

Luton: Motor Town

1910 to 2000



A Local History Resource Pack
Luton Museum Education Service

Arts Libraries & Museums

Luton Culture

Luton: Motor Town 1910 - 2000

The resources in this pack focus on the major changes in the town during the 20th century. For the majority of the period Luton was a prosperous, optimistic town that encouraged forward-looking local planning and policy. The Straw Hat Boom Town, seeing problems ahead in its dependence on a single industry, worked hard to attract and develop new industries. In doing so it fuelled a growth that changed the town forever. However Luton became almost as dependant on the motor industry as it had been on the hat industry.

The aim of this pack is to provide a core of resources that will help pupils studying local history at KS2 and 3 form a picture of Luton at this time.

The primary evidence included in this pack may photocopied for educational use. If you wish to reproduce any part of this pack for any other purpose then you should first contact Luton Museum Service for permission.

Please remember these sheets are for educational use only. Normal copyright protection applies.

Contents

1: Teachers' Notes

Suggestions for using these resources

Bibliography

2: The Town and its buildings

20th Century Descriptions

A collection of references to the town from a variety of sources. They illustrate how the town has been viewed by others during this period.

Luton Council on Luton

The following are quotes from the Year Book and Official Guides produced by Luton Council over the years. They offer an idea of how the Luton Council saw the town it was running.

1915 Luton Map

This map shows how the focus of the development of the town had moved from the centre to the edges. Major factory sites are marked on this map, as is land available for new industrial development. New housing estates are also indicated.

1934 Luton Map

This map, taken from the Luton Year Book, shows the areas of the town that grew during the period after the First World War. Most of the development took place to the north-west of the town centre. One of the reasons for this were The Stockwood and Luton Hoo Estates that lay to the south of the town blocking development in this direction.

1950 Luton Map

This map is the most recent we can include in this pack because of Ordnance Survey copyright. It shows the centre of town before the Arndale development and the new housing estates, including Farley Hill.

St Mary's Church and the town centre 1966

By the time this photograph was taken all the land around the parish church, with the exception of its churchyard, had been developed. The layout of the town in the area that would become the Arndale Centre can also be seen.

George Street towards Town Hall 1965

This view was taken looking down George Street from Market Hill, where the Corn Exchange once stood. George Street was not a pedestrian area as it is at present.

George Street 1965

This view shows the side of George Street which we be developed by The Arndale Centre. Frontages of the upper floors of these buildings remain.

The Old Town Hall and the Peace Day Riot

The old Town Hall had been built in 1847. By the beginning of the 20th century people had begun to think that it was not grand enough for Luton. It was destroyed when Peace Day celebrations ended in a riot in July 1919.

New Town Hall

After the 1919 riot Luton was without a Town Hall for many years. The present Town Hall was the winner of an open design competition. This drawing of it comes from the Luton Year Book 1936. The new Town Hall was opened in 1936. It is now thought to be a fine example of 1930s architecture.

The Pattern of Prosperity

This newspaper article presents a picture of the town during the 1960s. It was published in The Evening Standard of January 12th 1960. The building of the M1 through Luton raised the town's profile in the national media.

The Arndale Centre

The project to re-develop the town centre was the largest of the 20th century in Luton. When it was new the Arndale Centre was the largest covered shopping centre in Europe. It replaced narrow and crowded old streets with what was then a modern shopping environment. These photographs were taken in 1975. As with all changes, opinions about it varied.

3: Living and Settling In Luton

Luton's Population

These newspaper articles from The Luton News provide information about the data collected in the 1931, 1951 and 1991 Censuses. The data itself will remain confidential until 100 years after the Census was taken.

Luton in the 1920s

As the first quotation illustrates, Luton was still as small town by today's standards. The two following extracts give contrasting pictures of life in the town after the First World War. Although many families were getting used to electricity and indoor toilets some were left living in the kind of conditions we associate with the 19th, and not the 20th, century.

Luton In the 1930s

This article from the Luton News in 1964 looks back to the Luton of the 1930s. Luton escaped the Depression and was proud of its low unemployment statistics. At that time many people came here to look for work and begin new lives.

Extract from 'Report on Luton' 1945

The Report was compiled for the Borough Council to provide a picture of the town's population, health, housing, education and industry to enable them to plan future services. It is clear that, in spite of the fact that Luton had prospered in the years after the First World War, not all Lutonians shared in the benefits.

Farley Hill

The Farley Hill Estate was built to address the issues raised in the 1945 Report On Luton. It was planned as an independent community with schools, shops and other facilities. At the time it was thought such a large estate would solve Luton's housing shortage.

Coming to Luton

These quotes are taken from oral history interviews collected by the Luton Museum Service. They provide personal stories and opinions about what it was like coming to Luton from other parts of the country and the world. Also included is the point of view of a native Lutonian.

Lutonians on Luton

What do Lutonians think of their town at the end of the 20th Century? The quotes were collected by the Luton Museum Service as part of their oral history programme.

4: Business and Trade

New Industries Committee Booklet 1905

This is the introduction from a booklet produced by The New Industries Committee as part of their remit to attract new businesses to Luton.

'Progressive Luton' 1935

'Progressive Luton' is a booklet showcasing Luton and its industries. The introduction included here sets the tone of the publication. The booklet contains adverts for the town's major firms, some of which are included here.

Our Industrial Army

This article from the Luton Year Book 1939 gives a very positive picture of workers in Luton. The picture shows a production line at the Commer Cars factory in 1935.

Adverts from the 1930s

This small selection of adverts illustrates how Luton's businesses, large and small, were trying to tempt Luton people to spend their money. The type and style of the adverts also suggest the affluence of the town at the time.

Luton Industrial and Trade Exhibition 1951

Staged in June and July 1951, this exhibition was organised by the Borough Council as a showcase for Luton and as part of the Festival of Britain celebrations.

Luton Businesses 1955

This article, taken from the Luton Year Book 1955, provides brief biographies of Luton's major firms in the middle of our period and a picture of Luton industry at the time.

Working In Luton

Most of the jobs in Luton were factory based and many on production lines. These photographs show workers at SKF and Electrolux plants in the town.

Vauxhall Motors and Luton

These press cuttings and photographs attempt to illustrate the impact that Vauxhall Motors had on Luton through the 20th century.

Luton Airport

At the time of writing Luton Airport and the companies based there are one of the town's largest employers. It is also what most people now associate with the town. From the beginning it was seen as a resource for the town and its industries. This quotation and plan are taken from Luton Year Book 1939.

Acknowledgements

This resource pack was produced for Luton Museum Education Service by Eleanor Markland, Keeper of Education and Elizabeth Adey, Keeper of Local History with the assistance of Kate Warren, Chris Grabham, the Luton News Archive and The Arndale Shopping Centre. Layout and design by Shaw Design Associates.

Front cover: from 1958 Luton Official Guide

1: Teachers' Notes

Introduction

In order to see the beginnings of modern Luton it is necessary to go back a little further than our start date of 1910. By the last decade of the 19th century it was felt that the town had become too dependant on the straw hat trade. Seeing this the Luton Council and the local Chamber of Commerce decided to take action to attract new businesses to the town. They formed the New Industries Committee which successfully attracted many firms to the town and therefore had a huge impact on the development of the town in the 20th century.

One of the firms that settled in the town was the Vauxhall and West Hydraulic Company. It opened a factory in Kimpton Road in 1905 producing marine engines. However one of the sidelines it developed was cars. Vauxhall Motors, as it became, was to have a profound effect on Luton in the 20th century. Luton's prosperity became so bound up with that of Vauxhall that it was said that when Vauxhall sneezed Luton caught a cold.

The prosperity that Vauxhall and the other firms brought to Luton helped the town pass through the Depression of the 1930s with very little of the hardship for which the period is remembered. At a time when many towns were suffering a loss of business Luton was expanding. In 1934 the Luton News proudly announced that Luton had the lowest percentage of unemployed workers in the country. This made the town a huge draw to those seeking work and a better standard of living from all over the country. Families from depressed areas, including Tyneside in England and Clydeside in Scotland, moved to Luton triggering another wave of expansion as houses were built for the newcomers.

Houses began to cover fields separating Luton from the surrounding hamlets and villages. Investors and speculative builders bought land to develop for housing. Many houses in Stopsley, Limbury and Biscot were built during the 1920s and 1930s. The availability of housing and jobs drew yet more families to the town, which in turn attracted more companies looking for employees and enabled other companies to expand. Both before and after the Second World War Luton's workers and their employers enjoyed good industrial relations. It became one of the reasons why Luton was such an attractive town for businesses.

The townspeople, paid well by local firms and confident of their future in the town, became a market for the goods the town produced. More people in Luton owned their homes than was usual at the time. The modern appliances made here by firms such as Electrolux and Davis Gas Stoves were snapped up by new homeowners. The 1930s saw the construction of the new Town Hall, a modern and imposing building that reflected the town's pride in being one of the foremost industrial towns in the country. The Victorian town centre began to change from one dominated by hat factories to one concentrating on retail and entertainment. The Second World War interrupted this development. The new Town Hall was covered in camouflage, factories switched to war production and became targets for enemy bombs. Whatever happened the town would never quite be the same again.

By the end of the Second World War in 1945, there were important issues to be faced. Luton had escaped relatively unscathed compared to other similar towns but there was a serious housing shortage. Large council estates were planned for Farley Hill, Leagrave, Limbury and Stopsley. In the 1950s big private housing estates grew at Vauxhall Park, Stopsley, Limbury Mead and Sundon Park. The seemingly endless expansion did cause concern and some thought that it would be better to put a limit on the growth of the town. However the Borough boundaries stretched to take in more and more of the surrounding countryside.

In the 1950s and 1960s Luton's prosperity continued, justifying the optimism of its residents, and it was still attracting newcomers. Many people from Ireland and the Caribbean found their way to Luton at this time. As these communities grew Luton began to take on the multicultural face we know today. The pressure on the town to expand led to a hotly-argued debate over whether Luton should merge with Dunstable. While this was discussed, one thing was agreed, the town centre was too small and too old fashioned for such a forward-looking town. In the 1960s the Borough Council began to formulate the plans that would lead to the building of the Arndale Centre.

The Arndale development was the biggest single change in the town centre Luton had ever seen. Today when shopping centres and covered malls are commonplace it is difficult to understand how modern and exciting the Arndale was when it first opened. It was the largest covered shopping centre in Europe, Luton was leading the way once again. The Arndale attracted shoppers from miles around, no other local town had anything like it. At last Luton had a town centre that suited its still expanding young population.

In every post-war Census data shows Luton as a young town, the average age of its citizen is four or five years younger than the national average. Even in the 2001 Census Luton had the eighth highest population of under one year olds in the country. The availability, and affordability, of housing attracted young families. Therefore there was no let up in demand. In the 1960s and 70s the house building continued. As with many towns at this period the answer was thought to lie in high-rise living. The tower blocks at Marsh Farm and Hockwell Ring date from this period.

Although Luton had escaped the Depression of the 1930s it did not escape the economic downturn of the 1970s. With companies under pressure and cutting back, industrial relations suffered. Strikes occurred in the motor industry across Britain and Luton was no exception. Many old established firms closed or were taken over by larger corporations. Unemployment rose and community relations became more difficult. The early 1980s were possibly Luton's darkest years in the 20th century. Events certainly had an effect on people's perception of the town.

However as the national economy picked up, so did Luton. The events of the 1970s and 1980s had made people in Luton aware that there was a lot of effort needed if Luton was to move forward into the 21st century a happy and harmonious town. Since then there has been a great deal of work done on the regeneration of the town, and in attracting new industries. It is as if the wheel has come full circle from the New Industries Committee of the beginning of the century. Once again Luton is providing an attractive base for modern companies.

The success of these initiatives might be judged by the fact that Luton is still growing. In fact by the late 1980s Luton had finally run out of green field sites suitable for housing. Bramingham to the north, Wigmore to the east and Bushmead to the north east took up the last remaining farmland. Expansion to the south has been limited by the boundaries by the Luton Hoo estate and Hertfordshire. At the time of writing Luton is built up right to the Borough boundaries. However there is still pressure to provide more homes. Brownfield sites, such as the gas works in Dallow Road and the site of the Electrolux factory on Oakley Road are being developed for housing, but Government targets mean still more housing must be found.

Without doubt Luton has changed dramatically over the 20th century. There have been many changes but the 20th century has left Luton a significant legacy.

Bibliography

James Dyer, Frank Stygall, John Dony, *The Story of Luton*, White Crescent 1964

Aubrey Darby, *A View From The Alley*, Borough of Luton 1974

Stephen Bunker, Robin Holgate, Marian Nichols, *The Changing Face of Luton*, Book Castle 1993

Dave Craddock, *Where They Burnt The Town Hall Down*, The Book Castle, 1999

Keep Smiling Through, A WWII Resource Pack, Luton Museum Education Service 2001

Using the Resources

These are just a few suggestions of activities using the sources included in this pack.

The Town and its buildings

- Discuss the descriptions of the town. How have people's perceptions of the town changed over the 20th century?
- Compare what the Council said about the town to the other descriptions.
- Compare the three maps. Indicate on a modern map the areas that had been developed by the date of each map.
- Look at the areas marked as suitable for industry on the 1915 map. Have these areas been used for industry on the later maps? Are they still industrial sites today?
- Compare the 1950 map with a modern map of the town OS map. What have been the major changes? Free maps can be downloaded from the Ordnance Survey at www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/getamap
- Use the burning of the Town Hall as the stimulation for creative writing, art work or drama.
- Visit Luton Museum's new galleries to find out more about the Peace Day Riot.
- Discuss why the design of the new Town Hall might have been chosen to win the competition. What did the Councillors want the new building to be like? Write a brief that they might have given the architects.
- Visit the centre of Luton or look at photographs of the area views today.
 - Look for any remains of the town as illustrated in these pictures?
 - Which buildings have now gone?
 - Which buildings still remain?
 - What are they used for now?
 - List all the changes you can see.
 - Visit the Arndale Centre. Its main thoroughfares follow the routes of the old streets, and are named after them. There is also a plaque marking the site of the Plait Hall.

