

A WWII SHADOW FACTORY.

Roy Gault

I guess '*from Dearborn to Dagenham, via Manchester*' would accurately describe our journey with this piece ...

On 1st October 1908, the '*Ford Motor Co*' in Dearborn (Detroit) introduced the now iconic *Model 'T'* (aka 'Tin Lizzie') which, as we all know, came only in black. It was an instant success.

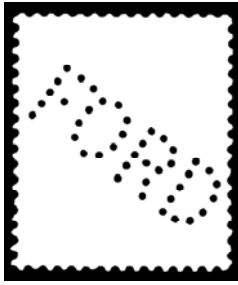


However, from the UK's perspective, it began a little earlier, in 1904, with the importation of two Ford Model A's by the '*The Central Motor Car Co*', London. Later, in 1907, a young man called Percival Perry formed a partnership called '*Perry, Thornton & Schreiber Ltd*', which absorbed 'The Central Motor Car Co' and began importing and selling Ford Model N's, the precursor to the Model 'T'.

A further development came in 1909 when the '*Ford Motor Co (England) Ltd*' was established as a semi-autonomous branch of Henry Ford's automotive empire, under the chairmanship of (Sir) Percival Perry (1878-1956). At first, the company sold *imported* Model 'T' automobiles while an assembly plant was being set up in an old tramcar and carriage works at Trafford Park, Manchester. Opening on **23rd October 1911**, the factory employed 60 workers to assemble Model T's from parts shipped in from the United States.

Luckily for us, the new company used a full-name "**FORD**" Perfin, from as early as 2nd November 1913 to as late as 13th March 1923.

1912-1923



F3100.01



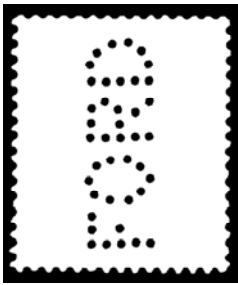
?? 18/13



28 SP/21

By the early 1920's, it was clear that the Trafford Park works was reaching its limits, and in 1924 a new site suitable for a much larger plant was acquired at Dagenham. Around that time a 2nd full-name "FORD" Perfin replaced the earlier diagonal type. The cancel on the 2d stamp below is TRAFFORD PARK/MANCHESTER, 24 MY/24.

1923-1931



F3100.02



?? SP/30



3 FE/26



24 MY/24

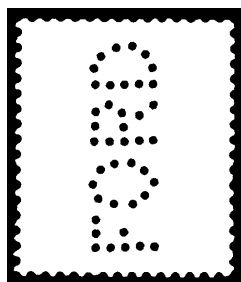


Production continued at Trafford Park, with the Model 'A' replacing the Model 'T' in 1927, until the Dagenham plant became operational in 1931. The final car rolled off the production line at Trafford Park in **October 1931**. The Trafford Park plant was closed, with many of the workforce taking up the offer of work and a move to Dagenham.

For those of you who have copies of the GB Perfins Catalogue will see, the Perfin record for “**FORD**” (F3100.02) has a distinct 10 year ‘gap’, say **1931-1941**, between the KGV Typographs and later stamps.

I(RC) 2d, 3d I(BC) ½d-3d, 6d, 9d, 1/- L ½d, 2½d
followed by a gap of at least 10 years, **1931-1941**,
then comes **R 2½d, 3d S 1d U(TC) 1½d**

1941-1954



F3100.02

The latest known actual date is September 1930, which ties in well with the closure of Trafford Park in October 1931, but how can we account for the KGVI light & changed colour issues, and the Elizabethan stamp? The answer, in part, is a **WWII Shadow Factory!**

In 1936, under the shadow factory plan, the British government appointed Sir Herbert Austin (1866-1941), of ‘Austin Motor Co’ fame, to head a new team within the Air Ministry, to assess and invest in expanding the British aircraft industry in preparation for any future war requirements. Austin was briefed to build **nine new factories**, and expand/develop **existing facilities** at all the car manufacturing plants in Britain, to enable them to switch quickly to aircraft production, should the need arise as war clouds were looming.

From a historical perspective, Hitler’s armies had marched into the Rhineland in 1936, taking it back from Allied control. In 1938, Germany merged with Austria (where Adolf Hitler was born), in what was known as ‘Anschluss’ (i.e. political union). Also in 1938, as part of the ‘Munich Agreement’, a significant part of Czechoslovakia known as the Sudetenland, which was mainly populated by ethnic Germans, was ceded to Germany. Indeed, our own Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, was party to the agreement. However, it was his policy of appeasement that bought us precious time.

As detailed earlier, Ford had a redundant assembly plant in Trafford Park, Manchester, which had been moth-balled since 1931, so it's not surprising that Ford welcomed the chance to participate in the 'shadow factory' scheme. Redeveloped by Ford from 1938, the Trafford Park site was designed as two separate facilities to minimise the impact of bomb damage on production. It was agreed that the factory would build Rolls-Royce Merlin engines, and the government duly funded the construction of a new shadow factory on Barton Dock Road, Trafford Park, especially designed for the purpose. Ford also re-drew the blueprints for the Merlin engine, making it more suitable for mass production, and by May 1941, the factory was ready.

Note: The Merlin engine powered the Vickers-Supermarine Spitfire, Hawker Hurricane, and De Havilland Mosquito fighters, as well as the Avro Lancaster and Avro Manchester bombers, and a whole host of others including the American P-51 Mustang!

The final total of Merlin engines emerging from the *Ford Motor Co Ltd (Aero Engines)*'s Trafford Park complex between June 1941 and March 1946 was 30,428. More than 17,000 people were employed at the factory, of which 7,000 were women.



11th March 1941 - Old Trafford football stadium, home of Manchester United, was hit by a bomb intended for the Trafford Park industrial complex. Seating was destroyed and the main roof collapsed. The stadium was not rebuilt until after the war, reopening in 1949.

Interesting though this might be, we have *no dates* for the "FORD" die after 1930, and the known issue 'R' stamps (KGVII light colours) could so easily have been used *after* the termination of the Merlin engine production contract in 1946. Whoever used these stamps, and the two issues that followed (shown on the previous page), remains a mystery. I've scoured the Internet and newspapers to see what branch of the 'Ford Motor Co' was still in business there, but without success.

It's over to you to see if anyone, perhaps with local knowledge, can answer the question - 'Who used the "FORD" Perfin 1946-1954, and where, as no dated examples or postmarks have ever been reported?