

RESEARCH GUIDES RESOURCE PACK

Factories

Manufacturing in Leicester during World War I

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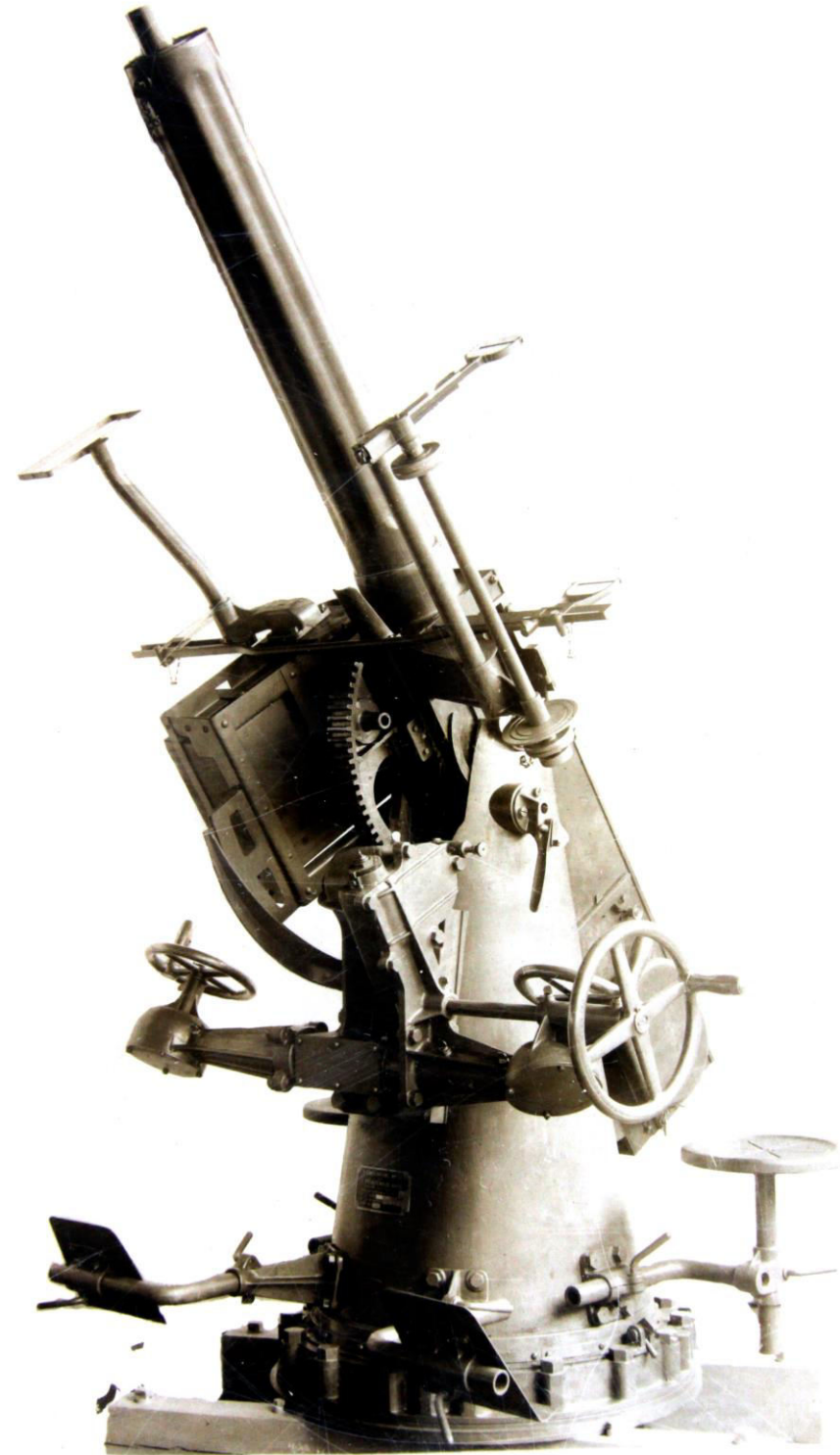
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FACTORIES

Manufacturing in Leicester during World War I

Introduction

Within weeks of the outbreak of war, large numbers of Leicester men left to fight but their jobs were soon filled as contracts for boots, clothing, equipment, shells and other munitions were awarded. It was essential that Britain out-produced as well as out-fought the enemy. By early 1915, at least 30 local firms were contracted to the government and many began to pool their resources to work together to increase production. War bonuses and overtime were paid to employees, and women were taken on in factories owing to the shortage of men. This led to some trade disputes as workers compared their earnings and conditions.

The Record Office holds a variety of sources of information for researching Leicester's industry in World War I. The examples shown below are taken from published accounts, minute books, order books, advertisements, price lists, photographs and building plans. Other available sources include newspapers, periodicals, trade directories (1914 and 1916) and records of trade unions.

FACTORIES

Leicester Armaments Group

The Leicester and District Armaments Group of Engineering Employers: An Experiment in Engineering Co-operation 1915-1918

This is a detailed published record of the successful work of the group following its winding up at the end of the war. As a result of the shell shortage, the War Office wanted to transfer skilled engineering labour to armaments firms all over the country. The Leicester employers, however, persuaded the office that they could make shells themselves rather than lose employees. The group was established in March 1915.

The booklet includes a list of officers and the committee with photographs, plus a very useful list of 80 members in Leicester, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rugby. There are sections on contracts, output, materials, finance, female labour and organisation. Part of the premises of the Leicester Tramways Department in Belgrave Gate was taken over for the finishing process of shell manufacture; eight photographs of the depot are also included.

LIST OF MEMBERS (*Continued*).

