

Woods of Colchester

The first part of this document shows photographs that were discovered in a discarded filing cabinet. Sid and Shirley Wright took them under their wing and shared them with us all.

Additional ones, from other contributors, have also been added.

The last part shows photographs that have been acquired over the years. In 2002 and other years, Mr Joe Mattack had organised reunions at Stanway Rovers Club. Jess Jephcott, an ex Woods apprentice, attended, with his father, Jeph, and took a series of photographs.



A sales team picture. 1. Jim Wild, 2. Mike Johnson, 3 Tony Potter, 5, Fred Roscoe, 6 Keith Simpson, 7 David Andrews, 8 John Harrison?, 9 Alan Butcher, 10 John Cave, 12 Harry Urquhart, 13 David Kettle, 14 Richard Staines, 15 John Purcell, 16 Colin Humphries, 17 Keith Hammond, 18 Alf Wakeling, 19 Danny Bell.

Although Alan Butcher gives us - Left to right, Jim Wild, Paul Riley, John Cave, David Kettle, Richard Staines, Fred Roscoe, Dan Bell, Keith Hammond, Colin Humphries.

Many people in Colchester and beyond used to work for a company called Woods of Colchester Ltd based at Braiswick in Colchester. This page is aimed at collecting memories of times working at the company, before it was sold off and flattened and the site covered with housing.

A little history of Woods of Colchester.

1909 Maurice Woods forms a company in Colchester producing single phase motors to suit the various different voltages in use.

The Woods family comprised Thomas Woods who was born in 1830 in Middlesex, later to become a provision merchant living at Gresham House, 3 Balham Park Road, London. He and his wife Jane produced at least six children, one of whom was Maurice Walter Woods, born in 1866. The 1871 census shows the family living only two households away from Sir William Fothergill-Cooke (1806 – 1879), famous for his partnership with Charles Wheatstone and their work on, amongst other things, electrical telegraphy. It seems quite likely that young Maurice developed his interest in electrical equipment by association with his neighbour.

Perhaps a fatherly interest by Sir Charles in a young, eager to learn, young man, living nearby. We know that Maurice had opened a factory in Colchester by 1909, the 1911 census telling us that he was an employer and an 'Electrical Engineer (manufacturer of electric driven ventilating fans and electric motors)'. He and his wife Edith Augusta produced five children, one of whom was Maurice Geoffrey Woods, born in 1902.

1937: By this time Maurice's son Geoffrey has taken charge of Woods (1935), which now employs about 100 people. Being ambitious, the company is soon employing 360 people. A picture in our collection shows the new factory that was built at Braiswick, whilst the Denmark Street works were kept on until the 1970s.

1945: GEC invests sufficient capital to gain controlling interest in Woods.

1964: GEC plc takes complete control of Woods by buying-out the rest of the Woods family.

1986: The American Fan Company is purchased by GEC and joins the Woods 'family'.

1998: Name Change - From July 1998 Woods of Colchester is now known as Woods Air Movement Limited.

2000: Marconi announces the sale of Woods Air Movement to Global Air Movement Holdings Limited SARL (Lux), a company formed by Compass Capital Partners.

2002: Flakt Woods becomes the new name for the company.

2006: The whole company moves to premises at Colchester Business Park. Braiswick is decommissioned, asset stripped and the land sold off for housing.



David Priest kneeling dark suit, Digger Kettle two to his left. Some names mentioned on the Old Farts page. Tony Timmins in the centre. Percy Grimsby, Henry Jones, Maurice York, Ruth Fookes, Digger Kettle.





Is that John Purcell far right? Brian Cranfield is second from right.



David Priest unveils the George Cuthew centre.



David Priest.



Sales team. Peter McCarthy, Adrian Hill, Rolf Beggerow, late 1970s.



1953-4





A 40th Anniversary Party.







G Allen in the foundry in 1948, with ladle, second bay from top.



G Allen as a foreman, chats to students.



A new building going up. September 1937.



