing sheep by a new electric machine. The device, which is an invention and a simple one, is the invention of Mr. R. S. Falkiner of Moonbria station Considerable skill is shown in the invention in the application of electricity as the motive power. At the demonstration five shearers operated with 'Falkiner-Boll' machines." Falkiner had sent Boll to Germany to obtain small electric motors for the shearing machines.

A year after purchasing Groongal Falkiner, "Fitted 24 stands of electric shearing machines known as the Falkiner-Boll, and they are the outcome of his great experience among sheep and machinery. Mr. Falkiner devoted much time and money in endeavouring to improve on the shaft driven machinery, and with the assistance of Mr Boll, an electrical engineer, he solved the problem by applying the driving power directly to the shearer's cutter by means of electricity." Reported Adelaide's *Observer* on 21 December 1912.



Above: The shearing shed at Groongal. [The Pastoral Homes of Australia, Printers John Andrew & Co. Sydney, 1914.]

Right: A 1912 catalogue listing parts for the new type of shearing machine from the Falkiner-Boll Patent Electric Shearing Machine Company.



Falkiner's interest in machinery and the sheep industry again came together this time concerning transporting wool bales, fodder and general farm equipment. Falkiner found an extraordinary machine on a trip to Germany and in November 1913 imported one. Also using electric motors, it was a massive motor road train. The inventor, Major W A Mueller, had built 10 similar motor trains for the German Army and he came to Australia with two assistants to commission the road train.

The road train consisted of a huge motor-van and 10 trucks. It was described retrospectively in Sydney's *The Farmer and Settler* on 14 June 1946. The propelling power was obtained, "From two 125 h.p. six-cylinder Austro-Daimler engines, the power units being located one in front of the van and the other at the back. Each engine had two carburettors and two magnetos. The engines of giant size (120 m.m. bore and 220 m.m stroke) were coupled up with and drove a huge dynamo which, in turn, supplied a direct electric current to propel the train, weighing 43½ tons unloaded, at any pace up to 18 m.p.h. when empty and from 4 to 10 m.p.h. when loaded." It was noted, "The train was not drawn by the motor van, each truck being independently driven by two electric motors, one on each axle and pair of wheels – the electric current being drawn from the dynamo in the van, which was propelled in the same manner as the trucks. All wheels ran on ball bearings." In addition, it was quite maneuverable, "A remarkable feature was its steering. The driver handled the steering wheel and as the train moved off, every pair of wheels followed in exactly the same track as the front wheels of the motor van."



*The Mueller petrol
electric road train.
[National Library of
Australia – from R. S.
Falkiner, February-April
1915]*







Above: The Mueller petrol electric road train in Wodonga in 1914.
[Victoria Collections WHS01288 from Wodonga & District Historical Society]

Mechanical problems plagued the venture and as rumblings of war gathered in Europe in 1914 Mueller and his crew departed. It was February 1915 before the train was seen in Hay. Falkiner hoped to transport wool to the railways but the plan collapsed when the engines gave out and the train bogged in the sticky black soil of the Hay plains with 251 bales of wool on board. The train was finally railed back to Melbourne and stored but destroyed when the warehouse burnt down.