- Discuss why Lutonians wanted to improve the town centre. Do you think the Arndale was the right way forward? Can you find the street name signs? Why is it commemorated?
- Look at the concept drawings for the Arndale Centre. Compare them to the actual buildings. What differences can you find?
- Organise a debate discussing the case for and against the Arndale development.
- Read the Evening Standard article about Luton. Why might Lutonians have felt pleased when reading this article? What do you think the writer mean when he said that Luton was like the M1?
- Talk to people who remember Luton in the 1950s and 1960s. What do they remember about the town at that time? How do their memories compare with the Evening Standard article?

Living and Settling In Luton

- Compare Robert Wilkinson's description of Luton in the 1920s to a modern map of the town. From the information he gives mark the extent of the town at that time.
- List all the items used in homes today that are electric. Which of these might Edna Odell's family have used in the 1920s? Find out when the others became available.
- Edna Odell and Reginald Shane did not know each other, yet they grew up in the same town. Imagine what Reginald would have thought if he had visited Edna's new house and what Edna might have felt if she had visited Reginald's home.
- Do some research about the Depression in Britain. What areas of the country were worst hit? What types of workers suffered most? What were its causes? Why do you think Luton still had jobs and good wages?
- Imagine you are an unemployed worker in a depressed area in the 1930s. Create a character and family for yourself. Tell the story of how you came to Luton and what happened when you got here as a first person narrative, a series of letters, a diary or a play.
- Look at the oral history extracts about coming to Luton. What reasons did they have for choosing Luton? What experiences did these people share?
- Find out how long your families have been in Luton (or your town or area). What other parts of Britain and the world does your class have links with. Plot them on a map. Can you find out what attracted your families to Luton? Draw up a list of the main reasons. How do they compare with those mentioned in the resources?
- Make a timeline of when the people in the pack arrived in Luton. Add in your families. When did most families arrive? Are there any patterns you can see?
- Discuss the quotes from Lutonians. Collect some views about the town from people you know. What do people see as the positive features of the town and what the negative? Are there any differences between people who live here and those who don't?

Trade and Business

- The New Industries Committee wrote this article to point out the benefits for companies moving to Luton. Design a logo for the Committee and layout the information in a modern style. You could use IT.
- Write an article for a business newspaper using the bullet points from the New Industries Committee article as your starting point.
- Read the introduction to Progressive Luton from 1935. What positive points does the Mayor make about the town? Compare these to the 1905 New Industries Committee article.
- What benefits might a similar committee highlight to attract industry to the town today. Design a leaflet to attract companies to Luton and write a press release for the local and national papers.
- Look at the adverts from the 1930s. Discuss how these businesses chose to sell their products and what type of people the adverts are directed at. Have the adverts got anything in common? What picture of Luton do they create? How do they differ from modern advertising? Choose a modern company and design an advert in a 1930s style.
- Discuss what the Borough Council were trying to do by organising the Industrial and Trade Exhibition in 1951. Why do you think they chose the front cover image? Do you think it works? Create an image that you think reflects the town today.
- Look at the list of Luton's major firms from the 1955 Yearbook. What types of businesses were they, service or manufacturing? What type of things did the companies make? Use a modern directory to find out if any of these things are still made in Luton today. Are any of these companies still working in Luton?
- Compare the extent of the Airport when it first opened to a modern map. Discuss whether the Council was right to think that air transport would be important to Luton.
- 'When Vauxhall sneezed, Luton caught a cold', use the Vauxhall press cuttings and pictures resources to discuss what this statement means.
- Look at the picture of the men with their 'shareout' money. What do you think they are saying? Use the ideas as a stimulus for creative writing or drama.
- From the article 'New Towns Denuded to Keep Us Going' it is clear that most people living in Luton then worked there and that many people from outside the town commuted to work there. Is that still true today? Design a questionnaire to distribute round your school and families. What proportion both live and work in Luton. Do more people travel out of Luton to work or commute into the town?
- Look at the pictures of workers in the factories. What do they tell us about what working in a factory was like? How do you think it might be different now?

20th Century Descriptions of Luton

1905 'The Engineer' March 31st 1905

"Luton is a progressive town of 38,000 inhabitants, which has until recently been chiefly identified with the straw hat industry. It is now making a strong bid to become a manufacturing centre of far greater importance, and seems to possess many natural advantages."

1913 Edward Thomas, The Icknield Way

"The crowd of roofs and the tall chimneys of Luton and in the midst a tower above all the rest. Entering the brand-new, jerry-built, slated cages of combined Limbury and Leagrave, the hard new streets led me to a rushy common."

1933 E.L. Burgin in Progressive Luton

"The town is very healthy, and its workers are generally prosperous, the earnings in the hat trade are substantial, and the operatives paid at piece-work rates. Normally there is very little unemployment."

C. 1937 Bedfordshire: The County Handbook.

"There is a briskness in the air of Luton and in the manner of its people that is definitely stimulating and tends to induce the visitor to overlook the town's structural shortcomings."

1937 P.G. Bond, Rambles around Luton

"The distant lights of Luton were flickering and beckoning with a homely friendliness. Even towns can be attractive in the dark."

1939 Arthur Mee 'The Counties of Bedford & Huntingdon' King's England Series

"Luton has clothed itself with the spirit of the 20th century and has become transformed within the memory of those not very old. Here [is] the biggest town in Bedfordshire, its population mounting to six figures, twenty times multiplied in a hundred years."

1939 London evacuee mother

"I never met such a snobbish, selfish, unfriendly, rude lot in all my life. All they think about is their houses. Houseproud, that's their trouble."

1939 London evacuee mother

"Everyone I've met at Luton is the same - real good people."

1955 Luton News

"Luton is a town where seven out of every 12 working men have a skilled job, where couples marry young, and where there are five surplus women for every 100 men. It is a town which has grown so rapidly over the past 20 years that the number of dwellings increased by 72%, and the population under the age of 45 is twice as big as that over 45. It is Luton seen through the eyes of the 1951 Census Report for Bedfordshire, just published - a youthful, vigorous Luton in a virile county, fit to face the industrial expansions of the future."

1960 JWM Thompson in The Evening Standard

"Just as the Thames flows through London, so the new M1 motorway traverses Luton. Nothing could be more appropriate. Towns like Luton and roads like the M1 belong to each other. They express the same sort of society...the same sort of civilization in fact."

1964 Luton News Supplement

"Luton today is a 'motor town'. It is recognised as one of the half-dozen major British centres of the vehicle industry, and inevitably, whether we like it or not, has some of the 'boom town' characteristics of all vehicle building areas."

1987 James Dyer, The Shire County Guide to Bedfordshire

"Luton is the largest town in the county, with a population of over 166,000. In spite of its brash modern appearance and seemingly endless housing estates, Luton has a considerable history.....Regrettably Luton today is an untidy, large industrial town, bursting at its seams, with almost every scrap of land sacrificed to the glory of Mammon. Yet for those who wish to linger there are things to see. Avoid the claustrophobic plastic shopping centre and turn immediately to the quiet sanctity of St Mary's Church."

1988 Dick Dawson, Dawson's Day Out

"A first time visitor to Luton might think it is a typical industrial town and not really worth exploring. But that would be a mistake. Luton has plenty of attractions to suit all tastes and if you plan it properly you can spend an interesting and enjoyable day in the town."

1999 The Daily Telegraph Property Supplement

"The south Bedfordshire town is one of the six or so places in England, along with Neasdon and Croydon, which for some reason have become synonymous with the mundane. Its claims to fame are few: it gave the world the slab-sided Luton van and, before that, the mass-produced straw hat."

1999 Simon Jenkins, England's Thousand Best Churches

"The picture on the front of the guidebook to Luton's parish church is almost comical. The photographer contrives an angle that gives the it a site in rural woodland. In reality, this fine Perpendicular church is set in some of the worst urban development that even the Home Counties have to offer, a horror of car parks, one-way systems and hostile shopping centres. Forget Slough, O friendly bombs, come to South Bedfordshire."

Luton Council on Luton

These extracts are taken from the Year Books and other publications produced by the Council.

Year Book 1925

"Essentially an industrial town, Luton is nevertheless free of some of the disadvantages which accompany industrial activity in some other parts of the country. Its industries are what may be described as clean industries. Electricity from one common source is the principal motive power, and in proportion to the number of workers employed there are very few chimney shafts to charge the air with smoke.

As a result it has still been practicable to layout out attractive residential areas. There is now a Town Planning Scheme in operation, which will regulate the development of a large area inside and outside the borough....In pre-war years Luton was one of the most rapidly-growing towns in the country. Expansion is again taking place. Already several new street are in the process of development, others are about to be begun, and there is every prospect of further development in the town and neighbourhood.....

Industrially, Luton is principally known as one of the chief centres for the manufacture of hats....In recent years, other industries have materially increased in importance. This is particularly true of engineering and allied enterprises. Among their productions are: - Motor vehicles, both for pleasure and industrial use; meters for air, water, gas, acids, heavy liquids, and other purposes; marine and hydraulic plant; electrical goods, including fractional motors, fuses, heating apparatus, etc.; ball and thrust bearings; boilers; machine tools; gas heating apparatus, industrial and domestic; pneumatic tools; cement-making machinery; cocoa and chocolate; gelatine; chemicals; fancy leather goods; and specialised equipment for hat factories.

There is reason to believe that the scope of Luton's industrial activities may be increased in the near future. In many ways the town is admirable suited for the settlement of new industries. Land specially suitable for the erection of factories is available; railway facilities are good; electricity and gas are cheap; there is good opportunity for members of a workman's family to find employment in other industries; and there are excellent facilities for education and recreation."

Year Book 1931

"It is a widely-recognised fact that Luton, possibly because many of its industries are of a specialised nature, has not suffered as much trade depression in recent years, and of about 30,000 insured workers who are on the books of Luton Employment Exchange, the percentage who have been unemployed has been one of the lowest in the country."

Year Book 1940

"The visitor [cannot] fail to note the cleanliness of this busy town, the brightness and dignity of its main thoroughfares, the architectural merits of its public buildings, and the relief to the eye afforded by the green of grass and foliage displayed in the numerous open spaces. Talking of foliage, indeed, he might be pardoned the impression while strolling along the New Bedford Road after leaving the railway station or passing along that thoroughfare by car from the direction of the river Lea, that he was in a Spa like Harrogate, Cheltenham or Tunbridge Wells. Then, again, he will find that, thanks to some subtle alchemy in the air, the Luton folk are brisk and energetic, going about their business or pleasure with equal gaiety.

1947 Luton Official Guide

"The citizen of Luton is a fortunate man. He has ample opportunities for good work at good wages in pleasant surroundings. And when his work is done, he has a rich choice of intellectual and social use of his leisure hours."

1950 Official Guide and Yearbook

"Luton has no pretensions to being other than what it is, an industrial town. But it is a modern industrial town, playing its part, and more than its part, in Britain's industrial recovery, confidently setting a new pattern in industrial and social development, and looking towards the future rather than the past."

Yearbook 1958

"With seven years of war and seven years of concentration on the urgent problem of housing; it is not surprising that the development of the town centre has lagged behind its growth in other respects, and at present, it lacks dignity and spaciousness, being at times uncomfortably over crowded."

The town's factories are mostly to the North-West and South-East, along the line of the main railway line from St. Pancras which bisect Luton. They are the modern monuments of an industrial town, for the most part clean and well-planned, offering working conditions, welfare and general care, sports and recreational facilities on a scale undreamt of fifty years ago. The great factory of Vauxhall is well worth a visit. But the signs of the hat factories hang thickly in Williamson Street, Guildford Street, Bute Street, and the many narrow streets around George Street, and with them are the ancillary trades – box makers, ribbon and feather merchants, dyers, bleachers.

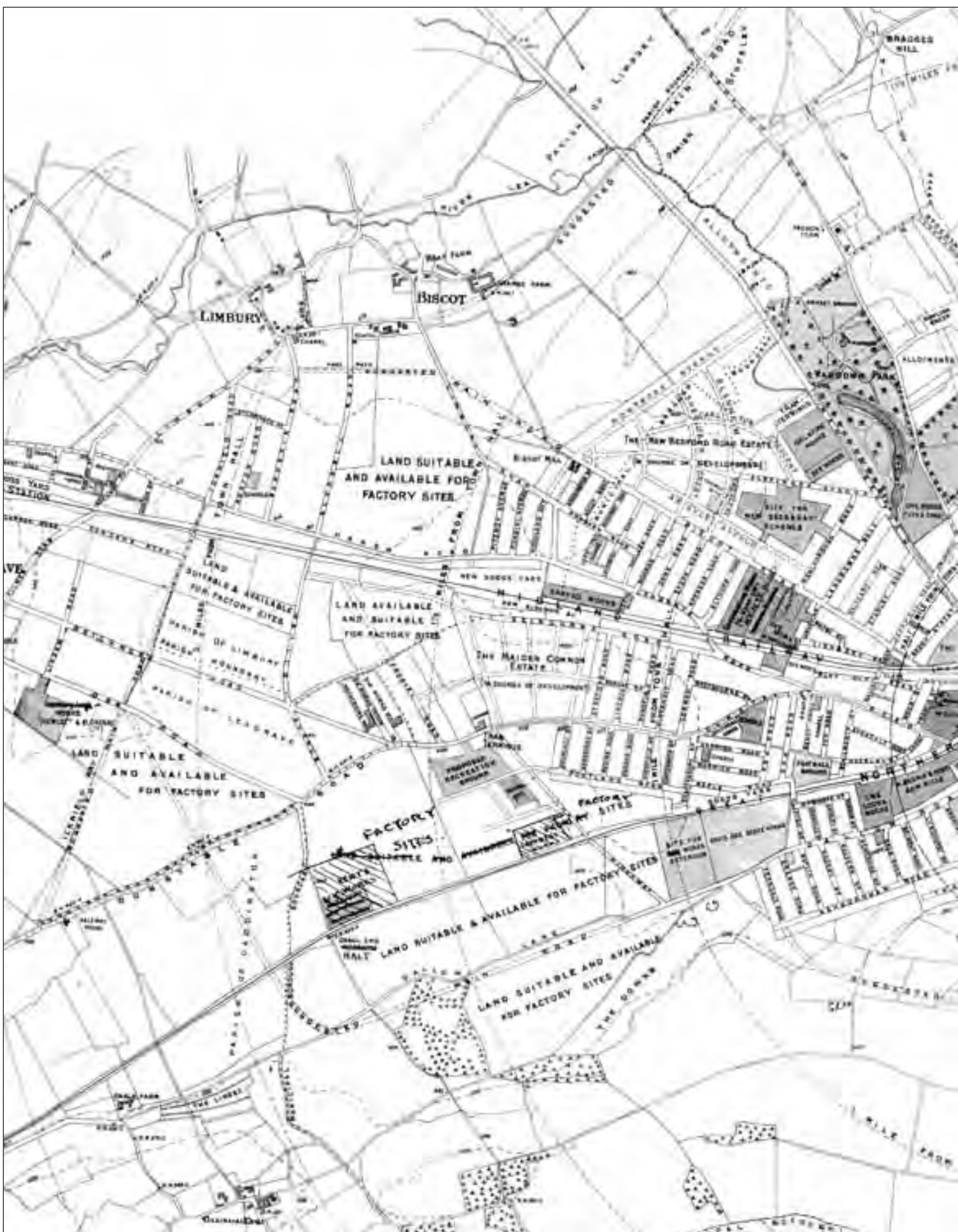
One concludes that if Luton has little contribution to make to history, it has much to repay the student of modern England. Its products, motor cars, ball-bearings, hats, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, gas ovens, chemicals, go to all parts of the world. They are produced in pleasant conditions by a well-paid community whose interest in the town's affairs is evidenced by the columns of the local press. It is a cosmopolitan community, drawn from the Midlands, Wales, Scotland and Tyneside, and all the characteristics of these areas have blended with the native enterprise and shrewdness of the inhabitants of the Bedfordshire country town. This is truly a 'new town' with its roots in the past and its wide-spreading branches in the future."

