



## Pressed Steel

Pressed Steel bought the 140-acre 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. Builders - H.W. Weedon & Partners

The decision to build at Stratton was announced at the A.G.M by Chairman Major Albert Pam OBE on 25th May 1955. Early pictures of the build can be seen on Swindon Viewpoint Webpage. The first employees would be from London area as there wasn't enough local labour at the time.

By December 1955 'A' Building was complete, and the first two presses were in operation, 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.

Toolroom 1 was completed in 1957, 'B' Building in 1958,

In 1960 The Duke of Edinburgh visited the Drawing Office and Board Room which had been completed in 1959 then .to open the Laboratory block (later to become Directors Offices & Board room when Toolroom 2 & Front Office block demolished in early 2000's.),'

C' Building was built in 1961, by Holland & Hannen and Cubitts for £3.5M, plans by Harry W. Weedon & Partners. (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, 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.), this gave the site over 1 million square feet of production floor and employed 4,000 workers.

By 1965 the site employed 6,595 people and had overtaken the GWR Railway Works as Swindon's biggest employer, this had reduced to 3,200 by 1986, this became British Leyland then Rover finally being bought by BMW in 1994 and is now the MINI plant.

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.

During the 1960's the plant built and shipped bodies in white (Complete metal shells) for Migit, Austin Healey Sprite (almost 49,000 produced), 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.

In 1980 the Mini Metro was launched which was to become the Austin Metro in 1994 it was replaced by the Rover100, unfortunately for Swindon this also meant 450 redundancies announced on 20<sup>th</sup> March that year. A six press line-up for Line C press shop was added, C Press becoming a world's first a couple of times with the first computerized monitoring of press precision, fully automatic loading and unloading and finally robotization, robots had been used for assembly and painting work but had never been used for press panel handling which put a lot of stress on the robot's joints. Later in the 80's 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/RoverSD1, 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.

11 Dec 1995 a 40th 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 facilities, some such were Leyland Truck & Bus, Renault, SAAB, Volvo and even unusual work such as TV Satellite dishes and Aluminium parts for Halls Greenhouses. Today the site only uses B and C building for the Mini work the rest of the site has been mothballed.

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 2018 the original A Building, South Acetylene House, South Boiler house and Central Office block were demolished.

2019 building commenced on new press shop for Electric Mini.

## **News Articles**

*A strike of 1,500 workers at the Pressed Steel Stratton plant, which has caused a crisis in the car industry is over. The men will be going back to work on what is considered to be fairly generous terms. After the mass meeting, held to consider the recommendation, the jubilant strikers sang a victory song, Keep Right On To The End Of The Road. Wiltshire Gazette & Herald 27-05-1958*

### *Stratton Factory Man Dies at Work*

*A Pressed Steel Company employee, Mr. Yvon Ronald Jenney (41), of The Hostel, Stratton St. Margaret, collapsed and died as he was working at the factory last night. He was dead before Dr. J. Zamenhof arrived at the factory. Mr. Jenney, who was formally a soldier stationed at the Royal Military College of Science, Watchfield, and living at 27 Wellington Square, Watchfield leaves a widow and four children. Evening Advertiser, 11 August 1959*

*The 1200 skilled men on unofficial strike at the Pressed Steel Company's car bodies factory at Stratton St Margaret, near Swindon, decided at a mass meeting yesterday to stay out until their pay claim for 9d an hour increase is met. It is estimated that between 50,000 and 60,000 men in different parts of the country are directly affected by the strike, now in its third week. The Glasgow Herald*  
02-05-1961

*Swindon May 4; The unofficial strike by 1,200 skilled men at the car body factory of the Pressed Steel Company at Stratton St. Margaret, near Swindon spread today. Production workers in an assembly building and the press shop walked out after claiming one of their number had been dismissed on the spot for refusing to handle "black" work. Shop stewards estimated that 150 men stopped work. Later several hundred men walked out in sympathy with others who had been dismissed for refusing to do "black" work today. The strikers were joined by diesel engine drivers and shunters who load parts for dispatch by rail. The firm said that they were standing by their decision to dismiss everyone who failed to report for work today. They said they refused to accept the plea that any work in the factory was "black", because the strike was not official. The skilled men have been on strike for three weeks over a claim for an extra 9d an hour, the firm have offered 3d. Eight unions are involved and have repeatedly ordered the men back to work. The Times 05--05-1961*

*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."*  
Evening Advertiser, Thursday, 17 April 1975

*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

*'ADOLF' JIBE IN BIG WALK-OUT. Swindon Car men blame B L boss. Swindon's car men finally blew their tops today and brought the town's B L Body Plant to a standstill.*  
Evening Advertiser, Tuesday, April 15, 1980.

## **Mileposts**

- 1965 British Motor Corporation (BMC) took over Pressed Steel Company Ltd
- 1966 BMC merged with Jaguar-Daimler and Pressed Steel to form British Motor Holdings
- 1968 14th May, Merger of British Motor Holdings with the Leyland Motor Company to form British Leyland Corporation.
- 1961 1500 hundred workers on strike over pay dispute.
- 1974 The Labour government rescued British Leyland Corporation at a cost of £1.25bn
- 1975 British Leyland Corporation shortened its name to British Leyland
- 1976 Launch of the Rover SDi
- 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.
- 2006 Front office block & Toolroom 2 demolished.
- 2018 A Building, Acetylene Plant, Boiler house & Central Office block demolished
- 2019 building work in new press shop starts.
- 2020 New Fire Sprinkler system installed. Maintenance Building demolished