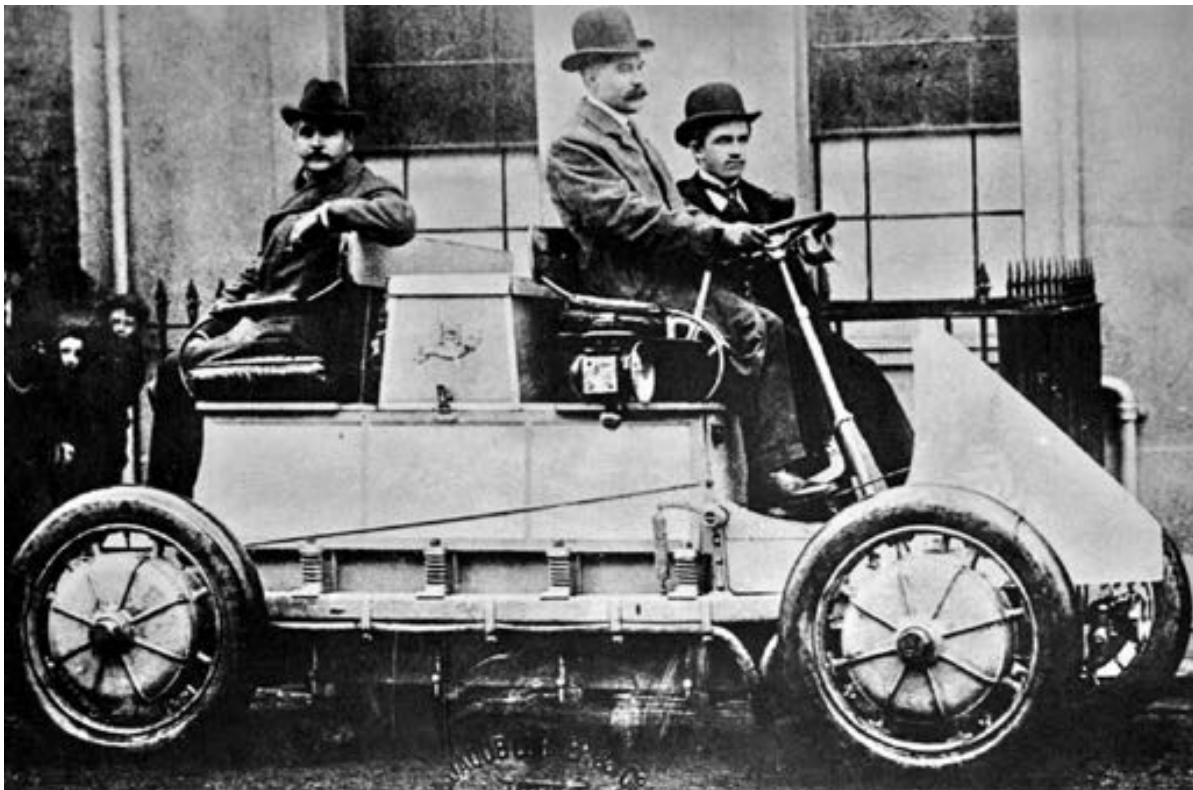
Below: The Mueller petrol electric road train bogged.
[National Library of Australia – from R. S. Falkiner, February-April 1915]



The final twist in the Mueller saga was a dispute between Falkiner and the Customs Department that might have amused his business partner Charles Kellow, who was a serial adversary of Customs officials. The cost of the road train exceeded £13,000, plus £4,590 import duty, \$1,884,000 and \$665,000 respectively in 2023 value. Falkiner, claimed the duty should be £673 not the £4,590 Customs calculated. The dispute concerned which part of the Customs Act applied. Was it a single vehicle or eleven vehicles? Falkiner paid under protest and went to court. Falkiner, trading as the Falkiner Electric Company, sued Percy Whitton, Collector of Customs in Victoria, to recover £3,917/8/9 paid as duty. Mr Justice Hood in the Supreme Court in December 1914 agreed with Falkiner. Ruling it was one vehicle not eleven, the duty was reduced to £673. Customs then appealed to the High Court and in May and June 1915 that court allowed the appeal and the judgement of Justice Wood was reversed. Falkiner was granted leave to appeal to the Privy Council, however, "The appeal to the Privy Council in the case of Falkiner versus Whitton has been dismissed.", reported Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* on 4 December 1916. Falkiner may well have commiserated with Kellow on the vagaries of the Customs Act. He was out of pocket over half a million dollars in 2023 value.

Mueller's propulsion system can be traced back to Ferdinand Porsche and 1900. His 'System Lohner-Porsche' had four wheel-hub motors. However, it was heavy and the range from the battery was limited to around 50 kilometres. This is why Porsche soon tried the hybrid concept in his 'Mixte-Wagen', in which the combustion engine served purely as a charging device for the batteries. The principle of wheel-hub electric motors was taken up again by NASA in the 1960s to power the moon cars.