Official Guide 1972

Luton is changing – and the signs of change can be seen all over the town as the old makes way for the new. New schools, and housing developments, new roads and facilities for recreation - and a new town centre which will revolutionise shopping habits and transform the commercial heart of Luton.

2001 Luton Borough Council, City Status Bid Document

"Luton is a vibrant, multicultural community - a model of harmonious community relations. We enjoy strong international links. Our cosmopolitan character makes Luton one of the most interesting and exciting places in Britain."





Map from 1915 Luton Year Book





From 1934 Luton Year Book

Luton: Motor Town









*Aerial view of St Mary's
Church and the town centre,
1966*



George Street in the 1960s



George Street in the 1960s

From The Daily Sketch July 21st 1919

Joy Day Riot

Ex-Soldiers Burn Down Town Hall And Loot Shops At Luton

£250,000 DAMAGE

Barton Charges By Police Futile: Military Called Out

From Our Own Correspondent

Luton, Sunday; Riotous scenes marred Luton's Peace Day Celebrations. Damage estimated at a quarter of a million pounds was caused. The Town Hall was gutted by fire, and the mob prevented the Fire Brigade making any attempt to save the building.

Trouble had been caused through the refusal of the use of the town's principal park for a memorial service to be held by ex-Service men, and their federation had declined to take any part in the peace celebrations.

Mob Goes In Search Of The Mayor

An angry spirit was evident when the mayor came out of the town hall in his robes to read a proclamation. He was hissed and booed, and after the procession had passed a big crowd went to the town hall.

Forcing their way through the police, the mob burst open the doors, demolished furniture, and threw chairs through the windows.

There were loud calls for the mayor. Failing to find him, a body of men went to his house, but they were persuaded to go away without doing any damage.

Bonfire Of Official Papers

Rioting was renewed at night, when the mob reassembled outside the town hall.

For a long time the police held the people back, but eventually they burst through, and piling up papers and documents in the town clerk's office set fire to them.

When the fire brigade was called out the hoses were cut, and the mob prevented the brigade getting to work.

Tins of petrol, looted from a neighbouring garage, were flung on the flames.

Heedless of baton charges by the police and 'specials', the crowded indulged in frenzied riot around the town hall.

"Keep The Home Fires Burning"

Several shops were raided, and it was only at midnight when the fire brigade had poured tons of water on the crowd, that things became quieter. The rioters had brought a piano out of a shop, and were playing 'Keep The Home Fires Burning' in the street.

A call was sent for to the military and the Metropolitan Police for assistance.

A large body of Royal Engineers arrived from Bedford this morning, and the area around the town hall was placed under military control. The soldiers were fully equipped, and wore shrapnel helmets.

Many of the police were badly injured, and several had to be detained in hospital. They made a gallant stand, and some were on duty for 20 hours.

An eyewitness remembers the day after the riot:

"Sunday morning, in the light of day, the Town Hall looked a pitiful sight, with the acrid stench of burning wafting everywhere. Young soldiers ringed the Town Hall, with rifles and bayonets. Surely they did not expect anyone to run off with the ruins, but if intimidation was the aim, that had no success, for ribald remarks and banter encouraged soldiers to join in with wit and good humour. The appearance of mounted police from London, it was said, annoyed the people, with riff-raff bent on mischief going into huddles to plan more destruction. A great crowd gathered in Chapel Street, with the object of burning down the Corn Exchange. The police, having got wind of it, were waiting, and as the mob gathered momentum and raced towards their objective, the well-disciplined mounted police met them head on. Unlike the night before the crowd checked, then scattered, the police laying about them with great enthusiasm. Being one of a multitude of boys, enjoying every moment, we knew every alley and bolthole, disappearing and appearing to our hearts content, the police ignoring us as they pursued bigger game. Eventually, one bobby nabbed me, asked me where I lived, cuffed me, and sent me off home."

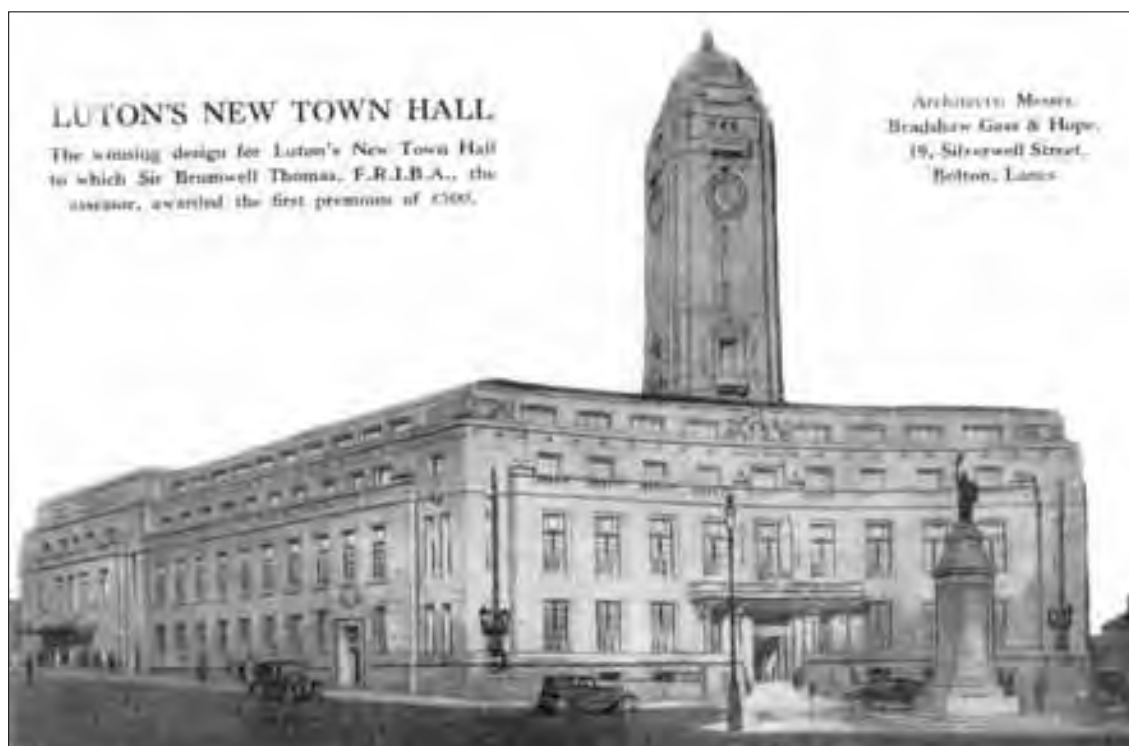
From A View From The Alley by Aubrey Darby



Town hall prior to riot – Luton Town Hall 1907



Town Hall after riot – Luton Town Hall July 20th 1919



Design for the New Town Hall, from Luton Year Book 1931

Competitive plans were obtained, carefully examined by an assessor nominated by the President of the R.I.B.A., and premiums awarded to the best. The Council have ... decided to proceed with the erection of a new Town Hall and municipal offices to the design submitted by the winners of the first prize, and there is good reason to anticipate that all the preliminaries will be settled in time for the erection to be begun in 1931. The proposed building, which is illustrated in this issue, will contain offices for practically all the municipal departments other than the Borough Police, and a fine assembly hall designed to accommodate both an organ and cinematograph apparatus."

From the Luton Year Book 1931

From The Evening Standard January 12th 1960. It was written by J.W.M. Thompson

The Bedfordshire stretch of the M1 under construction



I see the pattern for prosperity

Just as the Thames flows through London, so the new M1 motorway traverses Luton. Nothing could be more appropriate. Towns like Luton and roads like M1 belong to each other. They express the same sort of society... The same sort of civilisation, in fact.

So many industrial towns in England are weighed down by their inheritance from the Victorian age. I mean those chilling slum-and-factory deserts which even Mr. Betjeman's extremist disciples can only sigh over.

Luton has nothing like that. When the "dark satanic mills" were going up elsewhere, Victorian Luton was drowsing contentedly in its corner of the Chilterns. Its people addressed themselves to the blameless and profitable trade of making hats ... an old cottage industry grown into something more substantial.

Renewed

Then came the 20th century industrial revolution; and with that modern Luton came into being with a bang. The brand new industries came storming in. Workers flocked from all over the country to man them.

Very quickly, the town renewed itself on up-to-date lines. And this process of renewal has never stopped: it is still going on. Luton is getting bigger and changing all the time. It belongs to today.

Its people now make the things which are of the essence of our modern way of living. Cars, of course; more than 25,000 people work in the huge Vauxhall plant. But also refrigerators, aircraft, electric cookers, precision engineering products, vacuum cleaners, clothing for the masses, and still

(in a more modern way) hats.

They furnish our Affluent Society with its characteristic needs. In return they collect in full measure the rewards which that society offers.

Prosperous

Luton is booming, buoyantly prosperous. In fact, I was told by the Mayor, Mrs. Barbara Andrews: "There is not a more prosperous town in the country".

And Luton remains a town where the air and buildings are sparkingly clean, because, the great factories are modern, and do not need to pollute the air to thrive. A town where the parks are generous and trim, a town with no unemployment and no slums.

A town with a population drawn from far corners of the kingdom... there are 13,000 Scots for example included in its latest total of 120,500 inhabitants. And you are as likely to hear the cadences of Wales or the North-East coast there as to hear any native intonations.

"Our people come from all over", said the Mayor, and they are all blended into a happy community. They are all welcome and made to feel welcome.

"They never want to leave".

There certainly seems to be some deep source of contentment among Luton's thousands. There quite remarkable record of industrial peace is evidence of that.

The Arndale Centre

Frances Fisher

Frances Fisher moved from Enfield in Middlesex to Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire. She liked the new Arndale Centre.

"When I first moved to Aylesbury in the early 1970s I really missed the London shops. There were no big department stores in Aylesbury and I had been used to buying things for the children and myself in Marks and Spencers, Debenhams, all the big name stores. By the time my children were all at school my mother had come to live with us and one of our treats was to drive to Luton for a day's shopping in the Arndale Centre, with lunch of course. Here we could again find all the stores we had been used to in London and we could still get back to meet the children from school. When my mother-in-law came to visit from Norwich, all three of us would go. I particularly remember one dress she bought there in Debenhams and wore for years. It was a pleasure to have everything handy and under one roof, so even a rainy day couldn't spoil our treat."

Philip Harman

Philip Harman was a jeweller. His shop was one of the older properties demolished to make way for the town centre development.

"The coming of the Arndale was a period of change, really, for the whole of Luton, the whole of the centre of Luton. The Carnegie Library, Williamson Street, the shops that went down Manchester Street - they all packed in, and they were all demolished.

The size of the Arndale really is quite tremendous when you consider what it took in, from the mass of small streets that we had before then. From my point of view, and I think a lot of Lutonians must feel the same, the character has been knocked out of the town. The Arndale has come to sweep out the smaller streets and the smaller shops. All these large shops, the large family concerns who dominated your life really in those days, or dominated the street trade - they've all gone. The Arndale doesn't show itself, it's not on the high street - it's inside, there's nothing to see."

Bob Ireland

Bob Ireland was born and brought up in Luton. He was in his 50s when the Arndale was built.

"I'm interested in new things and I thought; yeah, great, I think the Arndale will be a good thing. I didn't think it would wipe out the old town. I don't live in the past, I like to think of the future, I like new things I always have done. Of course now the other things have gone I miss them. Barbers Lane used to be a nice little walk, all sorts down there, there was. Course its no longer there. It used to run from Cheapside right through to Guildford Street opposite the station steps, a little narrow lane with all sorts of shops down there."



*Concept drawings for the Luton Arndale Centre.
Reproduced with permission of the Arndale Centre Management.*



The Arndale Centre 1975



The Arndale Centre 1975

Luton's Population

During the 20th century Luton's boundaries have changed a number of times which make direct comparison of population as recorded by the census difficult.

