

# Glimpses of the Past

by George Toms

## No. 12. Brush at War 1942-45

It was one matter employing more women in industry, but it was another ensuring that they were able to do the family shopping. It was a different world in those days, rationing problems apart; one either ordered from roundsmen or had to leave one's requirements with the shops. In both instances one had to be there in person. Today many women war workers might be termed single parent families, which indeed many were if their husbands were away on active service or had been killed in action. Families were more supportive to their children, but shopping became a problem. The long working hours often meant that the shops were closed when they left work.

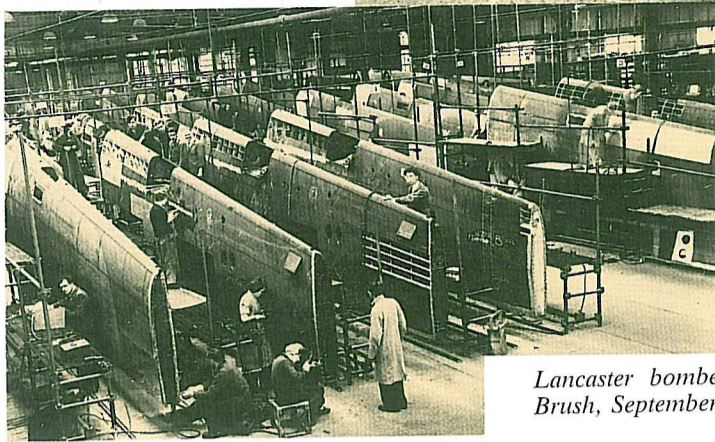
In January 1942 a new scheme was started, sponsored by Brush, to enable married women workers to overcome some of their shopping difficulties. The scheme was started in conjunction with the Trades Unions and the Loughborough Chamber of Trade, together with other local industries. In support of a suggestion made by the Town Clerk a scheme was devised whereby facilities were made available for shopkeepers to receive written lists of shopping from married working women in good time to enable them to have a fair share of what was available and this was particularly useful for goods still not subject to rationing. They could collect their orders from the shops at prearranged times and it would take only a matter of minutes. Order forms, in part certificates, were made available to eligible employees at work. The system generally avoided lost production through women being allowed time off work.

Aircraft repair work and construction was undertaken at the Falcon Works from 1941. Hampden bomber components were repaired under subcontract from Derby Locomotive Works of the LMS Railway. For a while repair work on Albemarle aircraft was done together with repairs on Lancaster bomber wing sections, but perhaps it is the construction of De Havilland D.H. 89 Dominie aircraft which is more fondly remembered. Three hundred and thirty five of these aircraft were built by Brush over the period 1943 to 1946, the year after the war ended.

Space is insufficient to detail these sturdy and versatile aircraft, but most were supplied to the RAF and the Royal Navy, being used for communications, air ambulance and training duties. They left the works under tow from a Fordson tractor, tail first and minus outer wing sections, to Loughborough Aerodrome on the Derby Road, where they were completed and test flown. The test pilot was Mr Allen, one of De Havilland's team. He was later killed by a German "buzz-bomb" when on a visit to London. For further details recommended reading is 'BRUSH AIRCRAFT production at Loughborough', an excellent book written by A. P. Jarram and probably still available from one source in Loughborough at about £2.

Electrical machines, transformers, switchgear, steam turbines, turbo and diesel driven alternators, and diesel engines were some of the other products of the works vital to the war effort. Arthur Hutt also understands that Brush produced de-gaussing cables and associated equipment for fitting around the hulls of ships as a protection against magnetic mines. Furthermore Brush made certain electrical items for the portable harbours (codenamed Mulberry Harbours) used on the French coast after D-Day in June 1944.

Bus production had almost ceased during the early part of the war, but as public transport vehicles became more vital to the war effort at home it increased. About 80 buses were produced in 1942 and over 100 the following year. By the time the war finally ended in August 1945 a further 300 or so were built. Further details of bus production are published by the PSV Circle in their booklets on Brush Coachworks Limited.



Lancaster bomber wings being repaired at Brush, September 1945.