RICHARDS, W. & SONS	...	...	...	Phoenix Iron Works, Leicester	...	...	Joined on the inception of the Group.
RUSSELL, S. & SONS	...	...	...	Bath Lane, Leicester	...	...	do.
SMITH, MAJOR & STEVENS, Ltd.	...	...	...	Abbey Works, Northampton	...	...	do.
SPENCER, A. T. & CO.	...	...	...	Upper Brown Street, Leicester	...	...	do.
SPIERS, WILLIAM	...	...	...	Walnut Street, Leicester	...	...	do.
STABLEFORD & CO., Ltd.	...	...	...	Coalville	...	...	do.
STANDARD ENG. CO., Ltd.	...	...	...	Evington Valley Road, Leicester	...	...	do.
STIBBE, G. & CO.	...	...	...	9/15 Newarke Street, Leicester	...	...	do.
SUMMERS & SONS	...	...	...	Wellingborough	...	...	do.
TAYLOR, J. & CO.	...	...	...	Bell Foundry, Loughborough	...	...	do.
TAYLOR & HUBBARD	...	...	...	Kent Street Works, Leicester	...	...	do.
TAYLOR, T. & SONS	...	...	...	Gladstone Street, Leicester	...	...	do.
TIMSON, BULLOCK & BARBER, Ltd.	...	...	...	Kettering	...	...	do.
WALKER, R. & SONS	...	...	...	Abbey Meadow Mills, Leicester	...	...	do.
WHITFIELD, HODGSON & BROUGH, Ltd.	...	...	...	Kettering	...	...	do.
WILDT & CO., Ltd.	...	...	...	The Newarkes, Leicester	...	...	do.
WILKINSON, S. W. & CO.	...	...	...	Little Holme Street, Leicester	...	...	do.
WILSON, J. W., Ltd.	...	...	...	St. George's Street, Northampton	...	...	do.
							Joined
ALLEN, W. & CO.	...	...	...	Great Central Street, Leicester	...	...	October, 1915
BERRIDGE, I. L. & CO.	...	...	...	43 Humberstone Road, Leicester	...	...	do.
DERNGATE MOTOR CO., Ltd.	...	...	...	Bedford Place, Northampton	...	...	December, 1917
FLAVELL, W. K.	...	...	...	Wood Street, Hinckley	...	...	July, 1915
GRIEVE, T. & Co.	...	...	...	Queen Street, Leicester	...	...	August, 1915
HOLLIS PATENTS MACHINE CO.	...	...	...	Crown Works, Newfoundpool, Leicester	...	...	October, 1915

The Leicester District Armaments Group.

.....

AN EXPERIMENT IN ENGINEERING CO-OPERATION.

.....

THE SHELL SHORTAGE.

WHEN the history of Leicester and District Engineering Trade is written, no brighter chapter will be found than the one dealing with the part Employers and Employees played in the Great War. Without experience, and without time in which to gain experience, they were called upon at a moment of crisis to help in the supply of ammunition to the Allied Forces. Indeed, they were pioneers in the great movement for the manufacture of High Explosive Shells, which spread throughout the country early in 1915. Hitherto, the Government had relied on Woolwich and private Armament Firms for their supplies of ammunition. These firms had done

their best, but had failed to keep pace with the demand. The Nation's life was at stake ; everything depended upon the decision that was taken.

The War Office saw the gravity of the situation and took the matter in hand. To them, apparently, there was only one way in which to proceed. The resources of the Armament Firms in the country must be increased, and to do this, it was proposed to transfer to their service a considerable proportion of the skilled labour engaged in every branch of engineering up and down the country. The one obvious disadvantage of this proposal was the dislocation that would be brought about in the business of the individual employer. Staffs and labour would be greatly disarranged, and possibly, in some cases, with very serious results.

The urgency of the demand was brought officially to the notice of the Employers of Leicester and District by Mr. P. Handley (Manager of the Leicester Labour Exchange), and they at once set out to try and find a better way. It was, perhaps, a bold step, but they ventured to take it. They had among their number men of high enterprise and marked ability. Mr. Robert Dumas, of the British Thomson-Houston Co., strongly advocated that the work should be undertaken in the Leicester District, and when manufacturers were called together to consider the matter, they frankly told the representatives of the War Office and the Board of Trade that they would rather undertake the work themselves than have their employees transferred to other districts.



BELGRAVE GATE.—Main Shop, showing painting racks and shells ready for despatch to filling factories.

FACTORIES

Local Munitions Committee

Minutes of the Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rugby Munitions Committee

In 1915, the government set up local munitions committees across the country to co-ordinate the vital production efforts. The Leicester committee, based at the Labour Exchange on Albion Street, presents an interesting overlap with the Armaments Group which had already been established; many of the employers' representatives served on both committees.

There are two minute books covering the period July 1915 - June 1919. The example pages shown here cover discussion of the issues of wages and the use of unskilled and female labour.

M I N U T E S

Meeting held in Town Hall - 5 p.m. 30 August.

Minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

CHAIRMAN reports his recent visit to Peterborough, and suggests that now it is practically decided that Peterborough is to be included, that District would probably require more representation.

SECRETARY reports that he has received a cheque for £150, and is now in a position to pay travelling claims etc,

CHAIRMAN reports having received orders for Bombs, Howitzers and Primers.

MR BENYON introduces the discussion of the more extensive use of unskilled labour in shops, particularly on Sheel work, his reason being that the general principles should be agreed to, as it is no use introducing unskilled labour in shops in Leicester if it is going to lead to trouble, and be a bone of contention. There is no indication of utilising female labour - one hopes that in Leicester the occasion may not arise.

His reason for suggesting the greater use of unskilled labour is that the skilled labour may be released for the more highly skilled jobs.

Treasury

MR AUSTON, MR DUMAS, and MR WARD outlined the Agreement of 5th March 1915.

Mr Austin said that the workmen had come here in the spirit of co-operation. The labour Advisory Committee was waiting for a lead from Head Quarters and had not yet decided to come to any terms of Agreement. He hands round copy of Agreement of March 5th.

MR DUMAS thinks that the question of the employment of women is the only one yet undecided between the workmen and the Federation.

MR WOOD said that the most difficult matters to arrange were those of wages and the practical operation of Clause 5 has lead to trouble in some districts as various rates exist in the same districts.

MR KEAY asked if Sheels are paid day or piece-work - MR WOOD said that 90% are made piece-work. MR DUMAS said that apparently both sides are in Agreement with the general principles, but some little difference exists as to the interpretation of the Clauses.

MR DUMAS asks if we are all prepared to "put our backs" into the matter.

MR MORRIS said the matter is not foreign to his side. He is anxious to do all in his power to help, but they must not forget what will happen after the war.

MR DUMAS points out that the Minister of Munitions would not be pressing the matter as he is if there were not any real demand and need for unskilled workers.

MR GIMSON sums up by saying that we are now in a position to say that both sides are in agreement if suitable safeguards can be provided, and his opinion is that the discussion has been of great value, but that on the whole it appears as if we should wait for a further lead from the Ministry of Munitions with regard to the general questions discussed.

----- Sydney A. Gimson 8/11/15.

FACTORIES

British United Shoe Machinery Co.

British United Shoe Machinery Company Ltd. Directors' Minute Book, 1899-1923

This company on Belgrave Road was, for most of the 20th century, the world's largest manufacturer of footwear machinery. At the start of the war, there was an urgent need for heavier and tougher footwear for army use, which led to the development of new machinery. Production also turned to new materials specifically for the war effort, such as shells, naval gun mountings, aero engine parts and fuses. In May 1915, around 1000 employees went on an unofficial strike which arose from issues with Belgian refugee workers and fears of 'dilution of labour'.

