

AP, Automotive Products or Lockheed Brakes



Automotive Products was the major employer in Leamington for around 40 years in the 20th century. It was generally referred to locally as AP or Lockheed although the company used many brand names.



World War I lorry

Origins

The Automotive Products company was established in Berners Street in London in 1920. The company was created with the initial purpose of importing components from the USA to maintain ex-military vehicles which were adapted for civilian use in this country. This established an early link with the USA.

The business soon expanded to manufacture industry. It was indeed an opportune time to acquire a place in this market-place which was on the point of growing very rapidly. The statistics about vehicles in the UK tell the story.

The Growth of the Motor Industry in Britain

The number of vehicles *manufactured* in the UK shot up from 14,000 in 1910 to 70,000 in 1920 and 237,000 in 1930. The war interrupted the advance but 784,000 were then made in 1950, 1,811,000 in 1960 and 2,098,000 in 1970. After this the figure has fluctuated around 1,500,000 each year, many now made in the UK by foreign companies.

The number of vehicles *on the road* has grown even more impressively. This rose from 143,000 in 1910, 591,000 in 1920 and 2,272,000 in 1930. In 1939 there were 3,148,000 vehicles and after the war this accelerated to 8,512,000 in 1960 and has reached a staggering 35,800,000 (yes, over 35 million) in 2014. Many of these are imported with only a rare British component to be found.

Historically the majority of vehicles in use in the UK were built by British companies in Britain using British components and huge numbers were exported. This trend declined catastrophically in the late 1970s.

The Three Musketeers

The three partners who set up the company were Edward Bishop Boughton (b. 1873), Willie Emmott (b. 1881) and Denis Tabor Brock (b. 1883). It is said that they were known to the employees as the "Three Musketeers". Boughton had developed the Ruston-Hornsby car after he joined that



Messrs Boughton, Brock and Emmott

company in 1916. The names of Boughton and Brock appear on patents in the USA for a “liquid operated braking systems” in the 1930s.

The tempo changed in 1928 when the company bought the rights to manufacture Lockheed hydraulic brakes in the UK from the American Lockheed Corporation.



Duesenberg

Hydraulic Brakes and Lockheed in the USA

The history of hydraulic brakes began when Fred Duesenberg first used the system in his racing cars in 1914 in the USA. This braking system could have earned Duesenberg a fortune if he had patented it. However, this became the first automotive marque to use the hydraulic technology on a production passenger car when a Lockheed system was installed in 1921.

Lockheed USA Here we take a brief diversion to look at the history of Lockheed in the USA. In 1903 Flora James Loughead (a Scottish name) divorced from husband, John, and bought a fruit-growing ranch in the Santa Cruz mountains in northern California, USA, where she brought up two sons, Allan (1889-1969) and Malcolm (1887-1958). She supplemented the family income by working as a journalist. Allan and Malcolm started by building flying machines and an exposition in 1915 was a big break for this business. Allan concentrated on the aircraft business but meanwhile Malcolm Loughead developed and patented hydraulic brakes in 1918 and 1919 and Malcolm and Allan went on to establish the Lockheed Corporation. However they did not change their individual names legally to Lockheed until 1934.



Establishment and Rapid Growth of AP

In 1929 AP bought a company called Zephyr Carburettors which was based in Clemens Street in Leamington at what is now number 32 and which is occupied in 2014 by John Atkins Cycles. This building had been built very early in the growth of the town as a chapel about 1816; it was subsequently used as a theatre from 1848 and then as a Congregational Church from 1868; after this it was the home of a corn merchant for a while. At some time the right hand one of the three classical first floor windows was removed but it has since been replaced with a passable restoration.



Clemens Street, 1846, 1928, 2014

AP began to manufacture components for Lockheed Brakes at these premises with 25 employees. Perhaps surprisingly, brake components were still being made in Clemens Street in 1970.

AP went on to buy the rights to Borg and Beck clutches in 1931 and also saw the future of retractable undercarriages for aircraft in 1937. They added Purolator oil filters to their portfolio of products in 1947 and then Thompson steering components. Such was the rapid growth of the company that the first block of their new plant in Tachbrook Road received planning permission in 1930, only 10 years after the company was established. The first sections were completed in 1932. The buildings would eventually occupy 70 acres.

World War II and beyond The factory worked continuous shifts during the war making components for armaments and aircraft and employed up to 10,000 people, including many women. The AP Aircraft Division at the Leamington site provided undercarriages and aircraft hydraulic



Tachbrook Road, Phase 1

equipment for a number of wartime British aircraft including the undercarriage for the Armstrong Whitworth Whitley. AP had supplied the very first tricycle undercarriage for RAF service which was used on the Armstrong Whitworth designed Albemarle general purpose aircraft. The factory was marked as a target on German maps and was subjected to several bombing raids. This aspect is played down in the official company history but, in fact, several employees were killed or injured. After the war AP went on to supply hydraulics and flying