Luton Parish	Luton Borough		
1901	36,404	1964	147,000 estimate allowing for extended boundaries
1911	49,978	1971	161,400
1921	61,342	1981	161,920
1931	70,486	1991	171,670
1951	110,381	2001	184,390
1961	131,505		

From The Luton News 8th August, 1935

LUTON'S INDUSTRIAL POPULATION FIVE THOUSAND ADDED IN A YEAR

What they do for a living

Figures now available show that Luton's industrial population, as distinct from its residential population, has increased by about five thousand in the last twelve months.

The principal increases are in motor engineering, general engineering and the distributive trades. The total numbered employed in the various branches of the hat industry has varied very little in the last two years.

When work is fully resumed after the holidays, therefore, it is anticipated that Luton's industrial population will be 44,000.

The chief groups in this total are:-

Hat Industry, 12,324

General Engineering, 9,739

Motor Industry, 7,301

Distributing Trades, 6,573

Building Trades, 2,636

Iron foundry, etc., 2,052

In these groups the principal increases have been: Motor industry, 1,400; distributing trades, 1,200; general engineering, 1,000.

The number kept in employment locally by the motor industry is even larger than is indicated by these figures, which do not take salaried worked into account, nor those employed in the production of motor parts in works, which are also occupied in other branches of engineering.

There has also been a fairly large increase in the number employed on public works and in constructional engineering. A further outstanding increase in the number of insured workers may be anticipated as the extension schemes at various important works approach completion.

From The Luton News 5th January 1955

Census Pictures Luton As Youthful And Vigorous Town

Skilled Men Who Marry Young

Twice As Many Under 45 As Over That Age

Luton is a town where seven out of every 12 working men have a skilled job, where couples marry young, and where there are five surplus women for every 100 men.

It is a town which has grown so rapidly over the past 20 years that the number of dwellings increased by 72 per cent, and the population under the age of 45 is twice as big as that over 45.

It is Luton seen through the eyes of the 1951 Census Report for Bedfordshire, just published – a youthful, vigorous Luton in a virile county, fit to face the industrial expansions of the future.

The Census figures show how Luton – and Bedfordshire as a whole – attracted a flow of people from all over the world in the 20 years before 1951.

Nearly 91,000 people came into the county – from other parts of Britain, from Northern Ireland and Eire, from the Commonwealth, the Colonies and from foreign countries. Of these, 39,895 moved to Luton.

They brought the county's population to 311,937 – an increase of 41.5%, compared with a 6.8% increase during the 10 years before the 1931 Census – and Luton's to 110,381.

Increase is greater than that of any other county in England and Wales with the exception of Hertfordshire, West Sussex and Buckinghamshire.

Birth Statistics

Every other person in Bedfordshire was actually born in the county – a total of 52.3% to be exact. 21 in every 1,000 people in the county are Welsh in origin, while a similar number hail from Scotland. Ireland, including Eire, has sent another 18, while 19 in each 1,000 were born in foreign countries.

Of those born in other parts of England, 7 in every 100 are Londoners, 3 came over the border from Hertfordshire, and two from Buckinghamshire, and another 2 came down from Lancashire. Yorkshire, Essex, Middlesex, Northamptonshire, Durham and Kent have one representative in every 100...

The Attraction

What work did those who decided to live in Bedfordshire find in the county?

Without a doubt it was industry which attracted them, for in 1951 out of every 1000

working men 550 were in skilled jobs, compared to 527 in England and Wales.

Figures for Luton show that 7 out of every 12 working men are skilled, and only 1 in 11 is unskilled. At the same time only 1 man in 40 claims professional status in the town.

Bedfordshire now boasts a bigger proportion of people in the younger working age range, 15-44 years, than the county as a whole – 44.3% compared with 42.7%.

Earlier Marriage

More people married earlier, and in 1951 219 men in every 1,000 were marrying between their 20th and 25th birthdays compared with 129 20 years before. Women marrying at the same age totally 502 in every 1,000 compared to 255 in 1931...

Luton had a slightly higher ratio of women to men – a surplus of 5 in every 100... More Luton people married than elsewhere in the county, and 22.9% of the Borough's population was under 15 – 2% higher than the average for the county.

At the same time only 9 Luton people in every 100 were over 65.

Up, Up, Up

Houses had to be built for increasing populations... Luton's houses and other dwellings went grew by 72% to a total of 31,270, but, nevertheless, 4,119 householders out of the total of 33,048 in Luton had to share accommodation.

Of all households, 266 were still without a piped water supply, 285 without a kitchen sink, 9,190 without a fixed bath, 97 without a cooking stove and 179 without a water closet.

From The Luton News 4th May 1994

Cosmopolitan Luton is getting younger...

LUTON MPs Graham Bright and John Carlisle will have to work harder than ever to win votes from the ethnic minorities and the young if they are to retain their parliamentary seats in future elections. The latest census figures just released break down Britain's population, unemployment figures and ethnic origins into parliamentary constituencies.

They reveal that 22.7 per cent of the 100,754 people living in Mr Bright's Luton South constituency are from ethnic minorities, a figure comparable to Inner London's 25.6 per cent.

North Luton MP John Carlisle also represents many non-whites (11.2 per cent) and both politicians' constituencies have a higher than average rate of under-18s who will reach voting age in future elections.

Similar census figures released for Luton last year revealed its population at the time of the 1991 poll as 171,671, up from 164,743 in 1981. At that rate, Luton's population could top 200,000 by the 2030s. But how much do you know about your town?

Did you know:

- Luton is one of the most cosmopolitan towns in Britain, according to the latest census figures. One fifth of its residents are from the ethnic minorities. The national figure for non-whites is 5.9 per cent.
- Pakistani (6.2), Afro-Caribbean and other black people (4.9), Indian (4.2), Bangladeshi (2.7), Chinese (0.4), other Asians (0.5) and other minority groups (0.9).
- The figures for Afro-Caribbean and other black people, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are among the highest in the country. And there are moves afoot to officially recognise Luton's huge Irish population as an ethnic minority by the time the next census forms come around in 2001.
- Even before the recent influx of students Luton was one of the "youngest" towns in Britain. In 1991, almost a quarter of Luton's population were children under 16, compared to just one in five nationally. Two in 15 people (or 13 per cent) were of pensionable age - the national figure is 19 per cent. Luton's figures are respectively among the highest and lowest in the country. The average age of a Lutonian is a sprightly 34, compared to average Briton at 38.
- Women outnumber men in Luton, at a ratio of 129 to every 127.
- More and more Luton women are going to work. By 1991, nearly two-thirds of our local ladies had a job. They were 11 times more likely than their menfolk to take part-time work.
- Luton has a higher-than-average rate of single parent families but there are fewer people living alone here than there are nationally.

Luton in the 1920s

Robert Wilkinson is from an old Luton family, he grew up in the town in the 1920s.

"In those days to walk to Pope's Meadow, and you know where Pope's Meadow is today – that was the last houses, there were no more houses. The next thing you came to was Wardown Farm, which was past the last crossroads. The crossroads which are now Stockingstone Road was then Stockingstone Lane, which was a dirt road, but no houses, no houses along the New Bedford Road from there onwards. That's where the kids used to play – we used to call it the Mud Arches, where the river came through, and I used to fall in there regularly. There was allotments along there then, but nothing else at all. Montrose Avenue wasn't there – no houses up there, up to the Biscot Mill.

Then, Cutenhoe Road was called Trapps Lane and there was nothing up there, only farms and that sort of thing. And the only other building from there on was Why-Axe-Ye [an old cottage], that was there then. But it was completely clear, no houses up there at all.

Osborne Road ... on the corner of Osborne Road there was a house, and there was a couple of houses down in Osborne Road, and nothing after that. And on the other side of the road, the last houses ... there were about five houses past Park Road West. There was the Blacksmith's Arms on the corner, which has now been knocked down, and there were about four or five houses along there, and then nothing."

Edna Odell was born in Luton and still lives in the house in she moved into with her family in 1924.

"I was born in 1920 when my father came home from the First World War, you see I was part of the post-war boom and we lived in Spencer Road which was a little terraced house, a whole row of houses from the top to the bottom with just passages in between and my parents had bought this house when they married in 1911. It had a little front garden, which was not a garden just bit of paving, but it was thought to be very high class to have a little front garden and then you went into the front room from the garden, not from the street, that was the big thing. Between the front and the back room at right angles there were very narrow, very steep and very dark stairs, frightened the life out of us. Then you went into the back room, which had a fireplace in it. And then through there into the scullery which was long and had a little range. In the corner it had a brick copper, where my mother had to light the fire every Monday morning to boil the water and then out at the back was the only loo, the outside loo, and the coal barn.

My father was a plasterer and in 1924 we moved in here [Blenheim Crescent]. I can remember trudging round with the pram and the hand cart bringing the furniture. We had electricity for the very first time! We hated it, my sister and I. We had this horrible cold bathroom. In the other house, you see, you had a big fireguard and you had all the towels on one end and all your nightclothes on the other – a rag rug on the floor and the bath brought in, and the water boiled in the copper and a lovely fire. And then you had your bath, and the towels were all cosy and warm and your nightie was all warm and then you had cocoa and then you went upstairs. We moved in here and we had this horrible cold bathroom – we didn't like it at all.

There was one [electric] point in this room which was thought to be very rash – why did you need electricity in the sitting room? One point in the back room – there wasn't a point in the kitchen – and there was one point on the landing upstairs.'

Reginald Shane spent his childhood in the New Town area of Luton in the 1920s. This was one of the most deprived parts of the town.

"When I got older we moved to where the school was, not far away. It was called Langley Place and it was an alleyway. Most of the people then, when I was about ten years old, they was unemployed. We got free meals down the old Plait Hall in Waller Street, where they used to give us poor kids a meal. We used to go for breakfast in the morning. That was porridge, and a salt cellar on the table – not sugar! If we didn't eat the porridge they told us we wasn't hungry and no need to go down at lunchtime for a dinner. Which was a free dinner as well, and that used to be meat pudding and mashed potato, and then we used to have to go back to school again and finish the lessons for the day.

We didn't have mealtimes at home – we just went in for a slice of bread and butter or bread and jam whenever, you know, if we had anything. There was nowhere to keep food at home if we had it. It was just a room with a cupboard and a fireplace where we'd burn the rubbish. They was broken-down old homes, really – people wouldn't put a dog or a cat in them these days. No, all we had was a table, I don't think we had any chairs, really, to sit down on. Well, we didn't even have a bed. We used to sleep on the floor, hardly any bedclothes at all. Mum and Dad had the front bedroom and we had the back bedroom. And that's all there was, bare boards – sleep on bare boards. We didn't have such things as carpets and rugs. We had nothing really, no. But see, we wasn't the only ones – we was poor, and everybody was poor."

From The Luton News 26/3/64 – this article looks back to the 1930s

From North, East And West The Flocked To – THAT GOLDEN VALLEY WHERE DREAMS CAME TRUE

Hard on 30 years ago Britain was struggling to recovery after the economic blizzard of 1931. Large pockets of unemployment existed in South Wales, Jarrow and the North East, and Clydeside. These were the depressed areas where men stood day after day at street corners; where yards and mills were closed; where there was no work and no hope of work; where life stretched out endlessly from one week's dole to the next; and where the iron had entered men's souls.

Yet in Luton work was booming. The mass-production car lines were on the move. There were all the signs of a new prosperity.

One day a clever writer came down from a London daily paper. He took a quick run-round Luton and its industries. Then he went back and wrote a splash article for his paper about this fairy town where the streets were paved with gold; where there was none of the murk and grime of the idle pits and yards; but work for all.

The despairing men from Wales, the Tyne and Clydeside read the story. Could it possibly be true? One by one they scraped up the fare from the thin stockings of their families.

"I am going to Luton. There is work there. If I can get a job I will find somewhere to live and send for you. If there are no jobs..., well, I can walk back home." One by one they disappeared and the prayers of their families went with them.

New Heaven and New Earth

One day there came great news.

"I've got a job, and I've found somewhere we can live for the time being. There are jobs for others of you too. Come quickly."

So they came. To them and their families it was a new heaven and a new earth. They began to reap the reward of honest work, the golden harvest of good pay and bulging wage packets. They had broken through to a new life.

And here they have stayed.

It was called the Town with the Streets paved with Gold. Soon it became known far and wide as the Brightest Spot in Britain. It had the lowest percentage of unemployed in the country and as the wage packets bulged and their numbers grew, the builders moved in.

They built houses; trim little semi-detached houses that became real homes...Most people could afford to buy and the joy of owning one's own transcended belief.

Adventuring Into The Future

Industry was expanding. The immigrant from the depressed areas felt the peace and happiness of a settled job. Behind him, fading into the mist were the memories of the depressing streets leading to the pithead, the sordid back-to-back dwellings and the eerie, idle shipyards. He had risen above these things. He and his family had come into a new life in the Golden Valley.

Into the town itself there was more glitter, more chromium plate. There were more and more and bigger and bigger wage packets spent each week.

The tills were ringing up the cash. More and more shops were opening; more and more old properties were being turned into shops and offices; more and more factories and production units were coming in.

More and more young couples, earning good money, were going steady. They flocked to the five magnificent cinemas, they sat close together in the warm darkness of the air conditioned luxury. The mighty Wurlitzer organs played soft romantic music for their ears. They were adventuring into the future, and planning their home. They were deliriously happy.

Chink, chink, went to money into the tills. This was Luton, the boom town; work for all and money for all. This was the brightest spot in Britain.

Housing in the 1940s

This is taken from the 1945 Report On Luton. The Report was compiled for the Borough Council to provide a picture of the town's population, health, housing, education and industry to enable them to plan future services. This extract shows why there was a housing crisis in the town.

"The best indications of all, perhaps, ... are the individual stories of wretchedness and strain which inadequate housing imposes on the less fortunate. We quote from typical letters recently received in the Health Department from supplicants for a place to lead a decent family life.

