

Glimpses of the Past

by George Toms

No. 24 Falcon Works Railways

First mention of a rail connection into the works was early 1864, within a few months of the purchase of the site behind Loughborough Station. It served the new timber yard set up by Henry Hughes and came from the Midland Railway, which at that time had only two tracks through Loughborough.

Probably one siding was sufficient at the time, and perhaps the same one which a few years later ran parallel to the main lines. By 1883 a triangular junction existed near to the railway entrance. This not only served the original siding, but a new one which had been laid along the east side of the works and along a course now occupied by 24 Shop. At its extremity it served the new Tramcar Shop (latterly 11 Shop) and the adjacent wood yard. At the end of the Tramcar Shop was a traverser which connected it with the shop itself, in the yard directly opposite today's Control Centre.

By 1883 the Midland Railway had four tracks and access to the works and adjacent Midland Railway coal yard sidings (now covered by 01 and 14 Shops) was from the new southbound freight line. Little is known of tracks inside the workshops themselves, but certainly the Boiler Shop and Tramcar Shop were equipped with some.

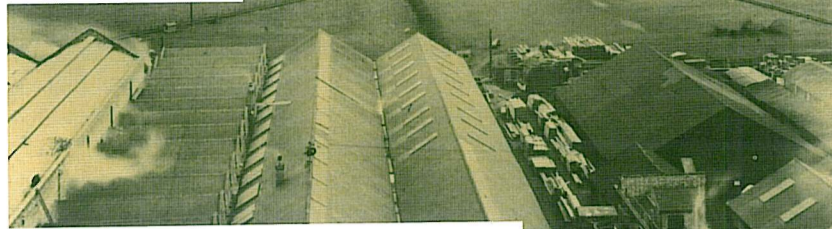
The 1890s witnessed a spate of building and rebuilding on a grand scale and by 1899 most of the original buildings had gone. The railway system kept pace with the expansion and lines reached out towards Meadow Lane, paralleled the Rempstone footpath, circumnavigated the Main Offices and terminated at the Nottingham Road entrance. The thoroughfare known as 'Pneumonia Alley' was provided with a link line and this crossed through the former 18 Shop (part of 38 Shop). Wagon turntables were provided at strategic places.

A new traverser was excavated near to the Midland Railway (between the present day shops of BEM and Hawker Siddeley Switchgear) and extended over the years. It was electrically powered and capable of winching tramcars out of the shops. This area was filled in during World War II and lies beneath parts of the Coil Shop, Tool Room, Machine Shop and the yard beyond the end of the Repair Shop.

Another addition was that of a tramcar test track. This was laid down about 1896, but was removed soon afterwards to make room for the building of the Great Central Railway. It was situated at the rear of the works, forming a triangle with one side running in the rear yard and the remaining two sides at a lower level on the fields beyond. The first side stretched from the area in front of today's Medical Centre to just beyond the Central Laboratories. It had gradients and curves which simulated street conditions for testing tramcars and tramcar equipment prior to despatch. It was provided with an overhead power supply.

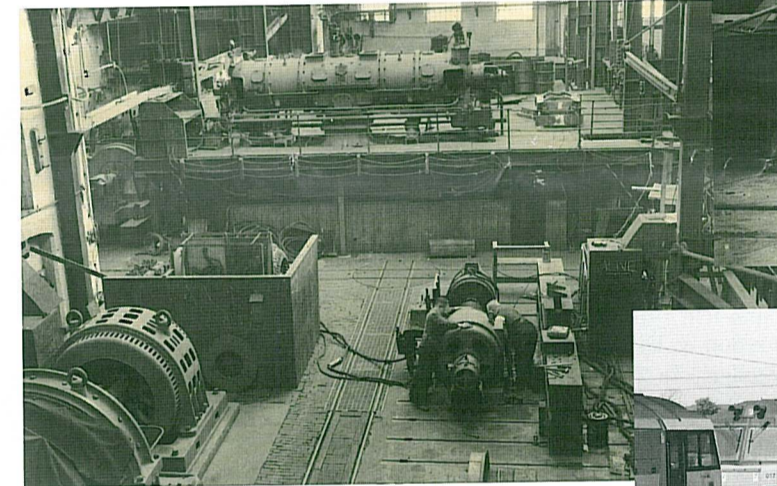
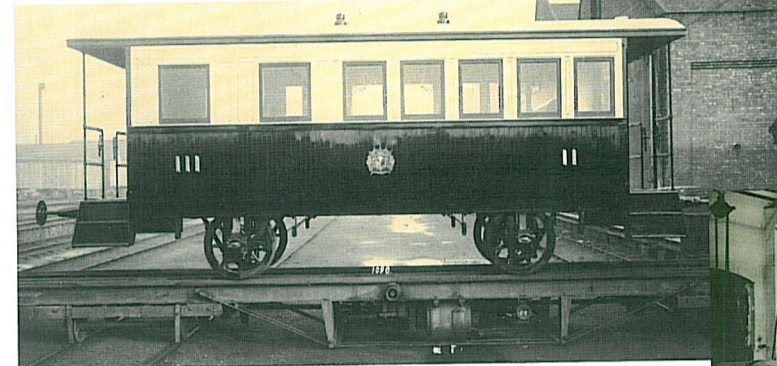
So far, no mention has been made regarding the narrow gauge railway system which had developed. By 1902 there were 1½ miles of these lines in the works, said to be electrified. Such a claim is doubtful, though if true quite by what system is not known. One presumes that either an overhead supply or battery-powered vehicles would be the most suitable and safest. Surviving relics of this narrow gauge system suggest a track gauge of 2ft. Certainly, it penetrated most nooks and crannies within the works. Parts of the system were still in use in 1960, though the motive power was human.