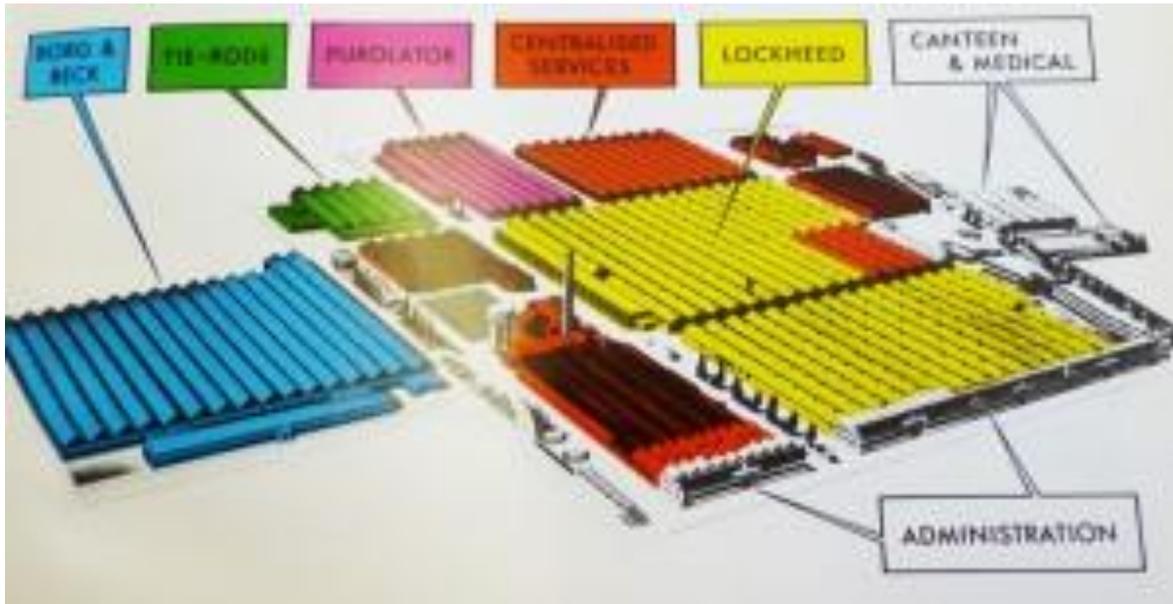
AP Lorry

control equipment for the Brabazon, Comet, Trident, HS125 and other British and foreign commercial aircraft. Avery-Hardoll high-pressure self-sealing hydraulic couplings were also one of AP Aircraft Division's specialities. The Aircraft Division was eventually moved from Leamington to Speke airport, Liverpool, and was renamed AP Precision Products Co. Ltd. Such was their reputation that Lockheed brakes were fitted to the car used by John Cobb to set the world land speed record of 394 mph in 1947.



Miranda at Battersea Park

Miranda The company was on the crest of a wave of success and to celebrate at the Festival of Britain in 1951 the company commissioned a bronze statue of a mermaid named Miranda which was 2.5 metres (8 feet) long and 1.2 metres (4 feet) high. It was created by sculptor Arthur Fleischmann and was situated at a main entrance to the factory on Tachbrook Road after being on display at the Festival site. It was an unusual representation of a mermaid because she had legs and fish tail fins for feet. It was designated as a listed building grade II but, sadly, it was stolen in 2001 and has never been found.



The Works at Tachbrook Road in 1955

Further Expansion

The one millionth set of Lockheed brakes was made as early as 1939 but this achievement was eclipsed when the ten millionth clutch was made in 1958. In 1956 the company supplied an astonishing 50% of the brakes made in the UK and 85% of the clutches. There was a massive expansion in 1956 when a new unit was built to rehouse Borg and Beck clutch manufacturing. At its peak the company owned 200 acres on Tachbrook Road. In 1958 the company was honoured with a visit by HM The Queen Mother who wore a hyacinth blue dress.

The company seemed hungry to grow and bought a firm in West Bromwich in 1954. It also established other sites away from Tachbrook Road with a spares depot in Banbury in 1962 and the factory in Liverpool. Earlier it had established roots in Australia in 1949 and in South Africa in 1952.



An automatic Mini still for sale in 2014

The Purolator Filters Division was originally at Tachbrook Road before being relocated to a former mill building at Bolton in 1963. The space vacated by the Filters Division was used for the new Automatic Transmission Division set up to manufacture a radically different and widely well-regarded automatic/manual gearbox for the BMC Mini and Maxi vehicles. It was said at one time that the Automatics machine shop at Tachbrook Road was the largest of its type in Western Europe.

Decline. The company declined along with the British motor industry as foreign imports of motor vehicles and components into Britain increased rapidly in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and the company was unable to supply to manufacturers at competitive prices. In retrospect, perhaps unwisely, it also licensed products for manufacture by foreign competitors. However it remained the largest employer in the manufacturing sector well into the 1980s. In 1974 it

employed 5,483 people; the next largest was Ford with 1,266. AP had reduced to 4,326 staff by 1983.

AP was eventually bought by British Belting and Asbestos (BBA) in 1986. The company was later sold to a management consortium in 1995 and then to Delphi Automotive Systems in 2000. Subsequently Lockheed Hydraulic Braking was sold to an Indian consortium which uses the name Caparo AP Braking. Another company called AP Racing is totally separate.

The factory with its imposing facades along Tachbrook Road was demolished in 2005 and the site is a business park in 2014. The building for the Borg and Beck Clutch manufacturing division still stands relatively intact, at least externally. However, even this block has been divided internally.

The Emmott family was involved in the company up to the sale to BBA and it is notable that Willie Emmott and the family name are remembered by a street named Emmott Drive on the Sydenham estate.

It is appropriate to mention the impact of the company on social life. For example, the ballroom was well known for the Christmas pantomime. Mention must also be made of the Lockheed Football Club (The Brakes) about which perhaps more in future. The club was founded as Leamington Borg & Beck in 1933 and the ground was opposite the factory on Tachbrook Road for many years.

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Mick Jeffs, October 2014.