1. 'I think you remember me approaching you on the occasion of the Doctor's orders applying for a council house. Well I have been to see the Housing Manager and he got me to sign another application and dated it 1943. I have actually had my name down 8 years, and I have had one of my daughters very ill again (TB) and if you cared to call the green mould is on the chairs and also in my sideboard, the Doctor calling here says I should get out at once to save my girl's health, but what can I do about it? My 3 boys are shortly expected home from the war and they want a home fit to live in and they cannot really live here under the state the house is in, I am afraid there may be some trouble with them when they do return. I have 5 boys altogether what have been in this war, but only 3 what will come home, and after 8 years waiting am I not entitled to a decent house to let them come home to, I am applying to you...to help me give them these rights, all Luton born boys, please for the Lords sake help me to get a decent home for them to come home to.'

2. 'The Almoner from Dunstable Hospital visited you a while back about the conditions I am living under. I have got my wife away convalescent after her operation, and am afraid if I have to bring her back to this one room it will greatly undermine her health again, we have been in this one room for four years now with our two children. Would you give this matter your earnest attention, a small place will do as long as there is a gas stove and convenience.'

3. 'My husband and two children are living in one room. I want to see if you can help us to get a house. One of my children is covered in bug bites where they have been falling off the roof into her cot. I, myself, have been bad with bronchitis and don't see much chance of it now. The lady we are stopping with now says she wants the room for her husband coming out of the army so I don't know what we will do. My husband has been discharged from the Merchant Navy so I hope you will be able to help us as I can't see much of a life for my two children having to eat and sleep in the same room.'

There is little wonder that serious social problems arise in circumstances such as those described. The unfortunate people have no chance... Cases such as those quoted are not exceptional.

The extent of the demand for houses may be gauged by the fact that at the time of writing there is a waiting list of 2,809 applicants for council houses... A period of six years without building, an expanding town, an unusually high marriage rate, and the foundation of many new families have engulfed the surplus [houses] and created the existing situation."

From The Saturday Telegraph, 12th October 1946

Start Made On Luton's 'New Little Town'

A group of about 150 people in the paddock of Home Farm, Farley Hill, to-day saw the Mayor of Luton, Cllr. W.G.Roberts, turn the first turf at a ceremony to make the commencement of work on the £2,500,000 housing estate to be built there.

The company included the Mayoress; Cllr. G.L.Hey, chairman of the Highways, Town Planning and Estates committee; and Mr.

W.N.Warbey, M.P. for Luton.

Cllr. Hey said the ceremony marked the next step in the Council's housing programme. "This estate," he said, "is something out of the ordinary. Previously, we have just built Council houses. Here we are going to establish a real neighbourhood unit – a little town of its own, with all the facilities and services that a little town needs."



Farley Farm Road, Farley Hill, 1951

Coming To Luton

The following extracts are taken from interviews recorded for Luton Museum Service.

Coming From Wales

Ceridwen Margaret Hogarth's father was Welsh, although she was born in Luton.

"My father had to leave Wales because of the Depression and my husband's father had to leave Durham because of the Depression. They'd both been miners. My dad had originally come to Luton to build the Alma. He left Wales because of the Depression as a single man he was having 11 shillings, that was the dole money at the time and he could earn 26 shillings if he came to Luton. He went to Brighton first to work on the sea wall and then the Alma was then being built, the Alma Cinema, well it was the dance hall and everything and he came to Luton to building work there and that's where he met my mum and they got married in 1932.

My father ended up being at the Vauxhall for 36 years, which he absolutely hated, every minute. He was there during the war when they made Churchill tanks and he did four years permanent nightshift. Which was the bane to all of us and we seemed to walk on eggshells for four years. I remember my mother saying 'shush' all the time 'your father's asleep'.

Eventually my father decided to buy a house. He bought one in Turners Road, which is now Turners Road North, at that time houses were from £550 upwards and my Dad's house was £725. Which my Grandad, having lived in a rented house all his life, told him he was mad to commit himself to a mortgage and already having 2 children. However the builder had built four houses, two pairs of semi-detached, and as my mum and dad were the only people in the builder offered my father £10 off the price of his house if he would have the keys to the other three to show people round.

When I started school at Stopsley infants, lots of the children there were of Welsh parents because so many people had come from Wales [because of] the Depression. And most of the Welsh people were Baptists or Congregationalists, as was my father. So I used to go with my school friends to the Baptist church in St Thomas' Road. When I was eleven years old I passed to the High School and there I had to be called Ceridwen which was my proper name. So all the people who knew me at High School called me Ceridwen and still do.

I've got very fond memories of Luton, I think if you live in a town and it gives you a living and your children an education and they go on to do well in life, I don't think you should knock the town, I think, be grateful really."

Coming from Ireland

Larry McGrattan was born in Dublin. He came to England in 1953 in search of work.

"On the train, in the same compartment, there was an English gentleman, and he got into conversation with us. And he said, Where are you going? and we said, London. What part? he said, so we said, We don't know any part, we're just coming over to get a job. So he said, I'm a commercial traveller, I've travelled all over England and Ireland, he says, You're only young lads, because we were only 21 years of age then, and he says, If you'd like a bit of advice, if you don't fancy London, there's a place north of London called Luton – they've got the car industry, they've got Vauxhall, they've got Commer Cars, they've got Electrolux and they've got Skefko ball bearings. Now he says, They're crying out for labour 'cause, see, I go through all over the country, and you might be probably better off eventually going there. But he says, I'm just telling you, if you don't like London, that's where you go.

So we said, Well look, we'll do what this chap says, we'll get to Luton. So we came to St. Pancras, came down to Luton, it was in the evening – naturally there was no place, you couldn't go for a job at that hour of the evening, and of course we had to look for digs for the night. And there was a place called the Stuart Hotel, so we asked Any lodgings, and he said Yes, and the two of us went there. So we said to them, Any place we could apply for a job? Your first thing, he said, you'd better go to the Labour Exchange. So we went to Hastings Street and gave the address of the Stuart Hotel, so they sent us for a quickie job. To get yourself some money, he said, I'll send you to the Luton Corporation. And they were based then in Windmill Road, this was in 1953 now I'm talking about. So we went down there, and we said We've been sent by the Exchange for a job, this was around after nine o'clock in the morning, half nine. So he says Certainly, OK, when can you start? So we said Well - we thought he was going to say next Monday. Oh, he said, you can come back at half twelve, at dinner hour. My God, we said, these are mad to get hold of us, so I said Well, this is alright, we'll start."

Coming From The Caribbean

Verna Ible was born on the island of St. Kitts in the Caribbean. She came to Luton in 1960 at the age of 19.

"It was a time when people were moving to England from the West Indies. My fiancé was already here, so I came with a few other people. At the time I didn't realise that everybody was going to lots of different places and that I was going to be the only one coming to Luton. Out of probably 200 people nobody even heard of Luton, it was as far as they were concerned somewhere in the outback, and I wasn't going to be seen again, perhaps! So I sort of ended up on the train station which I now believe must have been Euston, was escorted to the Underground by two men, and they took me down to the main line and put me on the train to Luton.

Then I was supposed to look out for the names of the stations all the way along because I wasn't quite sure how far Luton was from London, and this I did. But then arriving at Luton, getting my case off, I was helped by this very portly gentleman in his pinstriped suit and bowler hat and cane, who literally took my bags and brought them out all the way down the steps and paid for a taxi for me to go home, which I thought was very nice. And at that time I thought, Maybe it's not so bad coming to England because all the English people are very kind.

As a town I thought it was quite nice, well I hadn't seen any other towns in England because I came straight to Luton. There weren't many black people about – must have been I should think probably about two dozen. And sometimes, even though it was 1960, it seemed as if they weren't really accustomed to seeing black people around, so people would literally stand in the street and look at you as you were walking down the road.

I've been quite happy, I would say, living in Luton – the children have grown up in Luton. Of course, lots of people have come into Luton since we've been here, the town has changed quite a lot, physically and in every other way. I don't think Luton, personally, is any worse than anywhere else. I know lots of people say horrible things about Luton, but I always defend Luton."

Coming From South Asia

Putal Islam was born in Sylhet in Bangladesh. He came to England in 1962.

"I was 22 years old when I came to this country. I had three cousins in the UK at that time. One of the cousins, he was a brother and a friend to me and so when I came I stayed with him. I remember the day vividly when I landed in UK, at Heathrow, Heathrow wasn't really that big at that time, and when I came out my cousin was waiting with a couple of his friends and I got into the car and because I was surrounded by people I knew I didn't feel I was in a foreign country and all of a sudden the guy who was driving turned the radio on and it was jazz music coming on and that really struck me and I felt, I am in a different land now.

When I came there were not very many Bangladeshi families living here, mostly men. And they came with expectation that they would either qualify in some way or make a lot of money and go back. But that idea didn't really materialise for most people. My own aim was also to go back, but I met my wife here, she is Spanish, and then we decided to live here [in Luton] because that made it possible for her to visit her own country and for me to visit mine as well.

We first lived in London. At that time I worked in Farringdon and we wanted to buy a house, but it was not affordable in London so we moved out to Luton. And it was quite convenient for us to travel to London because the straight train to St. Pancras and then to Farringdon wasn't difficult.

We moved in here December 1970. This house wasn't built when we bought it, we paid just under £5000 for it. We had the option to put in central heating, it wasn't a lot of money in today's terms but we couldn't afford it at that time. You had the fire place and we had coal fire. So you had to do with the coal fire and immersion heating for hot water. We didn't have television at the time, the only thing we had was a tape recorder and we played that over and over, and we had a radio as well. Our neighbours were, fortunately very nice, on both sides. Mostly young couples came at that time it was a very young population around here.

Luton has changed a lot since we have moved in here, the look of Luton town is different. We are more involved with Luton's activities in various levels, we probably didn't expect or care before, but we feel this is our home now so we are living a life, life has got many aspects and you are involved in those. Luton is made up of different people now so when you talk about Luton you are talking about, Bangladesi, Pakistani, Irish, Scottish, English, everybody. Luton doesn't give you a picture of just one kind of society. Lutonians are now multicoloured, Luton is really multicultural, there is no doubt about it.

Coming From Luton

Bob Ireland was born in Luton and worked for many years at the Luton News and the Leagrave Press.

"I remember, Luton first changed in the 1930s – 1931/32, when the first invasion happened that I remember, because everybody was a Lutonian in those days. But in 1931 there was a big Depression, and although there was full employment around here, clearly certain areas of the country were real blackspots. Clydeside in particular, and the Welsh valleys. So an influx took place, mainly of people from around Port Glasgow and Greenock and around that way – the Clyde. And you could always tell them because they were usually very short and they had very short coats or jackets on, and you could pick them out anywhere, even before they spoke. You couldn't understand them once they spoke. And there wasn't much love lost between the native Lutonians and the newcomers because Vauxhall were taking them on at a lower rate than the local people were getting, and they were being laid off and the newcomers were being taken on. So that didn't make for very good community relations. But at the same time quite a lot of people came down from the North East and from Lancashire.

And then, of course, during the War – I wasn't here during the War – but a lot of people moved in from London, evacuated from London. So there were a lot of Londoners came to live in the town and when I came back I noticed the difference, you see. And after the War, of course, a lot of Irish moved in – because there was no end of jobs going at that time, so a lot of Irish people moved over about that time, and filled the jobs at Vauxhall and various engineering works.

And then of course after that there was a Caribbean influx, and then after that again there was the Pakistani, Kashmiri influx. So I've seen quite a few waves of various differing people come into the town."

Lutonians On Luton

Nabeel Sajjad

"Thinking of the future right now, I think I would just stay in Luton. Luton is brilliant. I think everyone from each community understands everyone. Everyone knows about each other's festivals, each other's beliefs and each other's religions, so there's not a problem. There's a lots of Asians, whites and Caribbeans, and I think everyone just gets along with each other."

Robert Steadman

"There's a lot of worse places than Luton. I couldn't live in London – I've never been anywhere where it's so impersonal. No-one knows each other – you only really talk to people if they're the same race as you are, it's down to religion and countries. We don't get that in Luton, it's completely mixed up. My neighbour on one side could be Asian, they could be German the other side. It makes you see people in a completely different light."

Frank Horan

"I'm always very impatient with people who criticise the town. Luton has been good to the Irish people. It gave us an opportunity to get married, settle down, bring up a family, and lead a normal kind of life."

Luton has got so many different nationalities, it's an amazing place when you think about it. It's succeeded in accepting them, and integrating them – maybe not completely but they won't try and force integration, and I think Luton has got to be complimented for that. They accept people for what they are, and help them to make their contribution to the life of the town. It's a cosmopolitan town – we're all part of a great big cosmopolitan thing."

Frank Gallagher

"My life in Luton has been really first class. A lot of [Irish] people like to be buried in Ireland. Anybody asking me where I want to be buried – right beside [here] in The Vale. It's been a good town to us, a good town to a lot of Irishmen – I'm going to finish up my days in Luton."

Ceridwen Margaret Hogarth

I've got very fond memories of Luton, I think if you live in a town and it gives you a living and your children an education and they go on to do well in life, I don't think you should knock the town, I think, be grateful really."

Verna Ible

I've been quite happy, I would say, living in Luton – the children have grown up in Luton. Of course, lots of people have come into Luton since we've been here, the town has changed quite a lot, physically and in every other way. I don't think Luton, personally, is any worse than anywhere else. I know lots of people say horrible things about Luton, but I always defend Luton."

Luton As An Industrial Centre

Published by the new industries Committee 1905

The town of Luton offers many attractions to those seeking sites for the erection of factories and works of any description requiring extensive area. Luton, Bedfordshire, is thirty miles north of London, on the main line of the Midland Railway. The town is the centre of the straw-hat and bonnet manufacturing industry; it contains also many felt-hat factories, extensive businesses in bleaching and dyeing, chocolate and cocoa works, gelatine works, and a number of large and prosperous engineering works.

