

Leatherhead & District Local History Society

Potted Histories No 43

Goblin BVC Ermyn Way Leatherhead



At the east end of Leatherhead, bordering on Ashted once stood the factory of Goblin BVC, makers of vacuum cleaners, washing machines and clocks employing 1000 workers. The founder, Hubert Cecil Booth was the inventor of the first vacuum cleaner. In 1904, he produced the world's first portable vacuum cleaner which only needed two operators, one to pump the bellows and the other to operate the cleaning tool. In 1921, his company produced the first electric upright bag model and a few years later, the cylindrical model, the whole range coming under the trade name of 'Goblin'. In 1938 Goblin BVC moved to a complex in Ermyn Way and during the Second World War made munitions which included mine-sinkers, shell fuses and camouflage netting.

Post-war, Hoover became a major competitor and so dominated the market that vacuum cleaning became known as 'hoovering'. Nevertheless, Goblin had diversified and itself contributed to the generic vocabulary with Goblin 'Teasmade'. H.C. Booth died in 1955 and in spite of expanding in 1959 to manufacture miniature electric motors (some used in Concorde); Goblin slowly had to run down its organisation. It finally closed in 1984 and the valuable site on which it stood was eventually taken over by Esso.

A display of Goblin products can be seen in the Leatherhead Museum.

Goff Powell - with acknowledgement to Edwina Vardey - History of Leatherhead - A Town at the Crossroads - L&DLHS 1988

For a more comprehensive history on Goblin BVC, I suggest you read Peter Tarplee's Past Industries of Ashted, Leatherhead & Bookham, available from The Museum, Barton's Bookshop Leatherhead and Bumbles Ashted.

For information regarding Membership, Lectures and Museum opening hours

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