These minutes refer to the strike, the Armaments Group and payments to wives and dependents of employees who had enlisted, as well as payments of war bonuses. It is interesting that higher costs resulting from the war led to a 20% increase in selling prices.

Continued:-

June 22. 1915

In Buildings	1484 : 4 : 0
In Plant	160 : 0 : 0
	£1644 : 4 : 0

That a Strike occurred in the Works on May 6th and a deputation from the Workmen and Trade Union Officials met the Directors, when certain alleged grievances were dealt with, and the men returned to work on May 10th.

→ That the Engineers in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire having decided to organize for the manufacture of Shells etc, under the name of the Leicester District Ordnance Group of Engineers Ltd, the Company has joined this group, and will participate in the manufacture of Shells.

→ That an order for 20,000 fuses has been received by the Company from the Government.

X → That the total sum paid to wives and dependents of the employees of the Company who have enlisted amounts to £2407. 18. 6. The total number of employees who have enlisted is 334. The number of men who have left the Company to take up work at the Government Arsenals and other Works engaged in the manufacture of munitions of war is 200.

→ That the Company is paying a War Bonus to its Staff as follows:-

2/6	per week for all men.
1/6	" " " " women & youths.
1/-	" " " " boys & girls.

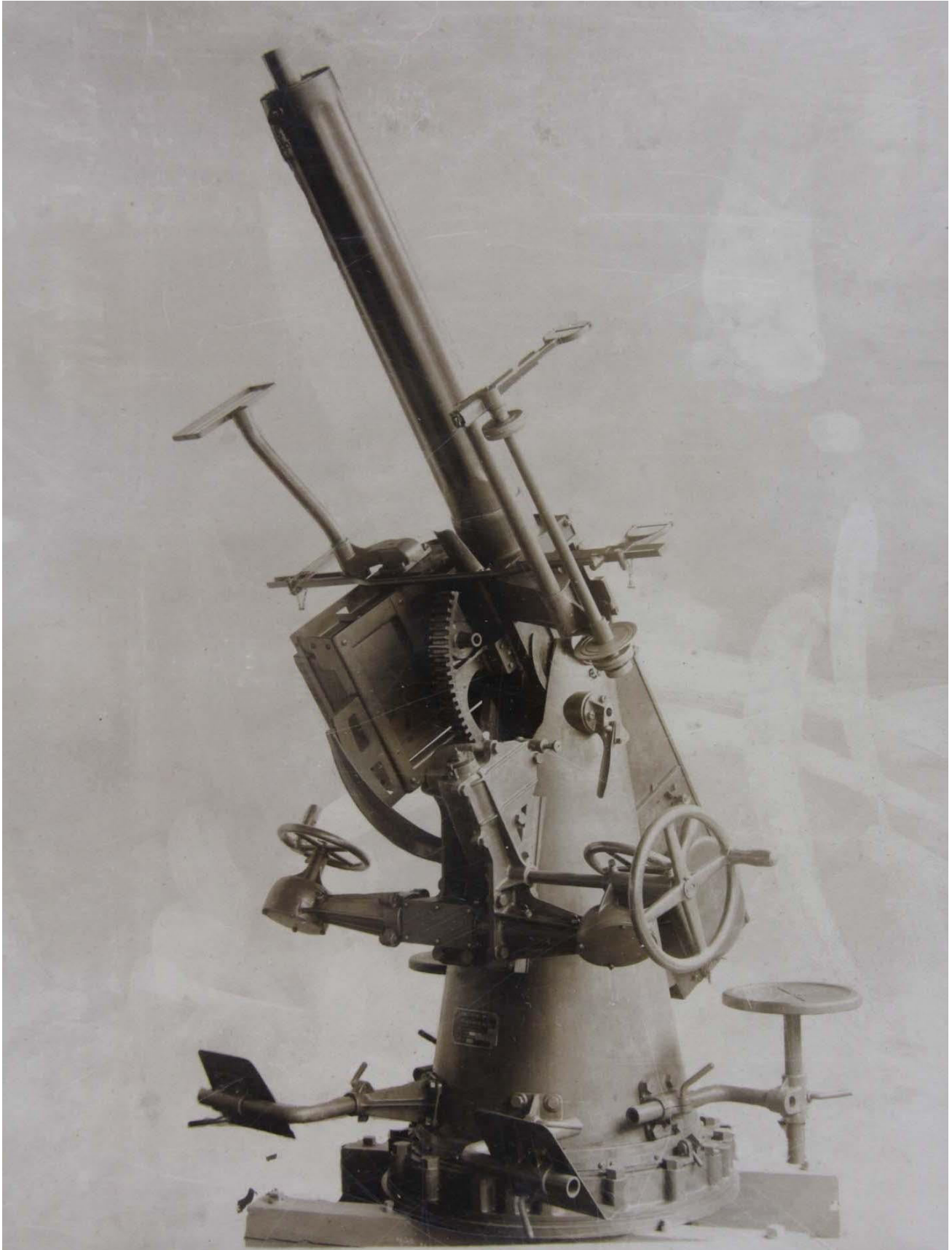
and a war bonus in the shape of extra wages is being paid to employees in the Works.

- That in consequence of the increased cost of labour and material, the Company has advanced the selling prices on Machinery & Parts 20%

