

SHADOW FACTORIES

SITUATION IN THE WEST MIDLANDS

Coventry was typical of many Midland Towns during world war two with much of its engineering industry switched to vital war work it is said that Coventry manufactured 25 percent of all British aircraft produced during the war.

Coventry was an industrial city of about 238,000 people which, like much of the industrial West Midlands, contained metal-working industries. In Coventry's case, these included cars, bicycles, aero plane engines and, since 1900, many munitions factories. In the words of the historian Frederick Taylor, "Coventry .. was therefore, in terms of what little law existed on the subject, a legitimate target for aerial bombing."

14 November 1940

The raid that began on the evening of 14 November 1940 was the most severe to hit Coventry during the war. It was carried out by 515 German bombers. The attack, code-named Operation Moonlight Sonata (Mondscheinsonate), was intended to destroy Coventry's factories and industrial infrastructure, although it was clear that damage to the rest of the city, including monuments and residential areas, would be considerable.

At around 8-00pm, Coventry Cathedral was set on fire for the first time, the volunteer fire-fighters managed to put out the first fire but other direct hits followed and soon new fires in the cathedral, accelerated by firestorm, were out of control.

In one night, more than 4,300 homes in Coventry were destroyed and around two-thirds of the city's buildings were damaged. Around one third of the city's factories were completely destroyed or severely damaged, another third were badly damaged, and the rest suffered slight damage. However the effects on war production were only temporary, as much essential war production had already been moved to "shadow factories" on the city outskirts.



AFTERMATH OF THE BLITZ IN COVENTRY

SHADOW FACTORIES IN OUR AREA

A shadow factory is a term given to dispersed manufacturing sites in times of war to reduce the risk of disruption due to enemy air raids and often with the dual purpose of increasing manufacturing capacity.

The shadow factory as the name implies is a replica of the original factory manufacturing the same products. Before World War II Britain had built many shadow factories.

Why was Earby Chosen for Rover's shadow factories?

Earby was certainly not out of reach of the German Luftwaffe, in fact it would have been on or very near the flight path for raids on Manchester or Liverpool. However in a rural location any large scale aerial attack would result in less collateral damage.

Many industrial premises were requisitioned for the war effort Earby had several mills and four were requisitioned. These were Spring Mill used as a tobacco warehouse, part of Victoria Mill was used to store shell cases and Grove Mill and Sough Bridge Mill were placed in the hands of the Rover Company.

The Mill at Carleton-in-Craven was also requisitioned as was Bankfield Mill in Barnoldswick and Bracewell Hall was used as the local head quarters.

Much of Rover's car manufacturing capacity was diverted to the essential aircraft production. Rover Company was awarded a contract to develop and manufacture Sir Frank Whittle's new jet engine design.

In 1941 Rover set up a new laboratory for Whittle's team along with a production line at their unused Barnoldswick but due to slow progress and in late 1942 Rover and Rolls Royce did an exchange deal. Rover decided to trade the jet factory at Barnoldswick for Rolls-Royce's tank engine factory in Nottingham.

At this stage production at Grove Mill at least was switched from making aircraft parts to manufacturing components for tank manufacture. In fact a tank was brought to Earby to show the employees the finished article local historian



THE RUINS OF COVENTRY CATHEDRAL AFTER THE BLITZ

A WORK FORCE ON THE MOVE

Relocating a factory also meant relocating the work force that would need housing. At the start of the war there was many empty houses in Earby and District as many textile workers had left the area in search of work elsewhere.

However with evacuees being brought in to the area from distant cities and the soldiers also being billeted here as well as transferred workers there was still going to be a shortage of accommodation.

The Solution

January 1941 – Register of available local accommodation to be drawn up.

March 1941 – Billeting Officer reported that it was proposed to billet 1500 transferred workers within the Earby District. Expected early May.

May 1941 – Meeting of council clerk and surveyor with representatives of the Rover Company and the Air Ministry.

The Air Ministry proposed to requisition land opposite the Punch Bowl Inn and at the top of Salterforth Lane for the purpose of erecting hutments to house employees from the Rover Company.

The council approved the temporary erection of the proposed hutments for the period of the emergency. The land to the north of Salterforth Lane belonged to Northolme Farm and the land to the south to Whitehouse Farm.

In the end only the Northolme estate was developed

Women workers were drafted in from all over the country to work at the shadow factories in Earby. A reception hostel was set up at 46 Colne Road to receive these mainly young women until they were found billets. Seven pairs of hutments on the Northolme Estate were eventually earmarked specifically to house groups of single women



GROVE MILL, EARBY



A Typical Scene in a War Time Factory