Below: The Lohner-Porsche Mixte Hybrid. [John Tallodi, Read Cars]

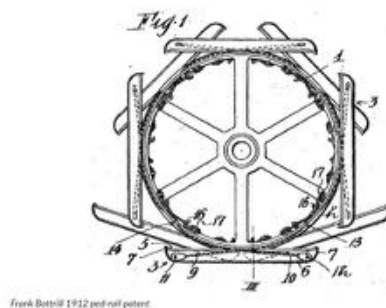


Falkiner's interest in gargantuan machinery didn't end with the road train. Although he had spent a great deal of money on the failed Mueller project, Falkiner financed Frank Bottrill's construction of Big Lizzie. The massive tractor was built in Richmond, Melbourne in 1915-1916. Bottrill's patented system of cables allowed it to put down and pick up a set of tracks so that the wheel rims didn't touch the ground. The cost is said to have been £7,000, \$855,000 in 2023 value. It was used to clear thousands of acres for soldier settlements at Red Cliffs, Victoria, after World War I. Big Lizzie was brought to the Glendenning Homestead to clear land and, having failed, was abandoned there until 1971 when it was relocated to Red Cliffs and restored. From the early twentieth century Glendenning Homestead at Rocklands, Victoria, was connected with later generations of prominent rural families including the Falkiners. Ralph Falkiner bought the Glendenning estate of 35,000 acres in 1914 and then the adjoining Melville Forest estate with 18,000 acres, which he sold in December 1916. As well as diversifying his pastoral interests, Falkiner established saw mills on both properties. Little could he have known that Big Lizzie would end its working days at Glendenning.

Below: *Big Lizzie at work. Note the man sitting on the rear wheel. [State Library of Victoria]*

Below left: *Big Lizzie now on display at Red Cliffs. In old money, the complete outfit was 108 feet long and comprised a tractor and two trailers. The total weight was 121 tons. 20 feet high and 30 feet long. [Red Cliffs & District Historical Society]*

Below right: *Frank Bottrill's patent for his traction system.*



Frank Bottrill 1912 patent

The Falkiner Electric Company exhibited at the agricultural shows in Sydney and Melbourne. At the 1916 Sydney Show, as might be expected, the sheep shearing machine in action attracted attention. As did the well-known Jelbart engine, which drove a Marelli dynamo producing the current to work various machines and appliances. The Jelbart tractor was on display. The Falkiner Electric Company had sold about 80 tractors in the previous twelve months. The King Irrigators providing irrigation by sprinkling was also demonstrated. "The Falkiner Electric Company seem to have solved the problem of potato planting with the Crump Potato Planter.", *The Sydney Stock and Station Journal* reported on 2 May 1916. Finally, "Electricity is now playing such an important part in domestic economy that the electric kitchen fitted with the Falkiner appliances created a good deal of interest." The NSW office of the Falkiner Electric Company was at 5 Moore Street, Sydney.



Above: The Falkiner Electric Company exhibit at the 1916 Sydney Show. On display was the Cooking by Electricity stand, Jelbart Light Oil Tractors, Marelli Dynamos Motors, pumps, electric fans and blowers, oil engines, chaffcutters, saw benches and the Falkiner Electric Sheep Shearing Machines. [*The Sydney Mail* 26 April 1916]

Brothers George and Frank Jelbart founded their firm at Ballarat, Victoria, pioneering Australian internal combustion engine design. "This is just what I have been looking for," exclaimed a visitor to the Royal Show on September 3 (1910), in allusion to Jelbart Bros.' Patent Air-Scavenge Gasoline Engines, which are manufactured by this firm, at 207 Dana street, Ballarat.", reported Melbourne's *Weekly Times* on 10 September 1910.

George Jelbart was mistaken for an enemy alien in December 1915 when he went to start an irrigation plant for a German farmer in Forbes, NSW. He was detained at Forbes police station before, "Officials were soon convinced that he was not one of the Kaiser's spies.", reported *The West Wimmera Mail and Natimuk Advertiser* on 8 January 1915. It concluded, "Mr Jelbart said it was rather amusing to be suspected as a German, as the family are from the west of Cornwall, and descendants of an old Cornish stock."