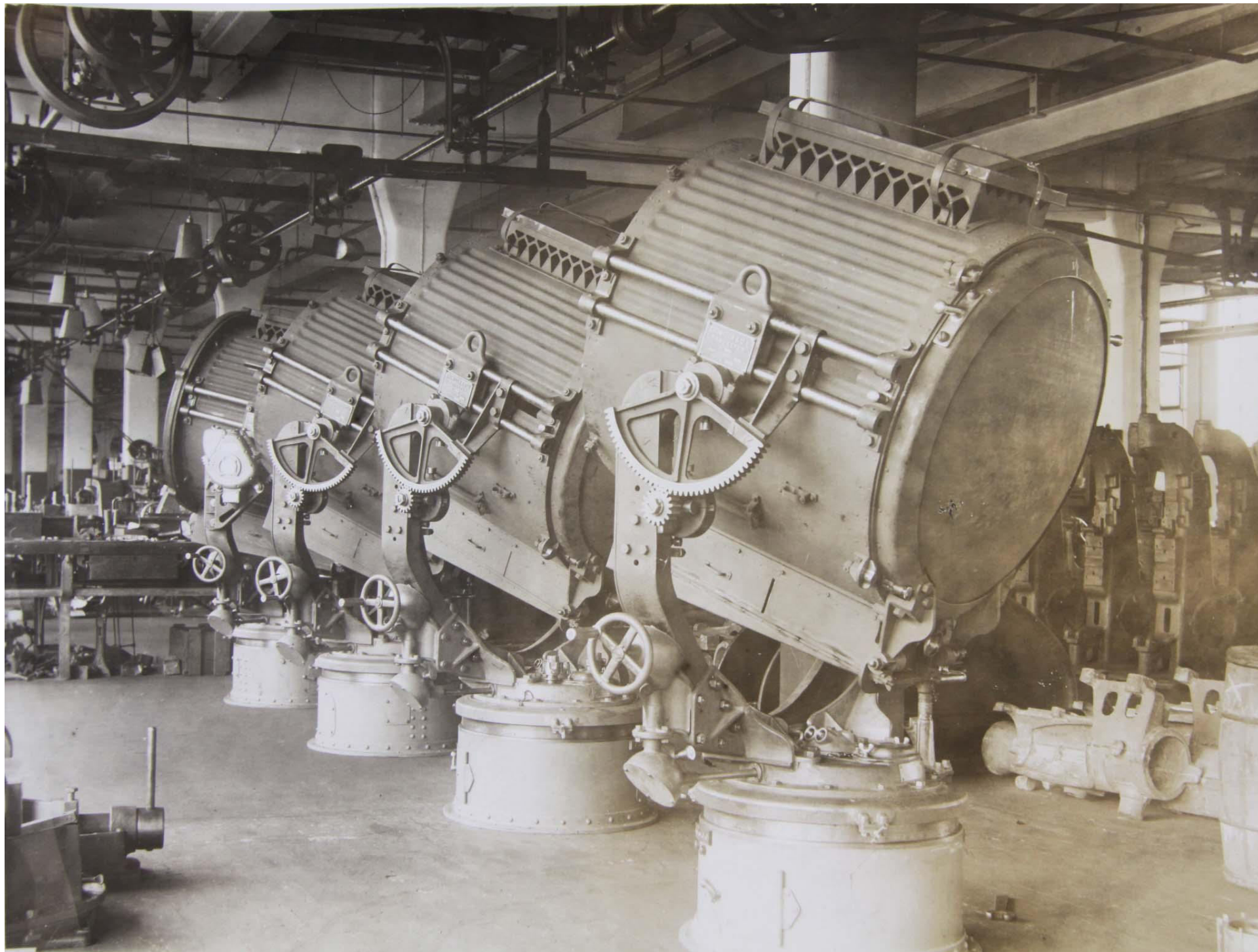
- That owing to the low rate of exchange and the difficulty of transmitting money to the United States, the Security Cycle Company's Bill for £25,836-0-0 has been redeemed.

British United Shoe Machinery Company Ltd. photograph album

The album contains 23 photographs illustrating war-time production. These two examples show a high-angle 'pom pom' gun fire mounting and sight and 36" searchlights assembly.



Date: c.1916 Reference: DE3736/1725/1



Date: c.1916 Reference: DE3736/1725/8

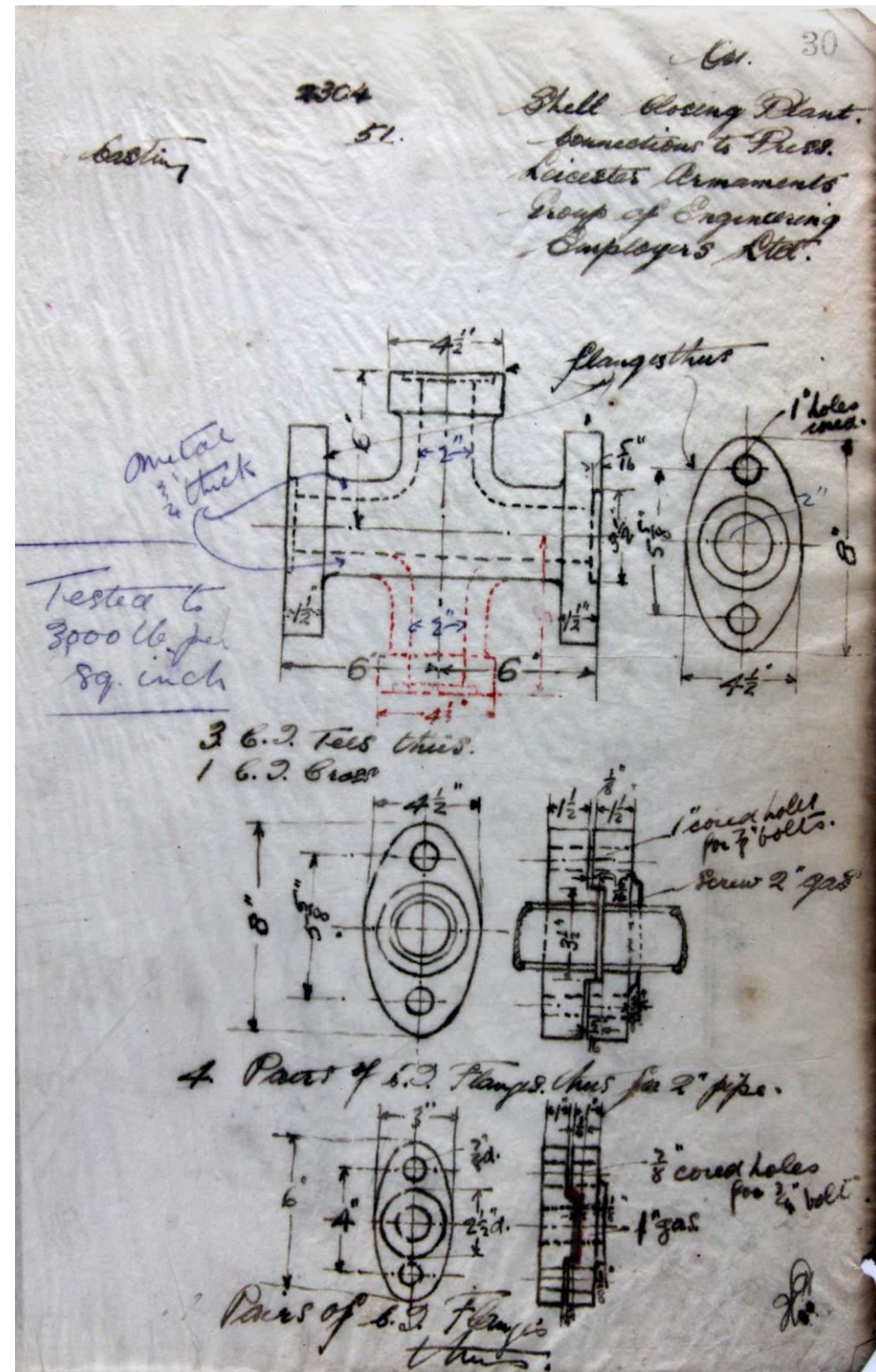
FACTORIES

Other Engineering Firms

Gimson & Co., 'List Book'

Gimsons were engineers, boiler makers, iron founders and boot machinery manufacturers located on Vulcan Road. This volume contains instructions for orders, plans and specifications, including many relating to munitions contracts.