As the works extended towards Meadow Lane so did the railway system. A new rail access and sidings were provided alongside what is today the Hawker Siddeley Switchgear part of the works. Then it was the automobile department. Behind were erected new buildings for the storage and seasoning of timber. These were rail-served and the standard gauge tracks finally looped around to link up with those already at the rear of the works, close to the present-day Fabrication Shop. A new rail access from the newly-constructed Great Central Railway was proposed, but this never materialised. Just before the turn of the century a steam locomotive was built by the Company specifically for works use, this was named SPRITE and was a remarkable

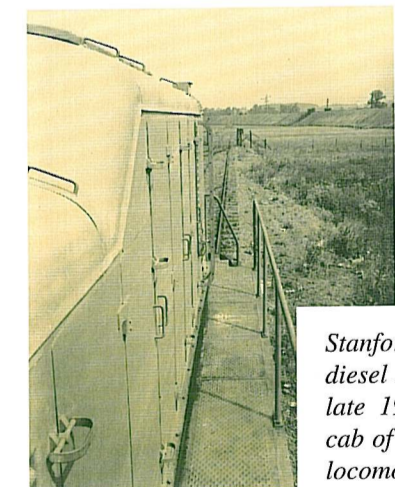


An aerial view of the rear of the Falcon Works almost a century ago. Prominent across the centre is the tramcar test track, complete with support poles for the overhead wire.

A tramcar for Siam on the main tramcar traverser circa 1908. The building on the right is now part of 23 DAX Coil Shop.



A Spring 1938 view of the railway end of 38 (formerly 18) Shop. The narrow gauge lines meet at a turntable in the centre of the photograph. The foreground is now occupied by part of Main Test.



Stanford on Soar next stop! The diesel locomotive test track in the late 1950s, as viewed from the cab of a Steel Company of Wales locomotive.

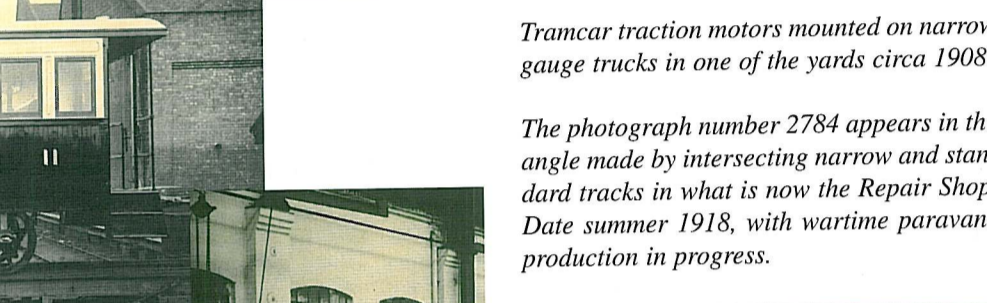
amalgam of available components.

By the time of the Great War the works expansion had stabilised and the tramcar test track was less-used. In the early 1920s the new Turbine Shop necessitated realignment of the original works access, but the rest of the system remained more or less intact until the 1930s when road transport started to take over. During the 1940s one line reached out into reclaimed land on the Meadows, in use for depositing spoil.