The town is adapted as the seat of any form of manufacture, but affords special advantages for engineering, printing, and other industries in which male labour is more particularly employed. Among such advantages, the following may be mentioned:

- 1 Exceptional railway facilities. Luton is on the Midland main line, having fifty-three trains per day, many of which do the journey between London and Luton in forty minutes. It is also served by a branch loop-line of the Great Northern and London-Western Railways, connecting it with the former at Hatfield, and the latter at Leighton Buzzard.
- 2 Accommodation for railway sidings on reasonable terms.
- 3 An abundant supply of pure water.
- 4 Land in advantageous positions at low prices, adjoining either line of railway if sidings are required.
- 5 Good local government and moderate municipal taxation.
- 6 Cheap gas of excellent quality, the present price being 2s. 3d. per 1000 for lighting, and 2s. 1d. for power. Municipal electric supply for lighting and motive power. The rate for power is very low.
- 7 Houses for the industrial classes at low rentals. Good five-roomed dwelling houses, with gardens at 5s. 6d. per week.
- 8 A well-drained, well-lighted, and exceptionally healthy town, the death rate being only 13.0 per 1,000.
- 9 Educational facilities in the shape of elementary, higher grade and technical instruction. An excellent Secondary School has just been established by the County Education Authority.
- 10 Healthy, pleasant, abundant and well-paid occupation for female operatives.
- 11 A recreation ground in each ward, a people's park for the whole town, and plentiful provision of allotment gardens. The corporation has just purchased an estate of 50 acres close to the town, which has been opened as a public park, and includes accommodation for the playing of tennis, croquet, cricket and bowls.
- 12 Recreation in the shape of cricket, football, golf, tennis, swimming (in fine public baths, 105ft. long), and theatre.

....A joint committee has been formed by the Town Council and chamber of Commerce, for the purpose of affording assistance and reliable information to any firms requiring sites.

LUTON LUTON LUTON LUTON LUTON LUTON LUTON LUTON

[illegible]

A black and white portrait of an elderly man with a mustache, wearing a dark, heavy coat with a fur collar and a chain of office. He is seated and looking directly at the camera.

Mrs. H. H. H.

UTON

45

LUTON—The Home of Electrolux Labour-Saving Products.

Stages in the manufacture of famous Electrolux appliances are shown in these photographs taken in the Electrolux Factory at Luton, Beds. Here are engaged many hundreds of skilled British work-people in the making and assembling of Electrolux Home Cleaning Systems, Refrigerators, Water Softeners and Floor Polishers: products which are to be found in countless homes in the British Isles, simplifying home-management, safeguarding health, economising and adding to housewives' leisure. They truly make the home ideal.



Refrigerator and Suction Cleaner Manufacturers to H.M. The King, and Suction Cleaner Manufacturers to H.R.H. The Prince of Wales.



1. Assembling Cleaning System Motors.
2. A corner of the department in which Electrolux Cleaning Systems are made.
3. Electrolux — Floor — Buffers — undergoing tests.
4. Fitting and testing Steamless Portable Water Softeners.

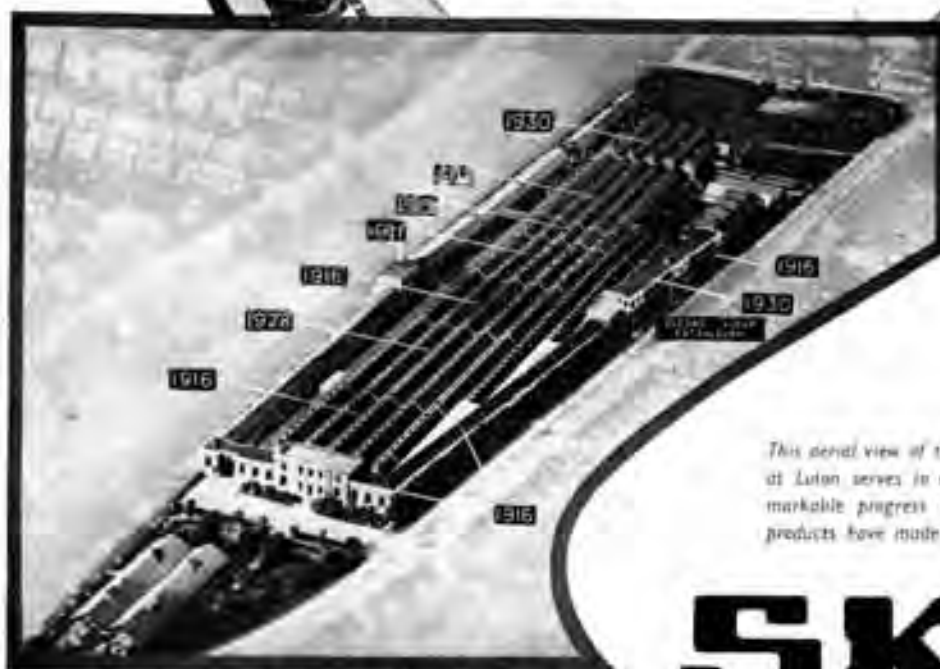
ELECTROLUX LTD.

HEAD OFFICE: 151 5, REGENT STREET, LONDON, W.1. : WORKS: LUTON, BEDFORDSHIRE.

from *Progressive Luton*, 1935

LOOK TO LUTON FOR BEARINGS

Year by year since 1911, the recognition of Luton as a centre for bearings has become more and more pronounced. The remarkable success of SKF Bearings throughout all branches of the British Engineering Industry has proved to be one of the great developments of the town.



This aerial view of the SKF factory at Luton serves to emphasise the remarkable progress that high quality products have made possible.

SKF

THE SKEFKO BALL BEARING CO. LTD., LUTON, BEDS.

from Progressive Luton, 1935



PROGRESSING WITH LUTON

and helping Luton Progress

VAUXHALL CARS

LIGHT SIX
12 h.p. & 14 h.p.

Standard Saloon
£195
(12 h.p. model only)

De Luxe Saloon
£215
(12 h.p. or 14 h.p.)

CADET

16.9 h.p.

Saloon £295
2-Door Coupe £295

4-Door Coupe £295
Granville Saloon
de Luxe £325

Ramsey Drop Head
Coupe £335
Tickford Saloon
£335



Vauxhall Motors have carried the fame of Luton engineering and craftsmanship, not only over all the roads of England, but into far-away corners of the World. Abyssinia, India, China, Java, Australia, New Zealand, Bermuda, South Africa, to number only a few, know Luton by their Vauxhall cars and Bedford trucks.

Starting with a modest barn-like building nearly thirty years ago, Vauxhall Motors have progressed until now the factory covers many acres and 3,500 men are employed. To-day Vauxhall cars and Bedford trucks are to be seen all over the world wherever there are roads.

VAUXHALL MOTORS LTD.

LUTON

BEDFORD TRUCKS

8-cwt. Van £155

12-cwt. Van £175

30-cwt. Lorry £210

30-cwt. Van £230

2-ton Short Wheel
base Lorry £250

2-ton Short End
Tipper £252

2-ton Long Wheel
base Lorry £250

2-ton Long Luton
Van £275

20-seater Bus £350



from Progressive Luton, 1935

Our Industrial Army

From the Luton Official Guide 1939

Thousands of deft-fingered women and girls are employed in the hat factories, in the huge Chocolate Works producing delicacies bearing the "Lutona" brand; in the Ribbon-Weaving Works, in certain departments of Engineering Works, in Chemical Works, and, of course, in the well equipped Offices belonging to industrial firms.

For heavier trades – aeroplane manufacture, engineering, iron and steel-founding, motor and motor truck manufacture, Soda Works, Gas Works, Electricity Works, male labour is almost exclusively employed. Mechanics in long overalls supervise various operations demanding the utmost accuracy and skill, and in the Chemical Laboratories the best brains are at work with a view to rendering assistance to manufacturers.

Watch the employees pouring out from the factories at meal-times or closing time, and you will be impressed with their obvious pride in doing worth-while jobs, with their cheerfulness and keenness.

This industrial army keeps the local shop-keepers prosperous – the wage-sheets of outstanding firms would make the chancellor of a small South American State "stare and gasp" – and help to make the lot of the Borough Treasurer a happy one. The records of the local Banks and the Luton Building Society show how thrifty most employees are.


After working hours, the smart women and girls show that they have a dress sense – they spend their money wisely and have a flair for marketing and shopping. From the very nature of the case the young fellows who can keep down jobs in such first-class factories must be intelligent and highly-educated – at any rate on the technical side. The interest taken by many workers in matters relating to culture and to the welfare of the community as a whole is a gratifying feature of life in Luton.



The production line at Commer Cars, 1935

Adverts from Luton papers in the 1930s

FRED COX
Watchmaker and Jeweller




**THE
RIGHT
RING
AT THE
RIGHT
PRICE**

Gem Rings, Wedding Rings,
a speciality
Careful and expert attention
given to all repairs

**15 Guildford Street
Luton**
Phone No. 1489

**Your Invisible Servant
—GAS**



*In every room
in the house,
upstairs or
down, GAS
has a job to
do — always
ready, always
efficient.*

COOKERS, GEYSERS, GAS
FIRES and WASH COPPERS
BY CASH OR RENTAL
PURCHASE TERMS

Luton Gas Company
Shareowners 72 GEORGE STREET

George Fountain
Builder & Contractor



HOUSES BEING BUILT IN
DUNSTABLE ROAD WEST
AND OTHER PARTS OF
THE DISTRICT

ALL PRICES—GOOD VALUES
MORTGAGES ARRANGED
PRIVATE OR THROUGH THE
BUILDING SOCIETY

**29 OAKLEY ROAD
LUTON**

SHOP AT
Blundell's
LUTON'S
LEADING
STORE



EVERYTHING FOR
Ladies', Children's and Men's Wear
Up-to-date—Fashion at reasonable prices
Furniture, Carpets, Bedding, China and Glassware

BLUNDELL BROS. (LUTON) LTD.
Est. 1917 (2 stores)
8-16 & 30 GEORGE STREET, and
2-12 CHEAPSIDE, LUTON, Beds.

JOHN E. BURROWS
ELECTRICAL
& WIRELESS
INSTALLATIONS
& REPAIRS.
ELECTRICAL
CONTRACTOR

Telephone :
Luton 1735.

45, Cardiff Road,
LUTON, BEDS.

For First-Class Domestic or Industrial Electrical Work.

E. H. HATTAM
High-class Pastrycook and Confectioner
84 Leagrave Road, Luton

FOR

Luton is proud of its Industries

Its Cars, its Lorries, its Buses, its Ball Bearings, Refrigerators, Clocks, Motors, and Machinery.

Luton is becoming proud of its Evening paper; they tell of its comprehensiveness, its rising success, of how it is first with the last news.

They buy it religiously every night; they have taken it to their heart.

YOU ought to take it every night, too.

The Evening Telegraph

Adverts from Luton papers in the 1930s

Telephone : LUTON 1834.

MAISON TITLEY
(W. TITLEY)

Ladies' Hairdressers

EUGENE Permanent Waving.
Every Wave Guaranteed

43, Waller Street, LUTON

Luton Industrial & Trade Exhibition 1951

This Exhibition was organised by the Borough Council in Wardown park in July 1951

A Message from the Mayor

It gives great pleasure to write a short forward to the catalogue of Luton's Festival Exhibition... This is Luton's own show – the first of its kind attempted. With it, Luton attains its maturity, and displays its thriving industry, its efficient public services, its rich pattern of social and cultural life. I prophesy that this exhibition will be enjoyed now and remembered for many years to come. I hope that not only will Lutonians see it – that goes without saying – but that they will see that their friends outside Luton come also, and see why we are proud of our town. *R.C. Oakley*

Introduction

The Exhibition and events described in this catalogue are Luton's contribution to the Festival of Britain. In the middle of this chequered 20th century, Luton has as much and more to celebrate as any town in this country.

Luton has no natural advantages as an industrial centre, no sources of raw materials, no proximity to great markets, or access to cheap transport by sea or canal. Even the railway had come late. But in 1951, Luton is one of the foremost industrial towns in Southern England. Its population has grown to over 110,000; its single industry to a variety embracing every phase of British industrial life from aeroplanes to ball-bearings. To those who see a gloomy future for British Industry, the Luton story, especially over the last thirty years, should be an inspiration.

For Luton owes its development entirely to the enterprise and foresight of its citizens, who, in the early 20th century, developed the production of cheap electricity and gas, and with these advantages, and others, encouraged new industry to come to the town. The influence of the hat trade [has] provided a supply of skilled, independent labour, both male and female, on which newer industry could draw. It created a tradition of independence and individuality. And above all, it created an enduring community which has withstood the test of rapid growth. The thousands of people who came to Luton in the 'black thirties', from Tyneside, Scotland, Wales, and the Midlands, when Luton was one of the few towns with almost no unemployment, rapidly became Lutonians. The cover of this catalogue is more than symbolic. Metal and straw have mixed very well.

There are still two Lutons. Around the centre of town are the many large and small hat factories, and the piles of cardboard boxes being loaded are an indication of their presence and prosperity. The new Luton has its great factories on the outskirts, many of them set on the edge of green fields. Here are made motor cars, trucks, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, electric and gas cookers, ball bearings, aeroplanes, and many other necessities of the modern world. They are nearly all modern factories, clean and attractive. Welfare conditions are good, and relations between men and management are based on mutual trust and confidence. There can be few industrial towns with such a proud record of freedom from industrial dispute.

The Industrial Exhibition displays most of the major industries. For the first time the Lutonian can see, under one roof, the foundations of the town's prosperity.

But a town is more than its industry. Houses, roads, sewers, schools and efficient Public Services are all necessary to its functioning. The growth of Luton has presented a series of urgent problems to the Borough Council. In 30 years the population has almost doubled, with all the consequent demand for services. The result is that Luton is an overcrowded and underdeveloped town. Perhaps the stimulus of difficulty is the cause of the vigour and efficiency of local government. The many departments, some of them so unobtrusive as to be taken for granted, show the nature and scope of their work in the Civic Exhibition. Everyone is doing a necessary job, and all are doing it with economy and efficiency.

This is a Festival Year. This Exhibition will show that we in Luton have much to be proud of, much to be thankful for, and despite our preoccupations, a good deal to be cheerful about.