The example page shows a drawing of parts for a shell closing plant for the Leicester Armaments Group.



Photograph of shell manufacture, Standard Engineering Co. Ltd., Evington Valley Road

Standard Engineering made boot machinery but was another company which turned its efforts to munitions manufacture. There is an accompanying letter on the following page from a group of Leicester bank clerks who gave their time in the factory on Sundays as munitions workers.



Date: c.1916 Reference: DE1620/78/13/1

Lloyds Bank Limited.

Leicester, June 19¹⁶

Dear Mr Pochin

Writing on behalf of the Leicester
Bank Clerks Sunday Munition Workers,
we feel that we should like to place
on record our appreciation of the
extreme kindness of you & your brother
Mr Stanley Pochin for arranging &
enabling us to help the country during
this severe crisis.

The full profits which you have allowed
us & the lunches & teas so kindly provided
have made our efforts remunerative
beneficial & congenial.

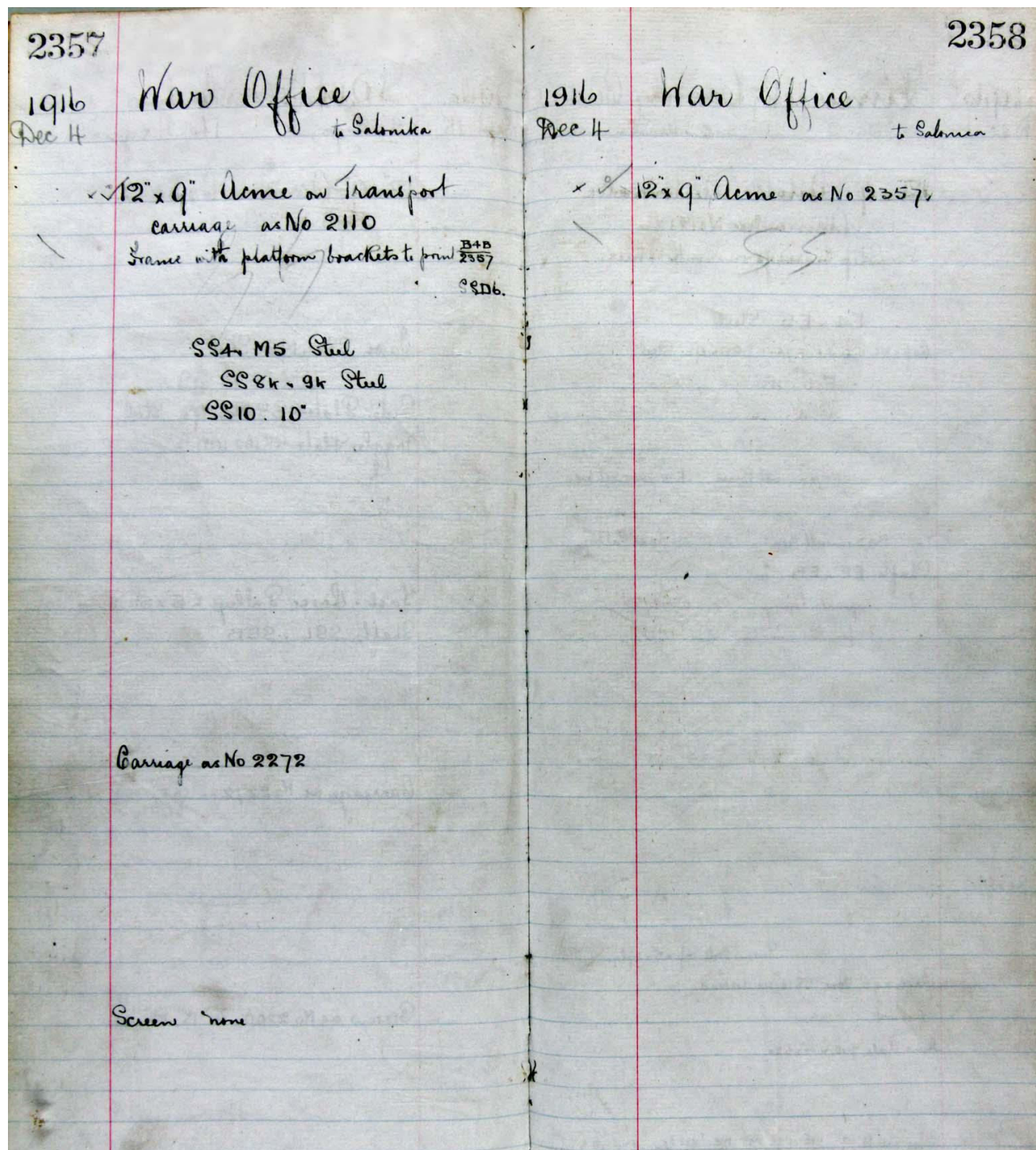
You have enabled us to place £148-16-10
to the Leicester Territorial Red Cross Assⁿ
per Arthur W. Fairbairn Esq. of the Leicester
War Hospital - Games Committee

£5 to the Leicester Mail Santa Claus Fund &
£5 to the Mercury Soldiers & Sailors Xmas
presents Fund. This could not have
been accomplished but for your
generosity & we heartily wish you
every success. Yours very faithfully
J. E. Quapp

Goodwin Barsby & Co., stone-breaking machinery manufacturers, work record book

This company's factory on Watling Street, Leicester, supplied a variety of equipment for the War Office and even for the Russian Government – although the record book shows that an order for the latter was not fulfilled in November 1917, owing to the Russian Revolution.

The example page here relates to a War Office order for a transport carriage for use in Salonika, Greece.




