

AP, Automotive Products or Lockheed Brakes



Automotive Products was the major employer in Leamington Spa 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 vital link with the USA.

The business soon expanded to include manufacturing components for the fast-growing British motor 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 a big part of 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 seriously interrupted the advance but 784,000 vehicles 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 therefore 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, 35,800,000 in 2014 and 40,600,000 (Yes, over 40 million!) in September 2022. Many of these are, sadly, imported, with only a rare British component to be found.

In the early years of the twentieth century the majority of vehicles in use in the UK were built by British companies in Britain using British components and huge numbers were exported. These trends declined catastrophically in the late 1970s.

The Three Musketeers

The three partners who set up the company were Edward Bishop Boughton (b. 1881), Willie Emmott (b. 1881) and Denis Tabor Brock (b. 1882). It is said that they were known to the employees as the “Three Musketeers”. There are more family details of



Left to right, Messrs Boughton, Brock and Emmott

these three men in the Appendix. Boughton had developed the Ruston-Hornsby car after he joined that 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 Loughhead (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 Loughhead 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 2023 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.



Tachbrook Road, Phase 1

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

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, four employees were killed and several injured. After the war AP went on to supply hydraulics



AP Lorry

and flying control equipment for the Brabazon, Comet, Trident aircraft, the HS125 train 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

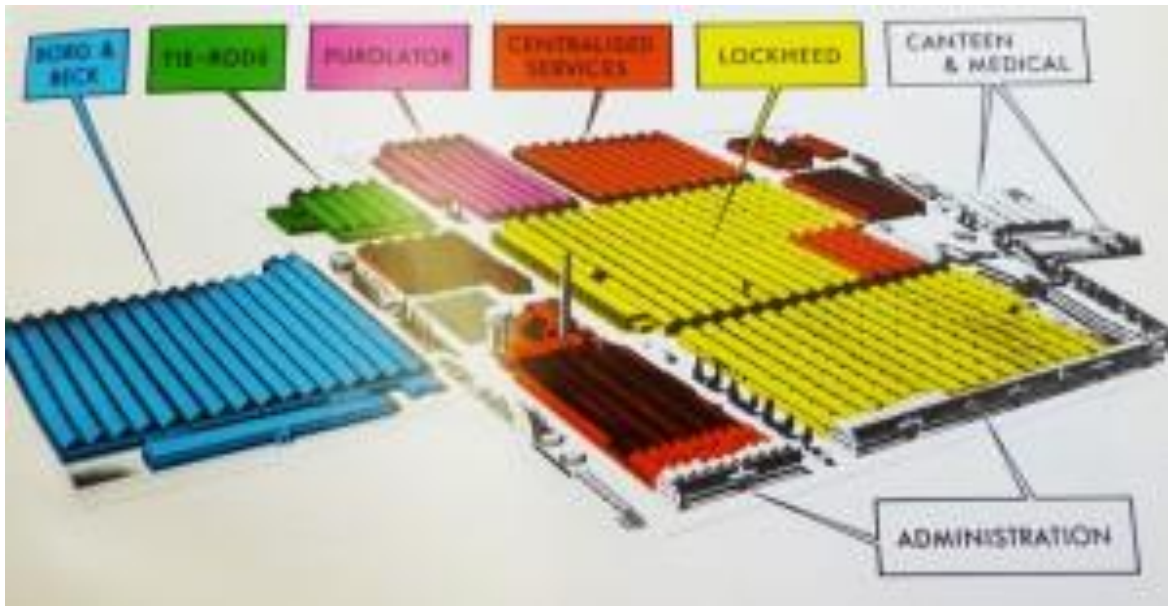
land speed record of 394 mph in 1947.



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 another 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 a factory in Speke in Liverpool. Earlier it had established manufacturing roots in Australia in 1949 and in South Africa in 1952. 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.



An automatic Mini still for sale in 2014

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 vehicle 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 2023. 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 in the town. For example, the ballroom was well known for the Christmas pantomime. Mention must also be made of the Lockheed Football Club (now The Brakes) about which perhaps more in future. The football club was founded as Leamington Borg & Beck in 1933 and the ground was opposite the factory on Tachbrook Road for many years. They now play in Harbury Lane.

Appendix

The “Three Musketeers”: Brief Family Stories

Edward Bishop Boughton was the son of William Rutland Boughton, a grocer born in 1842. Edward was born in Aylesbury in 1881. In 1939 he was living in Esher, Surrey, with wife Doris, son Terence, a butler and two maids. In the 1939 Register he is listed as “Engineer mechanical and company director”.

Denis Tabor Brock was born in London in 1882 (some records state 1883 or 1885). He was the son of a dentist, Samuel Brock (born 1851). In 1891 he was residing in Whitechapel. His mother’s maiden name was Louisa Tabor. He had at least three brothers and one sister. When aged 18 he was a “metal turner” living in Walton on Thames. In 1939 he was living at The Grove in Tachbrook Mallory, near Leamington, at the same address as John Emmott, son of Willie Emmott. He was listed in 1939 as a “Managing Director of an Aircraft Manufacturer”. He died in 1964 in Maidenhead. Notably his grandfather was William Brock (born 1814) the renowned firework maker (Brock's Fireworks).

Willie Emmott was born in 1881 in Shelley, Yorkshire, probably the child of Lavinia Emmott (born 1854), unmarried daughter of a tailor; his father is unknown. In 1921 he was living in Ealing with wife Nellie and son John (b1913); he was listed as an “Agent & Merchant of Automobile Components”. In 1939 he was living in Ealing with his wife Nellie and was listed as “Managing Director of company manufacturing Aircraft and Automobile components”. In 1939 his son John, was living at the same address in Grove House at Tachbrook Mallory as Denis Brock and John was listed as “Manager of Aircraft

Manufacturer” (at the age of 26).

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Mick Jeffs, Revised April 2023