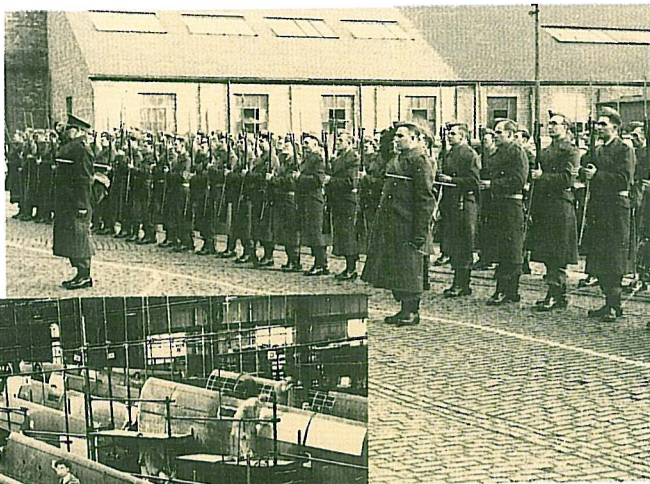
By 1943 the old tramcar traverser had been filled in and during February that year marquees were erected for the purpose of holding an exhibition of Brush products, mainly from the coachworks side, but not all. Subsequent to this exhibition and as a declaration of loyalty and support to the war effort, the Prime Minister Winston Churchill sent a telegram of congratulations to the Company for its efforts.

From 24th July to 1st August 1943 was the Brush Holidays-at-Home Week. This was an action-packed holiday with a difference organised by the specially established Brush Committee to avoid too many employees leaving Loughborough (and therefore work, should they be required to attend). Travel, unless absolutely necessary, was discouraged nationally as a matter of course anyway. Interesting programmes were arranged for young and old alike during the week and advertisements billed the events as "really attractive". Outstanding bands and artistes attracted people to Queen's Park and nearby Brown's Lane, where concert parties, Punch and Judy, donkey rides, games, a kiddies corner and "all the fun of the fair" took place. From 25th July the band of the Royal Air Force Regiment gave concerts, and not to be outdone the Brush Military Band (Conductor Arthur Clay) performed in Queen's Park on Saturday 25th July at 3pm and 7pm. I wonder if this was the same brass band which Arthur Hutt has made mention of in his reminiscences to me?

The arrangements lasted for more than one week. If one went to the Town Hall on 6th August then entertainment could be sampled courtesy of "The Leicesters" in Variety Parade with the special appearance of Trefor Jones. The acts certainly offered variety, one was Eve and Jean, the Tapping Teameters! Another was Bert Brougham, the "Pride of Killarney". Quite what he did is not clear. There was a Grand Sports Day at the Brush Sports Ground, Forest Road, a whist drive at the Town Hall and at the Odeon cinema further live entertainment provided by Eileen Joyce (pianist) and Walter Widdop (tenor). At the time black-out was enforced from 11pm until 5.25am.

During 1993 Mr Robin Watts, who works nightshift in the Wood/Insulation Shop approached me clutching a rather tattered clock card. He had found it behind the card rack during the retrieval of his own clock card which had disappeared when he placed it in its slot. For nearly fifty years Card No. 78, belonging to "Friedmann" (Mr, Mrs or Miss?) had lain inside the back of the rack! It is dated Week Ending 14 April 1943 and ran from Thursday to the following Wednesday. The last punched time is 8.30 in red ink, for the Saturday. The previous day has no less than six times in the column ranging from 7.58 to 5.17, representing three periods of work with no apparent break other than five minutes! Thank you, Robin!

More indication of wartime conditions within the works come from Arthur. Over 5,000 people worked at Brush during the war years and every employee had to have a works pass. This incorporated a photograph of the employee. To the best of my knowledge, the Falcon Works was never bombed, although it was marked as a target



The Brush Home Guard drawn up outside the main offices. No. 17 Platoon, detachment 'D' company, 9th Leicestershire Regiment, November 1941. The Guard of Honour was for the visit of the Duke of Kent to the Falcon Works and shows (at the front), Captain Wakefield (left) and Lieutenant Mears. Steve Collinge, retired Salvage Manager, who we thank for the loan of the photograph, can be seen 3rd right, next to the sergeant.