FACTORIES

Wolsey Advertising

Wolsey Underwear Company war-time advertising

In a 1919 *Daily Mail* article, Wolsey boasted that it had made nearly 14 million garments for the army during the war. 75% of production had been for the government which ordered underwear, knitwear and socks, including stump socks and mitts for wounded soldiers. The company's archive contains numerous patriotic (and often anti-German) advertisements which capitalised on Wolsey's supply of clothing to the military.

Aug. 15, 1914.] THE DRAPERS' RECORD. 315



Wolsey and the War

Important Message to the Trade

The Manufacturers of Wolsey Underwear solicit the co-operation of the Trade in their earnest endeavour to keep all their workpeople in full employment during the present European Crisis.

¶ Given trade support, the Wolsey Underwear Factories will all continue running, the services of every man, woman and child will be retained, and the places of Wolsey Employees who have left to serve their Country will, of course, be kept open.

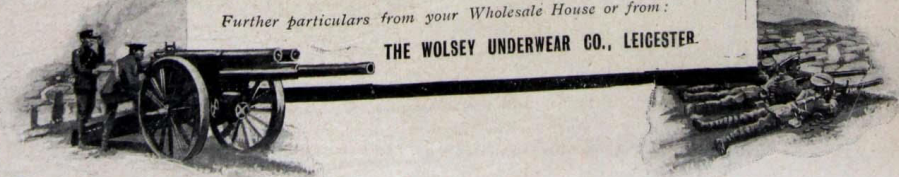
¶ Hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of *foreign hosiery* have in the past been sold in this country. Now, surely comes the time for *British Goods*. In this connection it is worth pointing out that the Makers of Wolsey Underwear are the largest British employers of British labour in the Underwear trade of the United Kingdom.

Wolsey Advertising going ahead!

¶ A vast Advertising Scheme has already been prepared for the coming season; this will be proceeded with, and aided by such trade assistance as the manufacturers feel sure will be forthcoming, there is adequate reason for regarding the future with optimism and with confidence.

Further particulars from your Wholesale House or from:

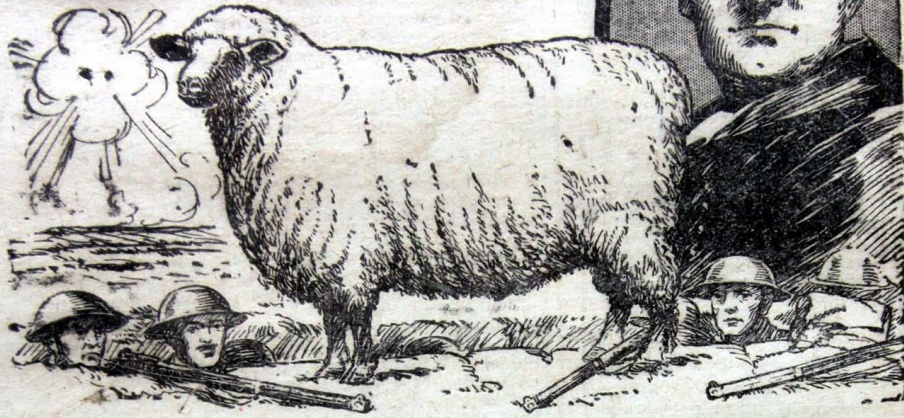
THE WOLSEY UNDERWEAR CO., LEICESTER.



Date: 1914 Reference: DE3375/37

Church Fam. News 21/9

Wool—Wolsey— and War!



SEE about your Wolsey needs to-day. The daily increasing cost of raw materials, the daily increasing demands—for Army and Navy needs—on the manufacturing resources of the makers of Wolsey Pure Wool Underwear, make this imperative.

Wolsey is pure wool, and therefore costs more now than before the war; but Wolsey is worth paying for. Your health demands that you should wear Wolsey. If your dealer cannot meet your requirements at once, Wolsey is worth waiting for. Every patriotic man will recognise the need for patience—because the health and comfort of our fighting men must come first and be safeguarded.

Wolsey

PURE WOOL UNDERWEAR

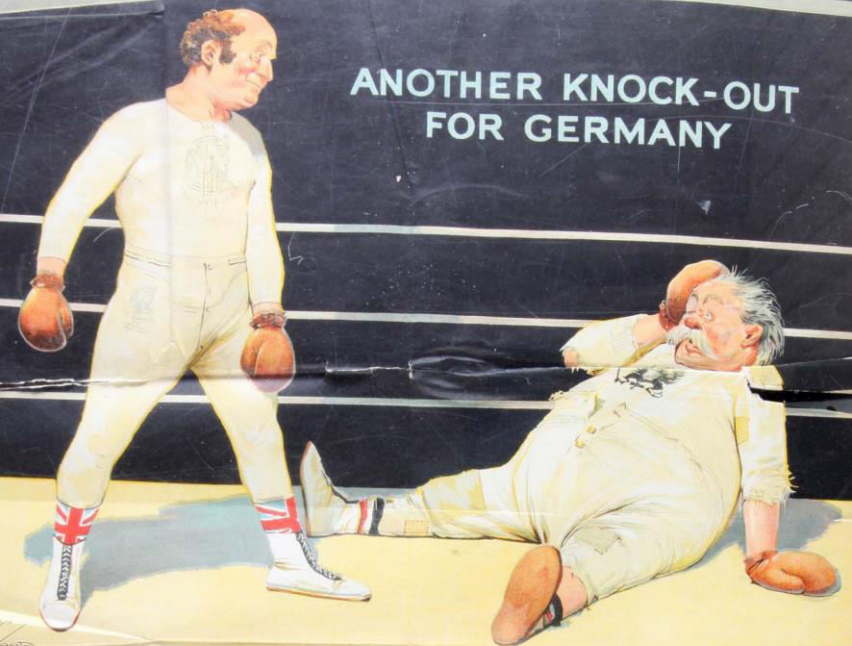
Wolsey is as British as it is dependable. Perfect fitting and made on strictly hygienic principles, deliciously soft and luxuriously comfortable. Guaranteed unshrinkable—replaced free if it proves otherwise.

THE WOLSEY UNDERWEAR COMPANY, LEICESTER.