A new railway facility developed from the old during the early 1950s, wholly connected with the new diesel electric locomotive building activities at the Falcon Works. Most of this new system was laid on the reclaimed land at the rear of the works and culminated far out on the Meadows on a locomotive test track. It served most of the new shops and yards, and some was

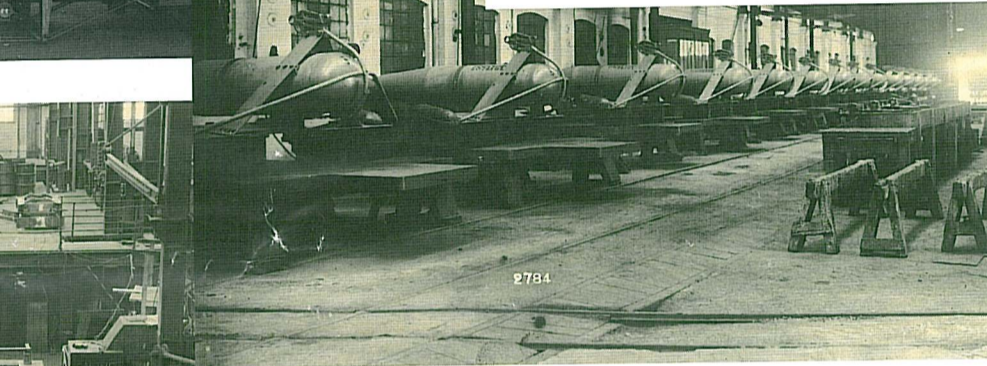


Testing a water car on the test track circa 1906.

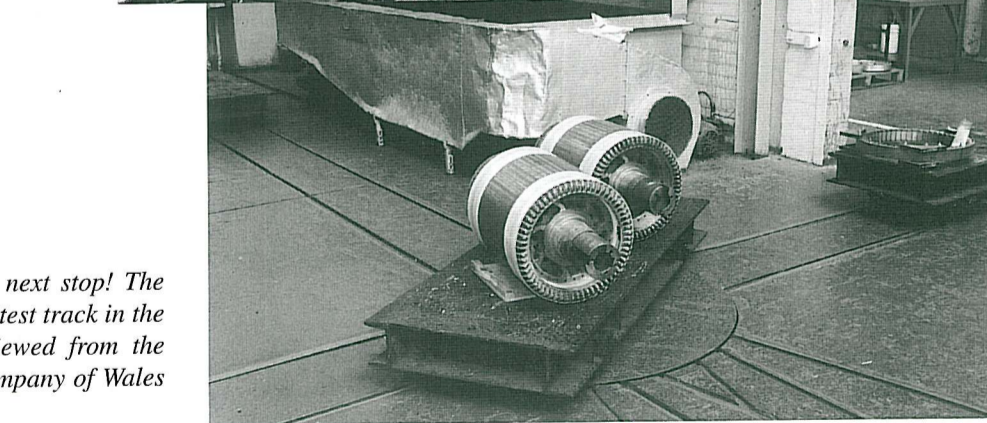


Tramcar traction motors mounted on narrow gauge trucks in one of the yards circa 1908.

The photograph number 2784 appears in the angle made by intersecting narrow and standard tracks in what is now the Repair Shop. Date summer 1918, with wartime paravane production in progress.



(see text)



of mixed gauge to allow for the running of locomotives destined for overseas railways.

The size of this new system reached its peak just before 1966 and coincided with the peak in locomotive building. The 1970s onwards saw its gradual fall into decay. Two spectacular derailments on the BR lines brought about the loss of the two works rail accesses.

In 1980 the provision of new locomotive building facilities at the rear of the works included mixed gauge tracks. Isolated from the rest of the works, the new railway system was parochial by nature. It was extended as necessary and in 1989 a long curvaceous link to BR lines was made in preparation for delivering Class 60 locomotives. Today this system still exists and is much-used. It has a complex layout in the yards (see immediately above left), and is formed of substantial former main line track, rather than

the lighter industrial track of previous eras.

One may still see relics of years gone by, isolated sections, and often barely covered by tarmac in the yards. Railtops are to be seen in the Coil Shop, Machine Shops, 24 Shop, General Stores and one very short portion remains in Pneumonia Alley.

The excavations of 1994 unearthed long buried sections, and long stretches of track were lifted. Totally unconnected with any works railway system are the thriving sections of narrow gauge railway (see above right), devoted to interconnecting adjacent 38 Shops and serving impregnation ovens, some of which were prefabricated by maintenance personnel from square section bar and angle steel. These are to be found in the BEM areas, as are most of the remnants of the standard and narrow gauge systems of yesteryear.