Major Firms in Luton from Year Book c.1955

Adamant Engineering Co. Ltd., Dallow Road

Sole manufacturers of 'Marles' patented steering gear – manual or hydraulic power assisted – which is made in a full range of sizes to meet the requirements of road transport from low horse-power pleasure cars to maximum load commercial goods-carrying vehicles and coaches and buses. Special designs are also available for sea and aircraft.

Alcock (Peroxide) Ltd., Chaul End Lane

As implied by their name, they specialise in manufacturing hydrogen peroxide and also sodium metasilicate which they have been largely instrumental in introducing to the laundry industry of this country. The company also manufactures a range of specialised detergents for various industries and has an expanding export trade in all its products.

Ballito Hosiery Mills Ltd., Bute Street

This firm extended its activities to Luton in 1951, taking over an extensive factory for the processing of ladies' nylon stockings. Activities include knitting, linking, seaming, mending and inspection.

Bancroft Folding Machines Ltd., Kingham Way, Reginald Street

This firm manufactures folding machines for all types for printers and for office use.

Barford Brothers Ltd.

[This firm] manufacture wool felt hat hoods for the ladies' millinery trade and men's hat trade, carrying out all processes of manufacture on the premises. All materials used in the manufacture of hats such as straw plaits and braids are dyed and also galloon and petersham ribbon for trimming. All activities are now concentrated at the North Street works.

Charles Bird & Sons Ltd., Collingdon Street

Charles Bird...founded this firm as a building materials merchant in 1872 ...and business has grown with the growth of the town...The company has developed most in its glass department...Glasses for the motor trade have become a very big part of the business, the company can claim to be one of the largest supplies in Southern England.

Blue Pennant Coaches, George Street

One of the youngest companies in Luton, started in 1951. The company operates a Private Hire service to all parts of Great Britain, concentrating on the comfort of passengers and providing heaters and wireless in each coach.

Blundell Bros. (Luton) Ltd., George Street

In 1852 Henry Blundell opened a shop at Market Hill which was the commencement of [this firm]...In the course of the years departments were added and at the present time there are fifty well-organised departments specialising in the sale of a wide range of merchandise.

Henry Brown & Sons Timber Ltd.

Nearly sixty years ago this firm moved to its present premises under the name of Bute Mills, Dunstable Road, Luton. The company handles all kinds of timber...it has a large joinery department [and]...a packing case department.

The British Gelatine Works Ltd., New Bedford Road

Founded in 1899...production commenced in April 1901 and since that date, the firm has been primarily engaged in the manufacture of photographic and technical gelatines, whilst latterly, the food and hat industries have been entered into. The company enjoys the reputation of being one of the principal suppliers of photographic gelatines, both in this country and on the continent.

Charles Clay & Sons Ltd., 53 Cheapside (Factory: Waldeck Road)

The company's extensive range of merchandise covers ribbons, women's and children's light wearing apparel, men's and boy's ties, shirts and sleeping wear, textiles and furnishing fabrics, velvets and velveteens, leather and imitation leather goods, advertising novelties and materials used in the manufacture of men's and ladies' hats and millinery. The company's warehouses in the UK are located in Luton, Manchester and North Shields (Northumberland) and subsidiary companies are established in New Zealand, Australia, Belgium and Spain.

Commer Cars Ltd., Biscot Road

Celebrating its Golden Jubilee in 1955, [Commer Cars is] one of the honoured names associated with the progress of the commercial vehicle. It was founded way back in 1905, a syndicate being formed to operate a small factory in London, where the first Commer industrial vehicle was produced.

Following its success, a move was made a year later to a larger factory on the outskirts of Luton; one forming the nucleus of the extensive modern buildings which now constitute a conspicuous landmark to travellers on the main line railway from St Pancras.... In 1928 the company became part of the Rootes Group.

Today, Commer produce a wide range of commercial vehicles for goods and passenger carrying purposes,...all of them enjoying an enviable reputation in their different spheres.

The Cundall Folding Machine Co. Ltd., Hitchin Road

Makers of paper folding machines, automatic feeders and perforating machines, for the printing and bookbinding trades. This firm has been manufacturing for over ninety years. Their machines are sent all over the world.

Currant & Creak Ltd., 38/40 Bute Street

The firm commenced business in September 1908... In 1924 the present limited company was formed...The firms has always maintained a high standard of production, covering the manufacture of ladies' millinery in straw, wool and fur felt of every description, and has always supplied to the wholesale trade.

The Davis Gas Stove Co. Ltd., Dallow Road

In 1891 [this company] was formed as a private limited company and four years later its first connection with Luton was made when the Langley foundry was acquired...In 1906 the construction of a new factory was commenced on a site which had been acquired in Dallow Road, Luton. The new factory...was opened in January 1907; three hundred moulders and other employees transferred from Falkirk to Luton bringing with them the name 'Diamond Foundry' and, incidentally, establishing the nucleus of the Scots community which flourishes in the town today.

Electrolux Ltd., Oakley Road

In the Electrolux factory, which covers an area of nearly 500,000 square feet, some 2,000 skilled workpeople are employed in the manufacture and assembly of Electrolux domestic suction cleaners and refrigerators, products which find there way into countless homes throughout the world.

Ellis & Goldstein (Luton) Ltd.

First occupied their Guildford Street premises in 1940. After being requisitioned by the Home Office in 1942 the factory was re-opened for the manufacture of ladies' outerware in 1946, since when the progress has been rapid. The completely modernised air-conditioned building now holds 630 employees.

The English Electric Company

A new and important industrial development has taken place at Luton Airport in recent years. This is the establishment by the English Electric Company of a new division engaged on guided missile work...For security reasons no details of this defence work can be given but it undoubtedly represents a valuable and continuous contribution to the air potential of this country.

**The English and Scottish Joint Co-operative Wholesale Society Ltd.
(Cocoa & Chocolate Works)**

The original building was completed in 1902 and the production of cocoa, chocolate and chocolate confectionery commenced that year. Since then the...[Dallow Road] factory has been extended and enlarged several times.

Geo. F. Farr & Sons, Collingdon Street

This firm of engineers was established in 1909 and specialises in the manufacture, installation and servicing of machinery and appliances for the hatting industry. Their 'Farrbest' products have earned world-wide approval...The firm's organisation supplies an ever-increasing demand for general factory installations and removals of plant, steam and boiler systems, sheet metal work, welding and electrical work.

C. Firbank & Son Ltd.

This firm of civil engineering contractors has its headquarters in Luton, and specialises in highway construction, sewage disposal works, drainage and water supply. Post-war activities include extensive work on advance preparation of housing sites, heavy excavation work and factory maintenance. A wide range of machinery is available for hire to every branch of civil engineering.

Flowers Breweries Ltd., Park Street West

The group control J.W.Green Ltd and Flower & Sons Ltd. The Luton Brewery is their headquarters and controls some 1,500 licensed properties. Flowers Breweries Ltd. also manufacture mineral waters in Luton, and these are distributed over a wide area.

Hayward Tyler & Co. Ltd., Crawley Green Road

A firm of hydraulic engineers was founded in 1815 and in 1872 moved from London to its present site in Luton. The English company's products can be divided into the following groups:

1. Steam and motor-driven reciprocating pumps for general service, boiler feeding, oil field service, pipe-line pumping; and reciprocating and centrifugal cargo oil and marine auxiliary pumps.
2. Electromersible pumps for bore-holes, well and mine workings, and other liquid filled motor applications.
3. Steam turbines and centrifugal process pumps for the oil and chemical industries and similar special purposes.
4. Carbonating and bottling machinery for the soft drinks trade.

Home Counties Newspapers Ltd., Manchester Street

Luton is the headquarters of [this firm], the largest local weekly newspaper production unit in the country... The company owns a professional portrait and commercial photographic studio, has studio artists and retouchers and a photo engraving department for newspaper and magazine blocks, and three retail shops. The central production plant at Luton is one of the best equipped provincial offices in the country.

Howards Refrigeration Ltd.

The Engineering Department operates from Bury Park Road, where are installed complete repair shops, test equipment and stores, and the main offices and showrooms. The company has a fleet of 14 service vehicles controlled from Luton and servicing all makes of industrial and domestic refrigeration plants.

S. Hubbard Ltd., Regent Mill, Regent Street

Craftsmen in felt. Manufacturer of wool and fur felt bodies for the hatting trade. Mechanical felt for all branches of the engineering trade, aircraft, automobiles, etc. Straw bleachers and dyers. Manufacturers of absorbent cotton wool for Medical, Industrial and Domestic uses. Founded 1906.

H. C. Janes Ltd. (Builders, Contractors & Civil Engineers), High Town Road

This company is well known in Luton as the largest firm of builders and contractors in the district... Since the war the company has been completing houses at a rate of 300 a year. At the same time it has been engaged on the temporary housing and schools programme, civil engineering and factory construction.

George Kent Ltd.

Founded in London in 1838 and established in Luton since 1907, George Kent Ltd. employ some 2,000 people at Biscot Road, with branch factories at Hibbert Street and Pondwicks Road... They manufacture water, air, gas and steam meters, industrial instruments, boiler-control equipment, steering gears, clear-view screens for ships, and electric motors. They are the largest firm in the British Empire specialising in this class of light engineering, and have a world-wide sales organisation enabling them to export up to 50% of their annual output.

Laporte Chemicals Ltd.

One of the country's largest chemical manufacturing concerns, with the main works at Luton... Production at Luton started in a small way in 1898 to meet the demand for a suitable bleach for the straw hat trade. The business grew rapidly and... the Kingsway Works was opened in 1915... Although hydrogen peroxide and related products such as perborate have remained the company's main products, manufacture of many other chemicals has been developed over the years.

The Legrave Press Ltd., Mount Pleasant Road

Well-known as high class Printers and Publishers. Their model factory at Legrave, which was built with the north lighting system, is equipped with the very latest machinery... Approximately 160 people are employed.

Lillywhite (Timber) Ltd., Legrave Road Sawmills

This... timber company moved to their present premises in 1945... In meeting the needs of local industries rapid expansion was undertaken and at present a fully equipped mill with up-to-date machinery is fully employed.

Luton Knitting Co. Ltd., Dunstable Road

This firm is one out of six in this country producing genuine Beret Basque, which enjoys great popularity and is a first-class dollar earner. They also supply the RAF and Army with berets, further they have a large department where Jersey cloth is made and a making-up section for scarves, pixie hoods and gloves.

Lye & Sons Ltd., New Bedford Road

This firms was founded approximately 100 years ago. Originally they were dyers of straw braids only. After that they added a bleaching section to the dyeing activities. Since World War II the firm continues only with the production of wool and fur felt hoods and capelines.

D. Napier and Son Ltd., Luton Airport

Established 1808...The company first came to Luton in 1940 when the Flight Installation and Experimental Establishment came to Luton...The Flight Development Establishment of D. Napier & Son Ltd., as it is now known, has grown from a small nucleus of seventeen persons to an establishment with hundreds of technicians capable of undertaking work of extreme versatility and highly scientific nature.

New Welbeck Ltd., New Bedford Road

Manufactures of suction cleaning equipment which is used for cleaning, blowing and spraying purposes in industry, commerce and transport throughout the British Isles and many parts of the world.

Ogden and Cleaver Ltd. 1-5 Stuart Street

Commenced in 1912 as decorators' materials merchant...The manufacture of high-grade paints was begun in 1931 and the growth of the business necessitated acquiring additional manufacturing premises in Dunstable.

Percival Aircraft Ltd.

[This firm] were lessees of about 10 acres of Luton Airport in 1936, achieved a high reputation before the war for the production of light aircraft types. Several world's records were broken by machines from their Luton factory...

The expansion of Percival Aircraft Ltd., since the war has included the erection of a test and experimental department, an addition of 30,000 sq. ft. of production floor space, and the completion of a new block of offices near the entrance to the aerodrome, which are not only in-keeping with this modern aeroplane factory, but also enhance the up-to-date appearance of the aerodrome premises.

Robinson Bros., Melson Street

Founded December 1929. Specialists in medium-class goods, mostly in ladies' felt and fur and straw hats.

Sanders & Brightman, Bute Street

[This firm] has been engaged in the manufacture of ladies' hats since 1909 and is one of the largest producers in Luton. On the outbreak of war the factory was turned over to the manufacture of naval caps of all types...and, although the main business is now ladies' hats, all types of uniform caps are now produced.

Seaward Brothers Ltd., Neville Road

A well-established building firm, having excellent premises situated on the perimeter of the town where space has been of great advantage in permitting the firm to house its manufacturing sections in well-lighted and equipped workshops. Its activities cover all types of building work from houses to the classic side of contracting, carried out by first-class craftsmen in direct employ.

Skefko Ball Bearing Co. Ltd.

Luton is well-known throughout the country and the world as a centre of the manufacture of ball and roller bearings. From small beginnings in 1910, on a site in which was then open country, The Skefko Ball Bearing Co. Ltd. has steadily expanded its plant until today, the original factory in Leagrave Road has developed so that the frontage extends over quarter of a mile. There is also a large factory in Sundon some three miles away, and jointly the two factories employ approximately 4/5,000 people.

J. Staddon & Son (Luton) Ltd. (Stationers and Printers)

[This] 'family' business... has been established for over sixty years. At the rear of this attractive shop, which deals in all the best stationery and office equipment, there is a very modern and well-equipped printing works.

P. Walser & Co. Ltd., Midland Road

[This firm] was founded in England in 1889, selling to the hat trade, the plaits and tissues manufactured in their factories at Wohlen, Switzerland. They commenced to make hats in Guildford Street, Luton in 1906, and speedily made progress.

Walter Webb & Baker Ltd.

[This business] with factories in John Street and Bute Street, Luton, was founded in 1886 by the late Mr. Walter Webb, a native of Luton... Recently the large building of five floors was acquired in Maddox Street, Regent Street, London, where facilities are now available for the display of everything appertaining to ladies' felt and straw hats.