RAMESES

ANOTHER KNOCK-OUT
FOR GERMANY



RAMESES DOES IT

BRITISH UNDERWEAR



Date: 1917 Reference: DE3375/38

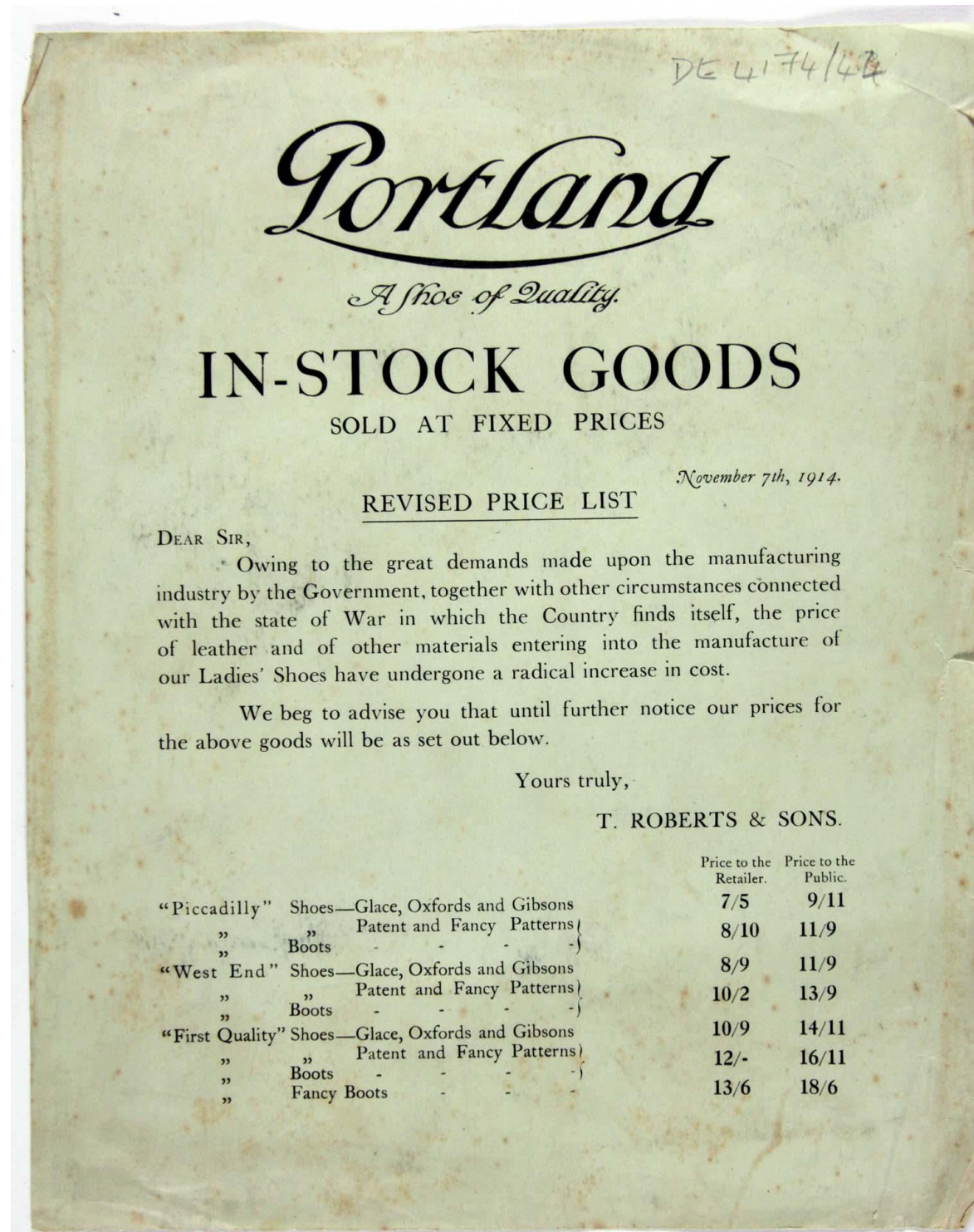
Date: 1917 Reference: DE3375/31

FACTORIES

Shoe Price Rises

Revised Price List, T. Roberts & Sons, boot and shoe manufacturers, The Newarke

As a result of demands by the government and the rising price of materials from the start of the war, the company was forced to make 'a radical increase in cost' to its Portland Ladies' Shoes.



Date: November 1914 Reference: DE4174/44

FACTORIES

Building Plans

Building Plan for a temporary engine shed, A. T. Spencer & Co., makers of munitions, Upper Brown Street

The series of building plans approved by Leicester Corporation contains a number of interesting examples of alterations required for war-time production. This cardboard box machinery manufacturer was now making munitions and submitted a plan for an engine shed. It was approved as a temporary building for the duration of the war and, attached to the plan, there is a letter from the City Surveyor requesting the removal of the shed in 1922.

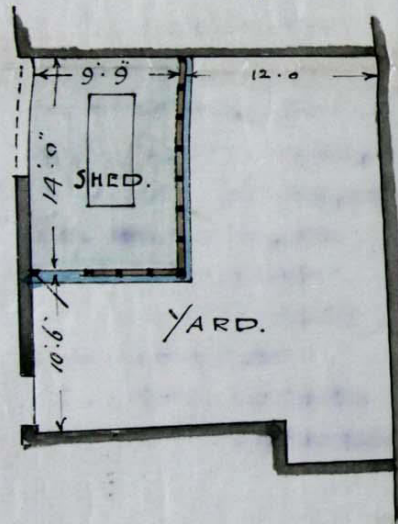
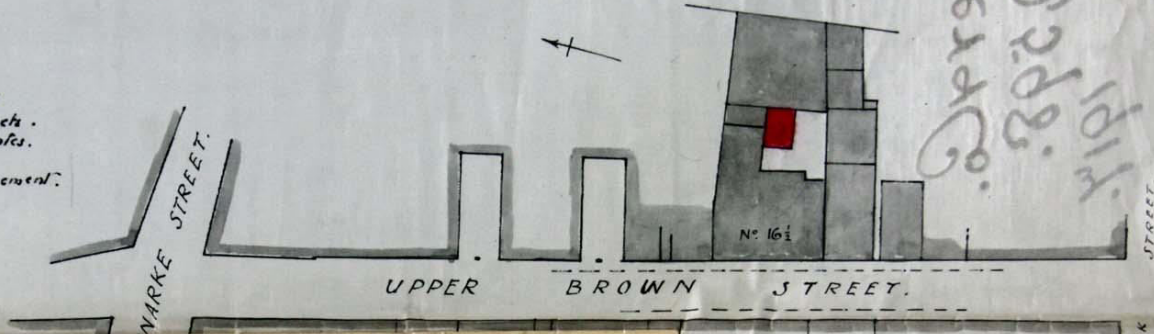
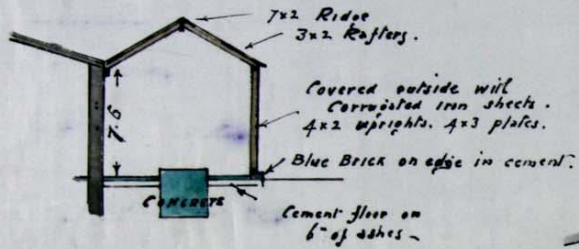
MESSRS. A.T. SPENCER & CO.
 ENGINEERS. 16½ UPPER BROWN ST.
 MAKERS OF MUNITIONS.