Above: *A row of engines produced by Jelbart Bros., Engineers, Ballarat, being towed by a Jelbart tractor along Dawson Street, Ballarat. [Article, Ballarat's Courier 11 October 2022]*

While Falkiner's enterprises with his Electric Company and machinery generally were progressing well, storm clouds had gathered on the domestic front.

Ralph Falkiner married Emily Clare Graham (1874-1934) in November 1900. They had four children born between 1903 and 1911. However, Emily filed for divorce in October 1913 when she appeared before Mr Justice Gordon in the Sydney Divorce Court. Ralph was not present in court. It was quite usual for divorce proceedings to be detailed in the press, particularly for prominent citizens, and this was the case with "Falkiner v. Falkiner". Moreover, it was covered in their home town of Hay's newspaper *The Riverina Gazette* on 28 October 1913. The grounds presented were Ralph's misconduct with Doris Fraser, between October 1910 and June 1913, while on a voyage between Marseilles and Melbourne, at various places on the Continent, and at Melbourne and at places in New South Wales.

"Petitioner said she was married in November, 1900, there being three children of the marriage, living. Her husband was a member of the Falkiner family, who had large pastoral interests in the Riverina. After their marriage they went on a honeymoon trip to Tasmania. Their married life was happy, and the first she knew of Miss Fraser was a week after her last child was born. Respondent came to visit her in hospital, and said he had been motoring with two girls, of whom one was Miss Fraser.

"Respondent, petitioner continued, left for a visit to England in 1910, and while away she heard of his association with Miss Fraser. She received a cable from Colombo, saying

'Don't write, breach final'. She did not know what it meant, so she went to his sister and learned that Miss Fraser was on the boat with him. She sent him a cable and got another in reply 'Decision absolutely final'.

"In December, 1910, she got a letter from him asking her to remove her personal effects from her home at Moonbria, in the Riverina. When he returned to Melbourne, she had an interview with him, and he asked her to divorce him, but she was unwilling to do so for the sake of the children. However, after the birth of respondent's second illegitimate child, she thought matters looked hopeless, and saw her solicitor, whom she instructed to commence divorce proceedings for divorce. Petitioner stated that respondent was making her an allowance of £2,000 a year (equivalent to \$290,000 in 2023 value) for herself and children.

"Continuing her story, the petitioner said she had ceased to live with her husband as soon as she found out these facts, but allowed him to visit the children, and take up his position in the world as their father. He had repeatedly urged her to divorce him, because he said he wished to marry Miss Fraser, and legitimise her children.

Judge Gordon said that the petitioner's delay in bringing the petition could not be called undue. "It was meritorious." He was quite satisfied that the grounds for divorce had been proven and pronounced a decree nisi, to be moved absolute in six months.

Falkiner married Doris Fraser (1885-1971) in June 1914 and they had five children.

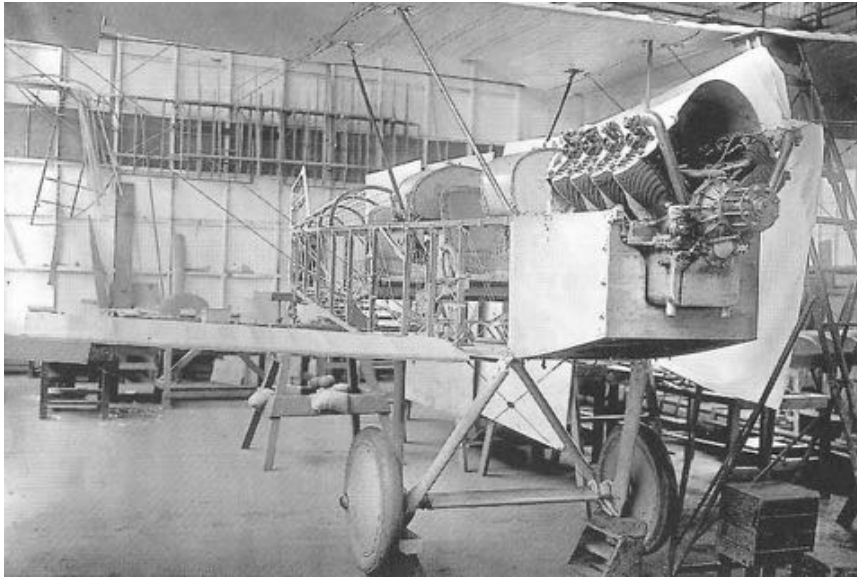
Falkiner shared another interest with Kellow – flying. Melbourne's *The Argus* reported on 26 February 1921, "Mr. R. S. Falkiner made an exceptionally fast flight from his Riverina station, Groongal, in his 100 h.p. [sic] Boulton & Paul aeroplane yesterday. The time occupied between Groongal and Echuca was 1 hour 27 min. and between Echuca and Melbourne 1 hour 2 min. The approximate distance covered was 275 miles."