R. Westly & Co, Ltd.,

...established in the autumn of 1928 as an associated company of Lye & Sons. Ltd... [who] considered that, with their long-established connections in the hat and millinery trades at home and abroad, there might be a successful outlet for ribbons manufactured in this district... and so, with the purchase of a small number of looms the firm of 'Westly's' was born... Today 'Westly's' ribbons not only fulfil the requirements of the hat and millinery trades but find constant demand also in many other directions... In 1933 further activities were added... by way of a completely new venture, viz.: that of rigid and elastic braiding. Again in 1950, a third manufacturing section was launched and is now well in its stride. That is the production of 2-way stretch elastic webbing and knitted braids and webs.

Vauxhall Motors Ltd.

The story of Luton's most famous firm started in 1857, when Mr. Alexander Wilson... founded the Vauxhall Ironworks at Lambeth, London... In 1905 the factory moved from London to the present site on Luton...

Considerable expansions took place at the Vauxhall factory in the late 1920s, and in 1931 the famous range of Bedford trucks was introduced. The Vauxhall factory continued to grow with demand for the company's products, and in 1936 more than 50,000 cars and trucks were sold in one year...

In 1953, Vauxhall Motors celebrated their Golden Jubilee as makers of motor cars. In that year a record production of 110,099 vehicles was achieved... The factory estates cover a total area of 290 acres. This includes 33 acres at the Dunstable factory where obsolete spare parts are made...

As befits Luton's largest employer of labour – the company's payroll now numbers over 13,500 – Vauxhall have instituted a number of important advancements in employee welfare. A profit sharing scheme has been in operation since before the war, a pension scheme was introduced in 1946, two weeks holiday with full pay is the rule, and Vauxhall was the first car factory to in this country to institute a 5-day week.



Workers at Skefko in Luton, 1951



Workers making heaters at Electrolux 1961

Luton News 9th February 1933

Vauxhall Motors Ltd.

Half Million Expansion Scheme Temporary Closing to Expedite Last Stage

Vauxhall Motors, Ltd, of Luton, closed down temporarily on Tuesday – not because production exceeds demand, but because demand exceeds the present output facilities of the works.

At the end of three weeks, during which engineers and builders will work day and night on the final stages of the reorganisation programme, the works will be re-opened with the plant laid out for much bigger production, and the employment of some hundreds of

additional men will be possible.

As we recently reported, half a million sterling was allotted for building extensions and additional plant. New buildings have sprung up, new machinery is ready for installation, and existing plant is ready to take its place in a completely designed scheme, whereby the latest methods of flow production will bring Vauxhall manufacturing methods up to a point of high efficiency.

Luton News 23rd March 1937

Vauxhall Motors Share Their Profits

Last night in the New Car Delivery Building, and this morning in the Canteen, £77,559 was distributed among 6,113 employees of Vauxhall Motors, Ltd., Luton, as their share of the profits made by the Company last year.

When the bulk of the amount was distributed last night in seven minutes - a further example of Vauxhall organisation - there was only one speech. Mr. C.J. Bartlett, the managing director, was the speaker, and he made two important announcements.

ONE WAS THAT TO PROFIT-SHARING THERE IS TO BE ADDED AN AUGUST HOLIDAY WITH FULL PAY.

THE OTHER WAS THAT THE COMPANY INTENDED TO PRODUCE A NEW MODEL VAUXHALL INVOLVING A CAPITAL EXPENDITURE OF A MILLION POUNDS.

Last night's distribution took place in the Car Delivery building because the Canteen, used last year, was not big enough for the number to be dealt with. Mr Bartlett spoke from a platform improvised from four Bedford trucks....

Mr Bartlett said he was more than pleased to take part in the second profit-sharing distribution, because the family was growing so rapidly that it might be the last occasion on which they were able to get together in this way....



Vauxhall workers collect their bonus money, 1938

But this profit-sharing was such an important event, and its consequences, to his mind, were so far-reaching that they wanted to take the opportunity while they could of having the family together and speaking a few words.

"I am glad to report," Mr Bartlett said, "that we had a very happy and successful year, last year. I put the emphasis on happiness, because there is an old saying that success is no good unless you have happiness."



Vauxhall made use of the nearby airport for their exports, 1958

Luton News 8th August 1957

New Towns Denuded To Keep Us Going

Luton may regard itself as an industrial jewel set among the chalk hills of South Bedfordshire - but to employers in towns throughout a 30 mile radius Luton is an ogre or an octopus.

For firms in Bedford, Watford, and the "new towns" of Hemel Hempstead and Stevenage stand by helplessly watching their skilled labour drain away – and always to Luton.

These firms say the busloads, coachloads and trainloads of workers who pour into Luton everyday to Vauxhall Motors may bring prosperity – but it is prosperity for Vauxhall Motors at the expense of other industries.

The situation has existed in part for years, but it has got worse over the last few months, and with the Vauxhall expansion virtually complete it will undoubtedly get worse still.

Now the situation is worrying some employers in the Watford area so much that the question is being considered specially by the Watford and District Committee of the Eastern Regional Board for Industry.

The matter was brought to a head by a letter sent...by a small engineering firm in the Watford area. This firm said it was losing so many "key men" to Vauxhalls at Luton that it could no longer employ so many in the semi-skilled category....

In Luton itself there is feeling amongst firms other than Vauxhalls. These firms are also losing labour to Vauxhalls and they like it no better than do employers in the surrounding towns.

No Blame Attached

But there is little inclination to blame Vauxhalls for it. All the organisations...[have arrived] at the same conclusion. This is that the problem will go on – and get worse – until more houses are built in Luton. The answer, they say, is houses and more houses for the

workers. Not just the odd estate here and there, but hundreds, if not thousands of houses....

Attention Drawn

A Spokesman of the Board [for Industry] said...In September 1956, we wrote to Bedfordshire County Council, stating that we had every confidence in the future of the motor industry and felt that more houses should be built. Now look what happens! Vauxhalls are recruiting labour and want a very large increase yet – the only thing that can happen is for workers to come in from outside.".....

New Towns Upset

One aspect of the "commuting" to Luton, he said, was that it was beginning to prejudice the whole idea of the 'new towns' of Hemel Hempstead and Stevenage.

continued on page 64

continued from page 63

"So many people are leaving the firms there and coming to Luton that the towns are no longer self-contained, as they should be," he said.

"Instead they are rapidly turning into dormitory suburbs of Luton."...

Mr Gore [the Secretary of Luton Chamber of Commerce] thinks the presence of Vauxhall Motors in the town tends to inflate wages. But he adds; "These inflated wages are one of the penalties we have got to pay for having a flourishing export industry in our midst."

Mr Gore thinks too that some employees are tending to hold the 'bogey of Vauxhalls' over their employers as a means of forcing higher wages out of them.

"Ten Bob Story"

He explained: "They go along and say: 'We could get ten bob an hour at Vauxhalls.' But could they? Vauxhalls don't pay ten shillings an hour to their men – but some employees of other firms think they do, and they manage to persuade their employers that it is true too."

Mr Gore said that on behalf of the Chamber's engineering section he recently carried out a survey of hourly wages pages paid in engineering firms in the district, ranging from Vauxhall Motors to back street firms employing only half-a-dozen men.

"It soon became clear to me that Vauxhalls are not the highest payers in town no matter what the average man might think," he said.

Band Wagon Glamour

So what is the big attraction of Vauxhalls? Mr Gore thinks it is partly the glamour of the name locally – something like "jumping on the Vauxhall bandwagon."

But he believes it is also the fact that Vauxhalls have facilities smaller firms just cannot offer, such as excellent canteen facilities, the rehabilitation centre, the profit sharing bonus scheme and the host of social activities.

As he points out, however, these are just the facilities which would put some craftsmen off going there. These are people who just won't work for Vauxhalls – or any other giant firm for that matter – at any price.

This was just the view put forward by Mr. R. Beaumont of the Partool Engineering Co. "There are men who just couldn't stand working there," he said. "They say it is a soul-destroying job."

But Mr. Beaumont, like so many others, bears no grudge against Vauxhalls for the difficulties they involuntarily cause the 'small man.'

"There is no doubt that they are taking other

people's labour," he said. "We don't like it, but I don't see that we can do anything about it."

Confidence Comes

"There is one thing. When Vauxhall Motors are doing well this town does well. It gives a lot of confidence here to know they are booming."

The 'new town' point of view was put by Mr. Harry King, of George W. King Ltd., Stevenage....

"People are coming down with their firms from London to the new town at Stevenage," he said. "What happens is that as soon as firms are allocated houses by the Development Corporation their workers leave them and they are off to Luton."

"Some of them are away from 6.30 in the morning until 7.30 at night. Then idea of the new towns was to get people out of London and give them homes in the country with their work on the doorstep. But what is happening? They are making worse and longer journeys now than they ever did in London."

Mr. King said he did not blame Vauxhalls.... "But the situation now is that if the firms keep coming down from London and losing their labour to Vauxhalls they will pack up and go back again. What will happen to the new towns then?"

Only Once Bitten

....There are of course plenty of hard things said about Vauxhalls said in the background, both in Luton and outside. No branch of Luton industry has stronger feelings, perhaps, than the hat trade, which has been losing workers for years.

One hat manufacturer... [who asked not to be named] claimed to be speaking for a large section of the trade when he declared: "Luton was a happier place before Vauxhalls came. I only wish they would pack up and let us get back to where we were."

But most people in the town realise that this would be impossible.

No Going Back

There is no going back to what Luton was 30 or 40 years ago - unless it is to become a dying, bankrupt community.

What would happen to all the shop keepers if Vauxhalls left? What would happen to all the little firms doing sub-contract work for them? What would happen to the dairymen, busmen and the builders?

Vauxhalls themselves have little to say on the matter. They do say, however, that they now employ over 20,000 people and will obviously need more.

They say also that a couple of years ago one-third of their workers came in from outside Luton, and although there are no more up-to-date figures it seems reasonable to assume that the number is now greater.

Luton Saturday Telegraph 21st March 1964

Vauxhall Switches More Production To Ellesmere

Vauxhall Motors, Ltd. yesterday announced a £30,000,000 plan to double the size of the Ellesmere Port Factory and transfer part of the production of Vivas from Luton....

Vauxhall gave an assurance yesterday that the Merseyside extension was not the 'thin end of the wedge' so far as Luton was concerned.

A spokesman said, "We are expanding

there because we cannot expand in Luton and Dunstable. We made it clear in 1960, when we decided to go to Ellesmere Port, that we would rather have expanded here."

"This is our home territory and always will be. Luton is, and will remain, the headquarters and nerve centre of this company."

Luton News 9th April 1964

Vauxhall Profit Tops £8¹/₄ m. And Wages Hit New Record

Vauxhall Motors, Ltd., made a net profit after tax in 1963 of £8,267,154, compared to £5,975,955 in 1962, the company discloses.

In the annual report and accounts, Mr William Swallow, Chairman and Managing

Director, disclosed that sales, employment and gross fixed assets were all at record levels in 1963.

The average earnings of hourly paid employees topped the £20 a week mark for the first time.



Vauxhall's Luton plant begins production of the Cavalier, 1977

Luton News 28th August 1980

Cash boost for industries 'FOR TOWN'S SAKE BUY VAUXHALL'

A surprise and dramatic move by Luton's leaders has given a massive boost to the town's ailing vehicle industry.

More than £ ¾ million is soon to be spent by Luton Council on locally built vehicles....

[A spokesman said] "We want to give a boost to local industry and we hope by bringing forward this expenditure programme we will provide that injection at a time when they are sort of customers."

Luton News 13th December 2000

What An Awful Christmas Present

The town was stunned yesterday by the announcement that Vauxhall is to end car production at Luton. The news came as a bolt from the blue. There have been rumours and crises before but after the previous dramas it was thought that Vauxhall in Luton was safe for the immediate future.

Luton's directors had warned in 1998 that the planet was on the brink of closure if the workforce did not agree to new working conditions. Some felt that this was deliberate brinkmanship to force through new terms. Clearly it was not...but equally clearly the workforce DID agree and thought their actions has ensured the future.

General Motors said yesterday that market conditions are changing and there is over-capacity in the car market. The company's European operations are being pruned and one of the chief sufferers is Luton. The estimate yesterday was that the end of car production at Kimpton Road will cause the loss of 2,000 jobs.

There was no hint that this was about to

happen. When this newspaper first asked questions at the factory gate yesterday afternoon some workers assumed we were talking about the Christmas closures which have already been announced!

So the shock when the news was confirmed was considerable. Even though commercial vehicle production will be concentrated at Luton it is still a catastrophe for the area. The prosperity which has attracted so many thousands of people to Luton was founded upon the success of Vauxhall and the other companies which provide it with components and services.

It is not completely ended but many other automotive industries in the area have already disappeared or shrunk and Luton can no longer be called a car town. Luckily numerous other industries have sprung up which are providing alternative employment but this is small comfort for those who are about to lose their jobs. What an awful Christmas present for the Vauxhall workers and the town!

Luton Airport – The Beginnings

From the Luton Official Guide 1939

Municipal Aerodrome

At a comparatively early stage in the history of Civil Aviation, the Luton Town Council recognised the necessity of planning to meet the future requirements of air transport, by purchasing an aerodrome site of some 374 acres...

The Aerodrome was officially licensed by the Air Ministry on 5th April, 1938, as a "Public Use Aerodrome" with runways of: North-South, 770 yards; North-East – South-West, 815 yards; East–West, 800 yards; South-East – North-west, 1,140 yards. (All these runways are capable of extension.)

On July 16th, 1938, the Aerodrome was officially opened ... and to promote general air-mindedness, not only in Luton, but in surrounding towns, an Air Display on a large scale was held. About 20,000 spectators visited the Aerodrome on this occasion, and over 100 aircraft from all parts of the country attended the display...Large numbers of the public took advantage of the facilities for "joy rides".

The Airport Committee are preparing plans for a block of modern administrative buildings with control tower, Wireless Station, Customs Offices, Meteorological Services, Restaurant and Hotel, and full night landing facilities...From the foregoing it will be obvious that the Council have entered whole-heartedly into the business of civil aviation. The Council have recognised that the development of air transport in Luton will probably play a part as important in the town's activities as any of the other industries.