1/8 IN. SCALE.

PROPOSED TEMPORARY SHED
 FOR SMALL ENGINE.



Spencer & Co.
 50, 2, 28, 1/2
 10 1/4
 STREET.



PLAN 1/500th
 FROM ORDNANCE SURVEY.

Borough of  Leicester.

No. 20598 Jan. 19th 1917

THIS PLAN WAS THIS DAY APPROVED BY THE HIGHWAY
 AND SEWERAGE COMMITTEE.

*On condition that this building is a
 temporary one and that the Council
 undertake to remove the same at the
 termination of the war if called upon by
 the Corporation so to do*

John J. G. G. G.

Chairman of the Committee.

*We agree to the conditions upon which
 this plan is approved*

A. T. Spencer & Co.

Witness:
Frank B. Cooper

FRANK B. COOPER A.R.I.B.A.
 ARCHITECT. 39 FRIAR LANE, LEICESTER.

Jan. 17. 1916

Sign

2598

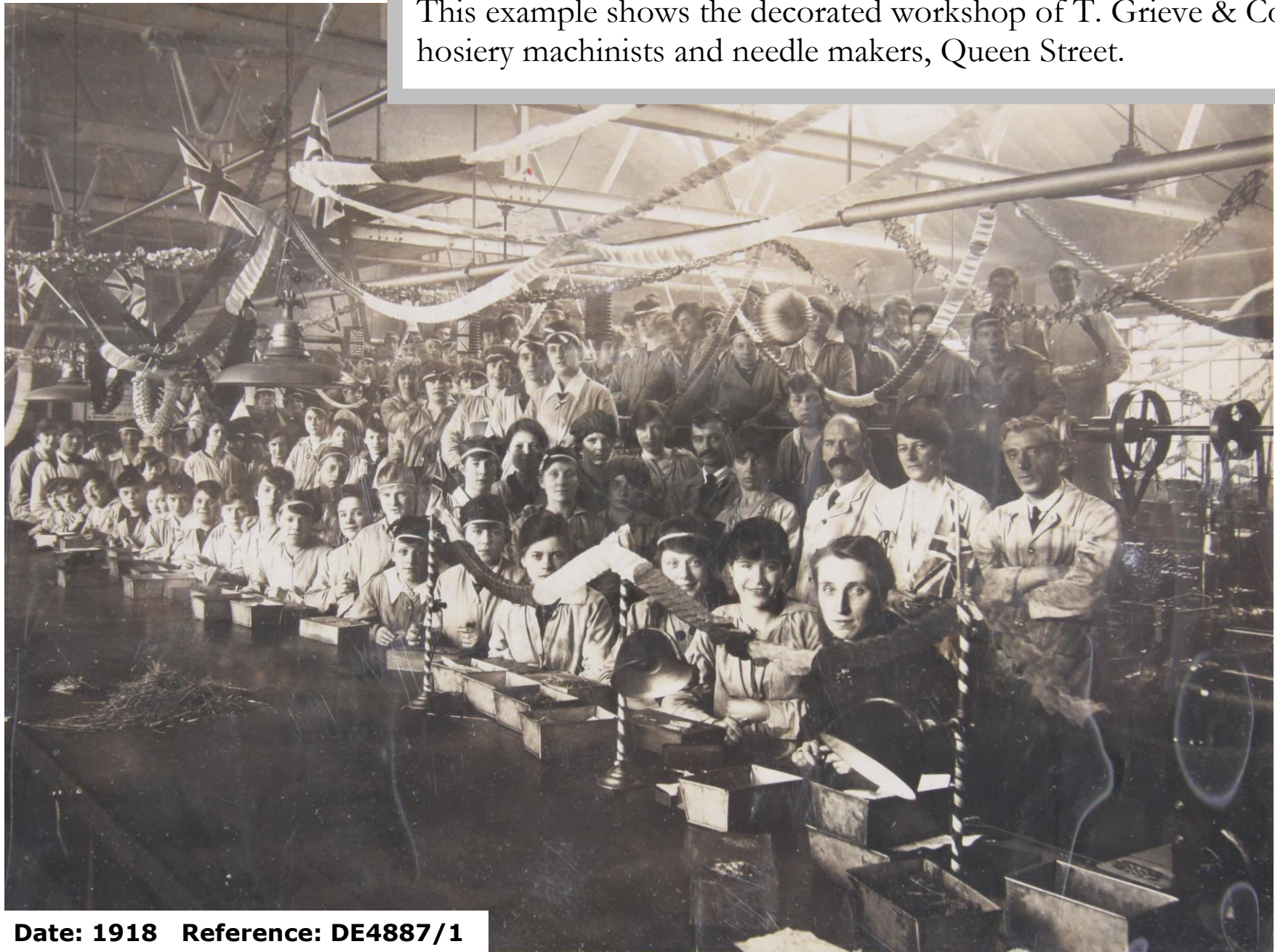
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FACTORIES

Armistice Day

Photograph of Armistice Day celebration

This example shows the decorated workshop of T. Grieve & Co., hosiery machinists and needle makers, Queen Street.



Date: 1918 Reference: DE4887/1

FIND OUT MORE

Additional Resources:

We hope you have found this Resource Pack both informative and enjoyable. Electronic versions of all of the packs in this series are available to download here: www.sdsa.net/WW1-spsf

If you would like to find out about researching your community, please visit the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

For information on our resources, please visit our website at the link below and view our online catalogue and information pages.

LINKS

www.leics.gov.uk/recordoffice

<http://www.sdsa.net/>

www.hlf.org.uk

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/a2a/>

Access to Archives includes some lists of business records which have yet to be added to the Record Office online catalogue.

<http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/>

The East Midlands Oral History Archive catalogue contains details of recordings which can be heard at the Record Office – including interviews with munitions and factory workers.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/looking-for-subject/firstworldwar.htm>

The National Archives holds many World War I sources, including records of the Ministries of Munitions and Labour.

Further Reading

F. P. Armitage - *Leicester 1914-1918: the War-time Story of a Midland Town* (1933)

Ben Beazley - *Four Years Remembered: Leicester During The Great War* (1999)



The Record Office
for Leicestershire,
Leicester & Rutland



Working in
Partnership

