



Pressed Steel

Pressed Steel bought Parsonage Farm in 1954 and the first sod was cut in February 1955, as an extension of the Oxford plant to allow the production of car bodies.

Early pictures of the build can be seen on [Swindon Viewpoint](#) webpage.

By December 1955 the first two presses were in operation, and the first stamping was completed under temporary cover, on New Year's Eve as the walls and roof were not completed until July.

By 1965 the site employed 6,595 people and had overtaken the GWR Railway Works as Swindon's biggest employer, this became British Leyland then Rover finally being bought by BMW in 1994 and is now the Mini Car plant.

The first buildings were A Press & Assembly and Toolroom 1, the first presses were originally mounted on sleepers standing on hardcore and cinders to stop them sinking into the mud. The first panels being produced under temporary cover as walls & roof were not completed until July 1956.

The press shop was the first in the world to have a scrap conveyor and bailing system installed in the basement this reduced the need for trucking the metal waste away from the pressing process.

Further building followed with B Press and Assembly in 1960 along with Toolroom 2 which also included the Main Office Block, Drawing Office and Board Room, it was this year that The Duke of Edinburgh visited the plant, finally C Press & Assembly were opened in 1962.

C Building ended up double the size originally envisaged as the local bedrock was much harder than expected and would have been too expensive to clear for building works, this was discovered during the building of the site Laboratory Block later to become Directors Offices & Board room when Toolroom 2 & Front Office block demolished in early 2000's. This also meant that when Toolroom 2 was built it was put at the front of the factory and the Offices added, these would have been originally at the top of the site, anyone passing up Swindon Road past No.4 Gate will notice it looked like the posh entrance, which it was originally intended to be. The north east of 'C' Building was originally the Enamel plant, introduced to coat the 1100/1300 range under frames after there were serious rusting issues. This plant was used a lot by the workers for coating 'homers' and self made toolboxes, the apprentice made toolboxes were dipped in these tanks.

The plant was closed after a major fire and the area was converted to a Light Pressings area, pulling together the 100 small presses scattered around the site, when Rover closed there was no economic need for this small component presses and the area was converted to MINI panel storage. As part of

the Honda collaboration part of C Building Assembly was rebuilt and became a state of the art Tri-Axis Press shop. During the 1960's the plant built and shipped bodies in white (Complete metal shells) for Midgit, MGB and MGB GT in 'A' Building, Rolls Royce bodies were also produced here at the rate of 10 per week, ADO9 (Austin Cambridge range) and Triumph 2000 in B Building and the 1100/1300 range in C Building, some of which were shipped abroad as C.K.D. kits to America, South Africa and Holland. The Maxi was launched in 1969 and ceased in 1991 and the Marina April 1971. The ADO9 was replaced by the ADO38 and the Triumph 2000 in the 1970's, these were later to be replaced by Rover P9 but when it failed crash tests the project was cancelled and with the closure of the Speke plant in Liverpool the TR7 took its place.

“Another sleeping British Leyland worker at the Stratton St. Margaret plant has sparked off a costly production stoppage. He was caught napping on Tuesday night and punished with a one-shift suspension. Last night, when the suspension took effect, about 140 men walked out in sympathy. The tired worker who left his job to go to sleep is a C building press operator. So are all the men who downed tools about 8.30pm last night and quit the factory.”

Extract from Evening Advertiser, Thursday, 17 April 1975

Another Newspaper Extract Reads as follows:-

“BRITISH Leyland today signed contracts worth more than £20m in connection with plans for the new Mini [Metro]. By putting their cash where their convictions are, the company has confirmed earlier Evening Advertiser predictions that it will mean boom-time for the Swindon Body Plant at Stratton St Margaret, for the Swindon plant is to produce well over half the body pressings for the new hatchback to be assembled in a brand new plant at Longbridge.”

Evening Advertiser, Wednesday, 15 June 1977

In 1980 the Mini Metro was launched which was to become the Austin Metro in 1994 it was replaced by the Rover100. C press shop became a world first a couple of times with the first computerized monitoring of press precision, full automatic loading and unloading and finally robotisation, robots had been used for assembly and painting work but never before for press panel handling which put a lot of stress on the robots joints.

In 1980's now part of Austin rover Group the site was making parts for Metro, Maestro and Montego.

It gained a new owner in 1988 with the sale of Austin Rover Group to British Aerospace for £100M, who themselves sold the now Rover Group Holdings to BMW in 1994 for £800M. During the BAe ownership the 45 acres at the top of the site are sold off and are today Britannia & Europa Trading Estates. With the collaboration with and Honda moving to Swindon the site started producing parts for the joint projects (Honda Concerto/Rover 200 & Honda Legend/Rover 800, doing nearly all the pressing work for Honda until they built their own press shop after BMW took over Rover and didn't want to continue with external contracts.

On the 11th December 1995 a 40th Anniversary Exhibition was held in The Swindon Museum, Bath Road and was opened by the Mayor Cllr. Bert Smith.

1998 saw the launch of the Rover 75. The site continued to supply body parts and sub-assemblies to Rover Longbridge until it's collapse, the decision was then made to turn the plant over to producing the parts for the new style Mini for shipping to the Oxford Cowley plant, 2006 saw the launch of the 2nd Generation MINI, 2009 saw the building of the 1.5 millionth mini and its 50th birthday.

In 2013 the 3rd Generation MINI was launched.

Over the years the site did work for a lot of other companies often when they were rebuilding their own facilities, some include Leyland Truck & Bus, Renault, SAAB, Volvo and even unusual work such as TV Satellite dishes and Aluminium parts for Greenhouses. Today the site only uses B and C building for the Mini work the rest of the site has been mothballed.

Changes in Ownership

- 1965 British Motor Corporation (BMC) took over Pressed Steel Company Ltd
- 1966 BMC merged with Jaguar-Daimler and Pressed Steel to form Motor Holdings
- 1968 14th May, Merger of British Motor Holdings with the Leyland Motor Company to form British Leyland Corporation
- 1974 The Labour government rescued British Leyland Corporation at a cost of £1.25bn
- 1975 British Leyland Corporation shortened its name to British Leyland
- 1978 British Leyland reached an agreement by which they built cars to Honda's designs
- 1981 The government injected £980m into British Leyland
- 1982 British Leyland changed its name to Austin Rover
- 1986 Austin Rover changed its name to Rover
- 1987 The government invested further £1.2bn into the business
- 1988 The government sold Rover Group to British Aerospace for £150M
- 1990 Rover Holdings and Honda in the UK Manufacturing took a 20% cross-shareholding in one another
- 1994 In February British Aerospace sold the company to BMW of Germany
- 1996 In October BMW announce its intention to invest £3bn in Rover
- 2000 Rover was renamed and the Swindon plant began trading as Swindon Pressings Ltd, it was put up for sale but in 2001 BMW decided to retain ownership.
- 2003 BMW Group confirm Plant Swindon as the main press supplier for MINI
- 2004 Plant Swindon secures major MINI Sub Assembly with a total of £60m into the plant.