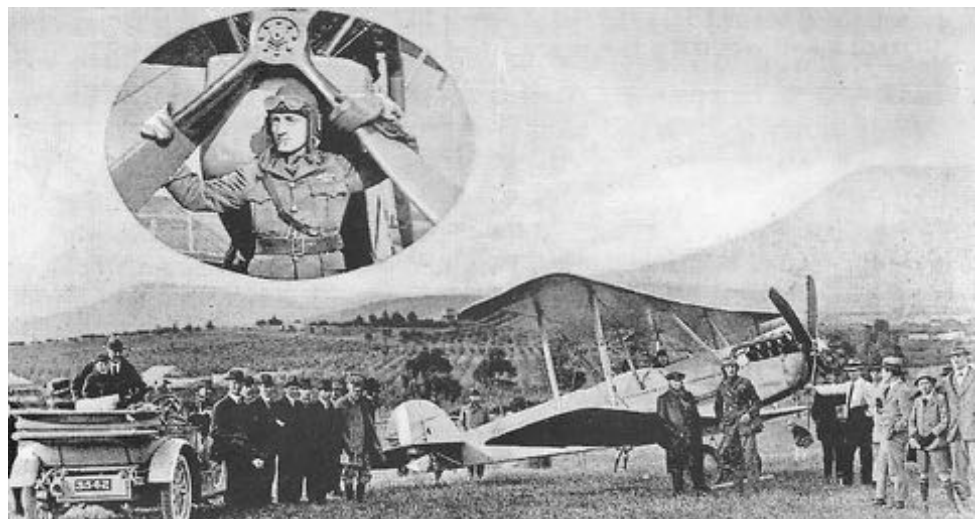
*Falkiner's Boulton & Paul P.9.
[National Archives of Australia A3560.1974]*

The Boulton & Paul P.9 was a British single-engined two-seat biplane. The wings and fuselage were constructed of wood with fabric covering. It was powered by a RAF 1A V-8 engine of 90 h.p.

The first order for the biplane was from Lieut. A L Long for use in Australia. He used it for mail and newspaper deliveries in Tasmania. His first flight from Elwick to Launceston with intervening stops was claimed as the first delivery of newspapers by air in the country. On 17 December 1919, Long made the first northbound crossing of Bass Strait.



Above and Below: Long's Boulton & Paul P.9 under construction and with his plane ready to make the first aerial delivery of newspapers in the country from Elwick to Launceston in Tasmania. [A. Brew Their Flying Machines]



Only eight P.9s were built because of the ready availability of war-surplus military aircraft and four were registered in Australia. Falkiner acquired his P.9 in February 1920 and it was registered G-AUCP. He sold it in 1924 and it crashed in Victoria in 1927.

Falkiner's inventiveness and experimentation didn't stop with electric shearing machines and motor road trains. Brisbane's *Worker* led an article in 24 September 1925 with "Cane Cutting Machine". "An Empire Press Delegation to Bundaberg, Queensland, was given a demonstration of the Falkiner Sugar Cane Harvester. He spent some eight years in perfecting this harvester having visited every part of the world where sugar-cane is extensively grown (including South America and Cuba). The machine was 12 feet high and weighed four tons and was operated by one man. It was driven by two 20 h.p. Austin engines, one to propel the machine and the other to drive the cutters, the elevators and topping." Falkiner's use of Austin engines may have been a result of his connection to the Austin Car Company.