A Leyland double-decker for Wilts & Dorset ready for delivery from the Brush works, March 1944.



on prewar photographs taken from civilian aircraft that overflew the area. The products were well-known to the enemy, so did Brush have a secret weapon? - was it the canteen, the ultimate deterrent?

During late August 1943 the *Loughborough Echo* carried a small news item about the smallest employee at the Brush Works. This was Gladys Brown, then aged nineteen and only 4ft. 1in. tall. One day as she and her mother walked out of the works the securing police officer enquired as to how 'this child' had got into the works. Her mother turned to her and said, 'Show the gentleman your works pass'. She did so and the officer walked away dumbfounded!

By late 1943 the war, although far from over, was progressing sufficiently well to plan for the future. In the October Brush organised an 'Education and Training for Engineers' convention, with an eye on the part that industry would play in the post-war world. Concurrently, Brush co-ordinated efforts with Loughborough College and the Works School to commence continuative training to all 'girls and boys' below the age of eighteen, and selected advanced education for some above that age. One of the stressed aims was quality production, with speed coming in time, and the newly-established Craft School was the bedrock of the scheme. Youngsters were to spend six months at a time in here, learning trades and 'the lads who would never make engineers were weeded out'. There must be many an 'old lad' from the Craft School who remembers these days. In March 1944 Sir Ronald Matthews, with a whiff of victory in the air, spoke of the 'Brave New World' which lay before everyone. This was the occasion of the second social gathering of the Student Section of the Brush Apprentice Association, and it was used to reinforce the trend already set in motion.

June 1944 saw the Allied armies land in France and the long-awaited Second Front established. Almost a year of hard fighting in Europe lay ahead, but clearly the 'Holidays at Home' week the following month

had a more optimistic ring about it. The band of the Sherwood Foresters performed at an evening concert held at the Town Hall and one could also listen attentively to guest artistes McKenzie Reid and Dorothy, Scotland's BBC Ace Accordionists. The events continued into August and, on the 2nd at the Brush Sports Ground the Brush Military Band under conductor Arthur Clay provided musical entertainment. By the end of 1944 many of the local Home Guard units had started to stand down - the Allies were on the borders of Germany by this time and the veterans were clearly no longer required to repel the enemy.

May 8th 1945 was Victory in Europe Day and Brush was already geared for the future. The changeover from a war footing back to one of peace was not easy. Many government contracts were either cut back or cancelled and markets had to be won back. In distant parts, the Far East, the fight continued in the jungles and the islands, but it appeared too distant to many. VE Day gave the first opportunity for many to let their hair down as restrictions were relaxed. The *Loughborough Echo* of 6th July 1945 reported that the previous Saturday some 10,000 people were on holiday, over 1,000 of them leaving by train to take their holiday away from home.

August 1945 saw the abrupt end of the war in the Far East and the start of the Nuclear Age. Already employees had started to return home from the forces in Europe and the final act saw even more return. Sadly and inevitably there were those who did not return - they had paid the supreme sacrifice.

For the war-weary Brush employees there was a future to look forward to, an uncertain future, for it was a different world to that of 1939. The long struggle had been a unique experience for all, but victory had been achieved, at a cost. The Falcon Works was war-worn and much remained to be renewed. It took years, in common with most of British industry, to achieve this.

If you have any information relating to this or any other period of Brush history, please contact George Toms, preferably by internal mail, c/o Main or Mining Test.

We would also like to thank Arthur Hutt and his son, Nigel, for their help in supplying information and photographs.

Preparations for an exhibition of Brush products on the site, February 1943.

The recently-found clock card, lost since April 1943.

No. 78							
NAME	FRIEDMANN						
WEEK ENDING	14 APR 1943						
Ordinary Time							
Overtime							
Total Wages							
Less National Insurance							
Amount Paid							
Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Total
In 6.17	7.58						
Out 11.00	10.45	0.20					
In 10.51							
Out 12.35							
In 12.50							
Out 5.17							
In 5.17							
Out 5.17							
							ADD TIME
							TOTAL

