

Longbridge and Longbridge Plant (Economical decline of Birmingham's industry)

The **Longbridge plant** is an industrial complex situated in the Longbridge area of Birmingham, United Kingdom.

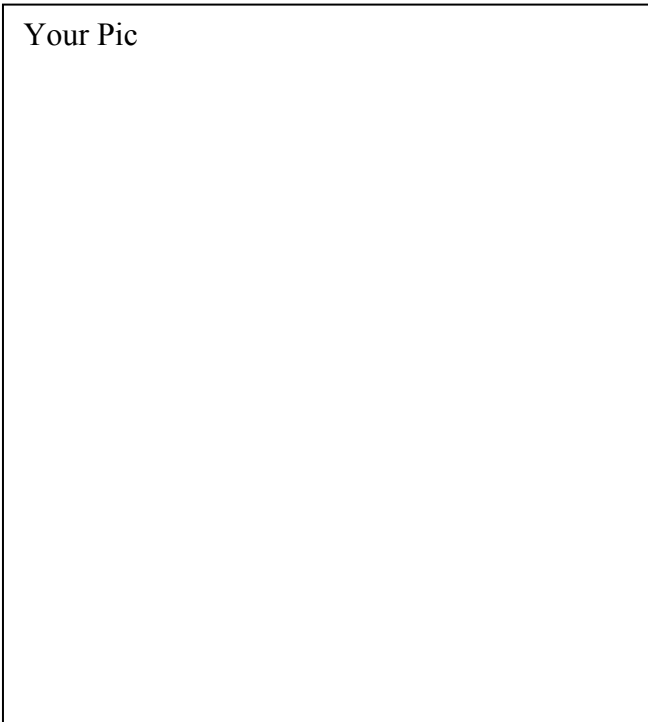
1895-1901 White and Pike

The original site and factory development was undertaken by Birmingham-based copper plate printers White and Pike Ltd. They opened in the first quarter of 1895. Unfortunately the venture failed, and the site was repossessed by the bank in 1901

1906-1914 Austin

In 1905 Herbert Austin founded his own car company in Birmingham. On paper the first Austin was described as a 25-30 h.p. high-class touring car with a four-speed gearbox and a chain-driven transmission. Each car had a material and quality guarantee and the first model was produced at the end of March 1906. By 1908, there were 1,000 workers at a factory.

Your Pic



1914-1918 World War I

The plant was part of a significant rapid mobilisation process. Machines that had been used to build Austin cars were employed to produce munitions, and all the resources of the factory were harnessed to serve the armed forces. The number employees, many of whom were women, rose to over 22,000 during the peak years. With the need to expand capacity, the company bought Longbridge farm.

The interwar years

Beside cars the company started to extend their production line by developing airplanes, trucks and other land machines.

World War II

The factory was mobilised again. The manufacturing of cars was largely abandoned and the machines were turned to the production of armour, tanks, bombers and military equipments. Trenton buildings, Number 2 paint shop, was still referred to as the Beaufighter line by some people during the 1970s. Having such a concentration of wartime production meant that the area was a prime target for bombers. Erdington was made famous for being the very first part of England to be bombed by the Germans, who had presumably been trying to hit Longbridge.

After the war

After war the company expanded rapidly, introducing new models, and overseas marketing. In June 1946, the millionth Austin was produced. In 1952 Austin was amalgamated with the Morris Motor Company and became BMC. BMC became amalgamated to British Leyland in

1968. By the late 1960s Longbridge was the largest car plant in the world and employed around 250,000 workers

Nationalisation

The British Leyland company ran into financial difficulties and was refinanced by the government in 1975. The government thus became the dominant shareholder British Leyland (later called BL) remained a public company.

Between 1978 and 1979 union convenor at Longbridge, was behind 523 disputes at the then government-owned British Leyland (BL) plant, Britain's largest factory at the time. Many of the votes for strikes were cast in Cofton Park opposite Q-Gate.

Expansion work at Longbridge was completed in 1979 to allow a new assembly line for the forthcoming new supermini car, which was launched in 1980 as the Austin Metro. The Metro was in production virtually unchanged for 10 years, becoming one of the most popular cars ever to be produced at the plant.

Privatisation and subsequent liquidation

By the 1980s BL had been severely rationalised, and many businesses and other factories within its empire had either been closed or sold off. In 1988 the Longbridge plant, along with the rest of Austin Rover, was sold to British Aerospace, who renamed it as the Rover Group in 1989. In 1994 BMW bought Rover Group and the Longbridge plant. However, BMW shareholders prevailed and in 2000 Rover was sold to the Phoenix Consortium, who renamed it MG Rover Group.

At the time many financial commentators claimed that the plant was not modern enough and that the company would surely run out of money within a few years. In April 2005, this happened; the Phoenix Consortium put the MG Rover group into administration, leaving more than 6,000 workers without jobs. Another factor in MG Rover's meltdown was the fact that it had not launched an all-new model 1994. In contrast Rovers most important competitors had replaced virtually all of their model ranges since the late 1990s.

Your Pic

Nanjing and SAIC ownership as well as Longbridge Technology Park

The Chinese automobile company Nanjing acquired the remaining assets of MG Rover, including the lease to the Longbridge plant, three months after it went into receivership. In August 2008 MG TF production restarted, some three years after the collapse of MG Rover, using only part of the old Austin Works, Austin's original South Works. Additionally the service tunnel/bridge (pictured), used to carry vehicle bodysHELLS across the Bristol Road, was demolished on the night of 4 August 2006. Other parts of the huge MG Rover factories on the site were demolished during that night and later in 2006 and the land to be used for future redevelopment. At the moment much of the original site still lies unused awaiting development. Less than half of the original Longbridge site has been retained for carmaking. In another part a new Technology Park will be built up and established.

The current production facilities at Longbridge have the capacity for employing not more than approximately 1,000 workers. More than half the factory site has been sold off and cleared, and the land reclaimed to be put to use by businesses which will hopefully create up to 10,000 jobs in the next few years.