The Falkiner Cane Harvester in operation. These are stills from a 1925 film held by the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia, reference 43557.



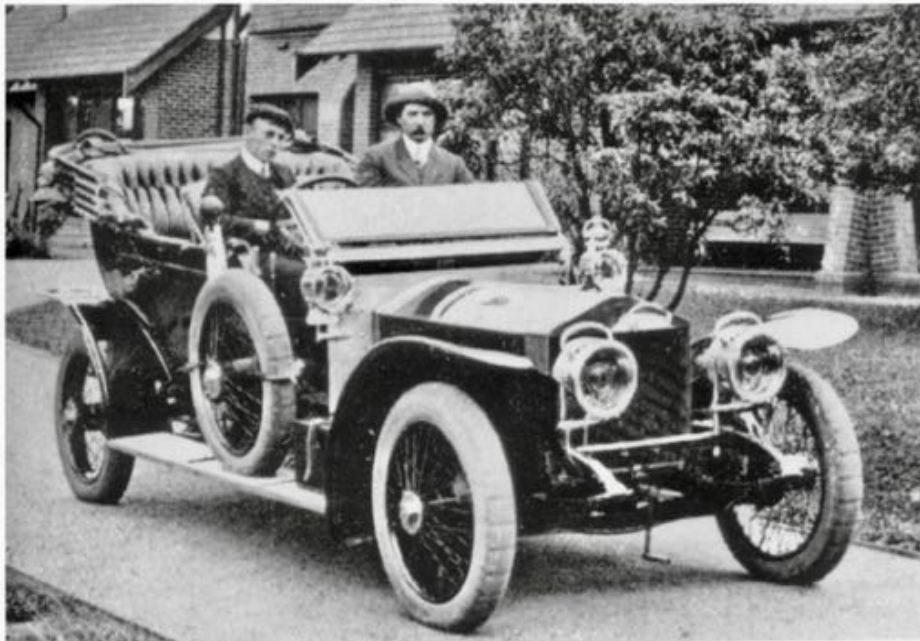
As well as numerous patent applications for improvements to the cane harvesting machine, including in America, Falkiner continued to apply for patents. In 1932 improvements in fire break machines and in 1933 for flexible trackways.

Falkiner's involvement in Kellow-Falkiner lasted only a few years before he sold his interest to Charles Kellow. However, their names in the company lasted well beyond their deaths in the 1940s as Kellow-Falkiner continued to trade until 1988. Ralph Falkiner was a pall bearer at Charles Kellow's funeral.

Postscript Kangaroo vs Silver Ghost

Leigh Falkiner, as mentioned, was a passenger in the first trial run of the first Rolls-Royce imported to Australia by Charles Kellow. He had another memorable Rolls-Royce encounter in 1929 by which time his 1909 Silver Ghost, chassis 60999, was a farm hack. "Kangaroo Hunt" was the heading in *The Lockhart Review and Oaklands Advertiser* on 26 November 1929, "A shooting party killed approximately 100 kangaroos on Falkiner and Sons' Boonoke and Moonbria Stations (Deniliquin) on Saturday. During the shoot a big red 'old-man' kangaroo jumped into a Rolls-Royce car driven by Mr. L. Falkiner and carrying Messrs. Loudon, Grano and Wyse as passengers. The animal struck the steering wheel and landed in the back seat of the car, and then sprang out over the front seat without injuring anyone. The car had been stripped of the windscreen and hood, and this probably prevented a serious accident." The contest? Did the kangaroo avenge its mates? The kangaroo, Falkiner and crew all escaped with a few battle scars, so probably a draw.

***Below: Leigh Falkiner's Rolls-Royce before its career hunting kangaroos on the back blocks of Boonoke Station.
[Pastoral Homes of Australia 1910]***



Acknowledgement: Assistance from Tom Clarke. D Neely Sydney April 2025.