Fans Great and Small

The outbreak of war found Woods of Colchester Ltd. newly installed in their very modern and in some respects unconventional factory at Braiswick. In 1938 the Company had been asked to send one of its engineers to Woolwich. Mr. Geoffrey Woods, the chairman and managing director, and one of the engineers were there shown a "mock-up" in wood of the turret of what was to be the infantry tank Mark II, the forerunner of the Matilda tank. As a result of this visit the firm was entrusted with the entire supply of fans for these turrets, running into tens of thousands, until the autumn of 1944, by which time the demand was beyond the capacity of the firm. Also before the outbreak of war the first of 5,000 motors for control of Bofors guns were in hand.

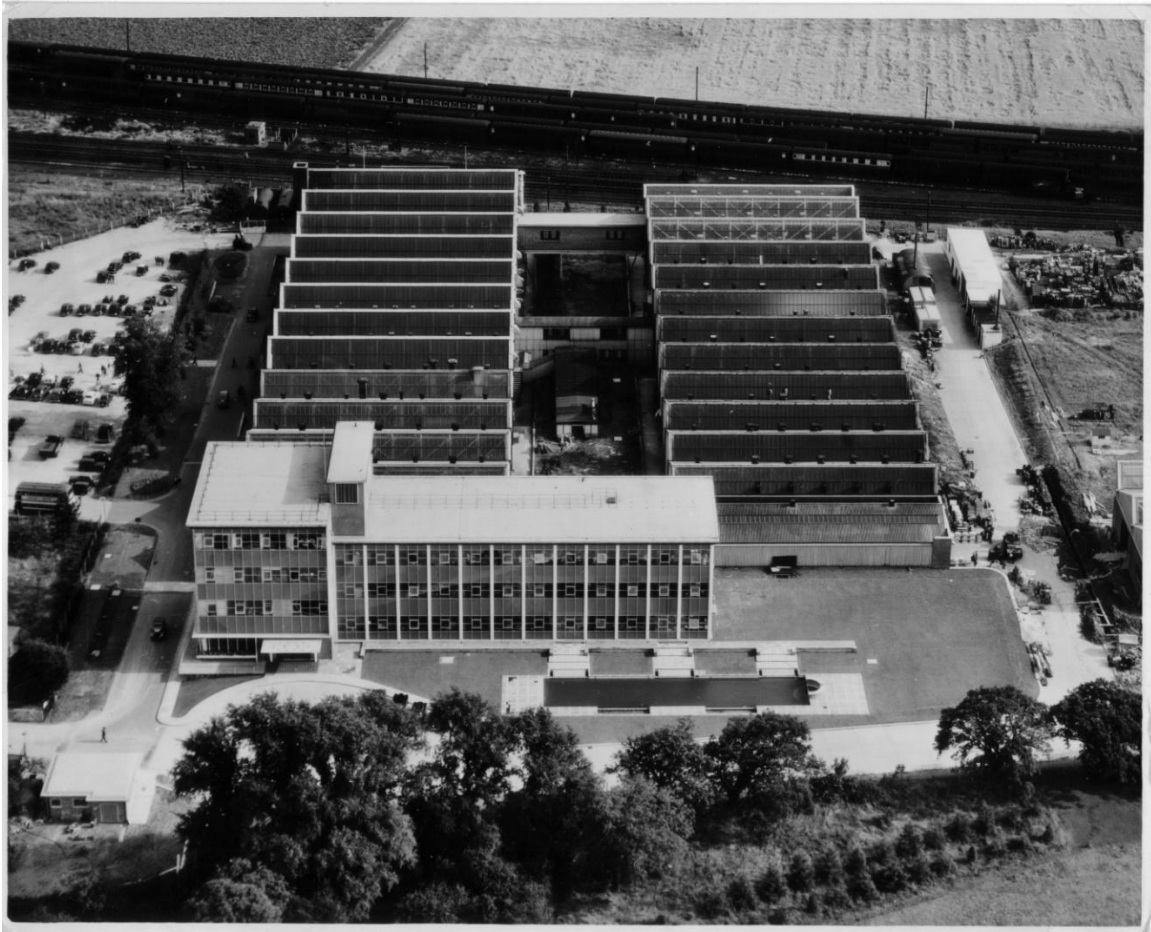
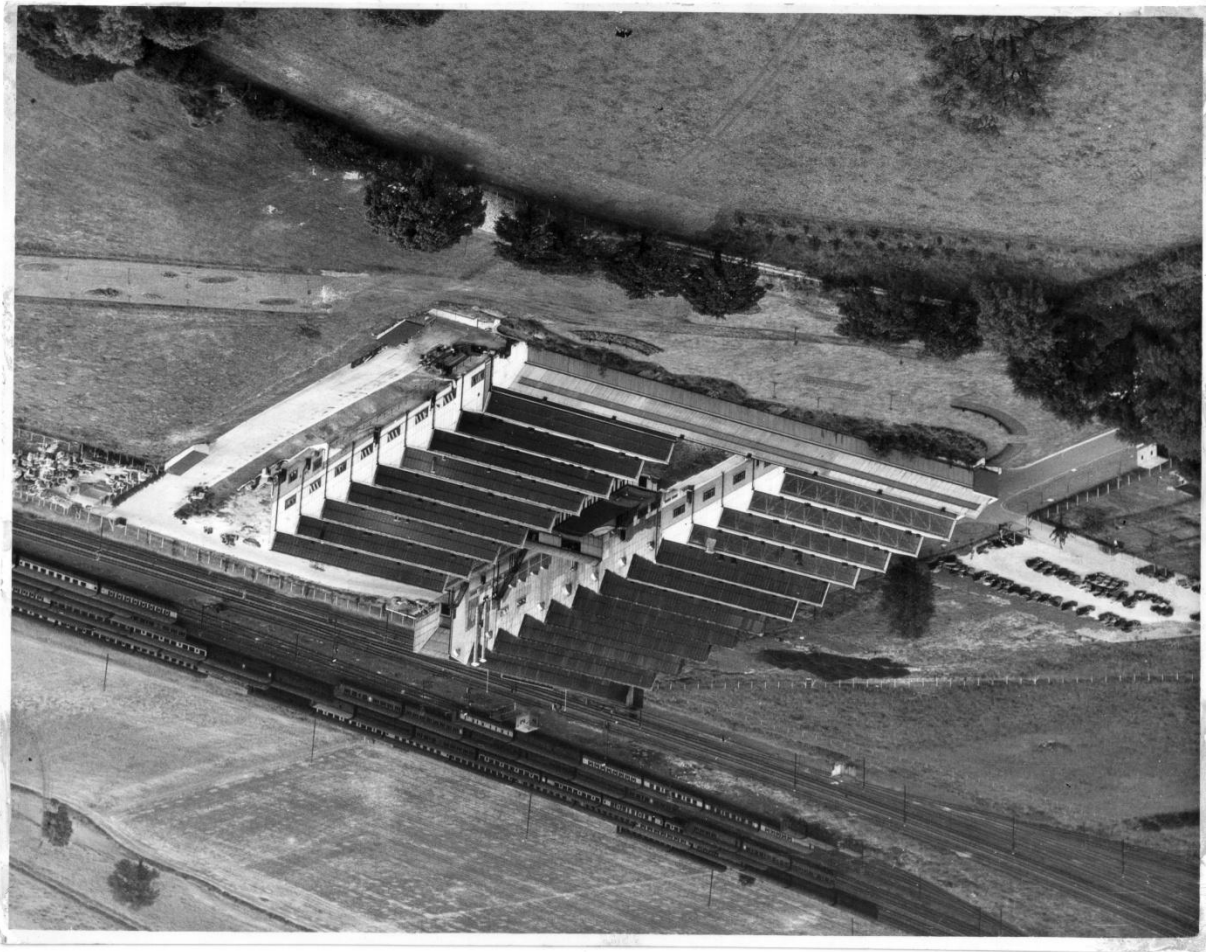
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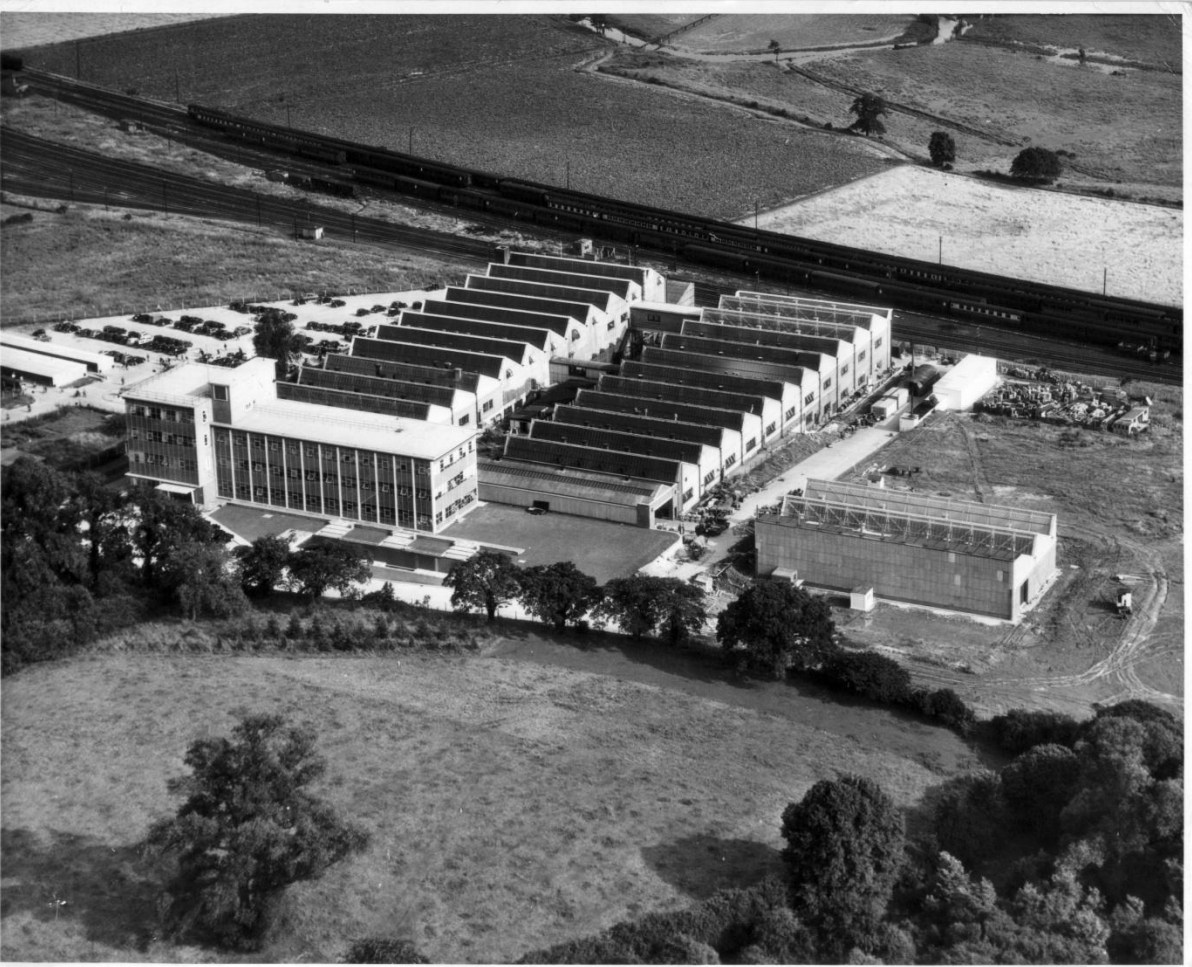
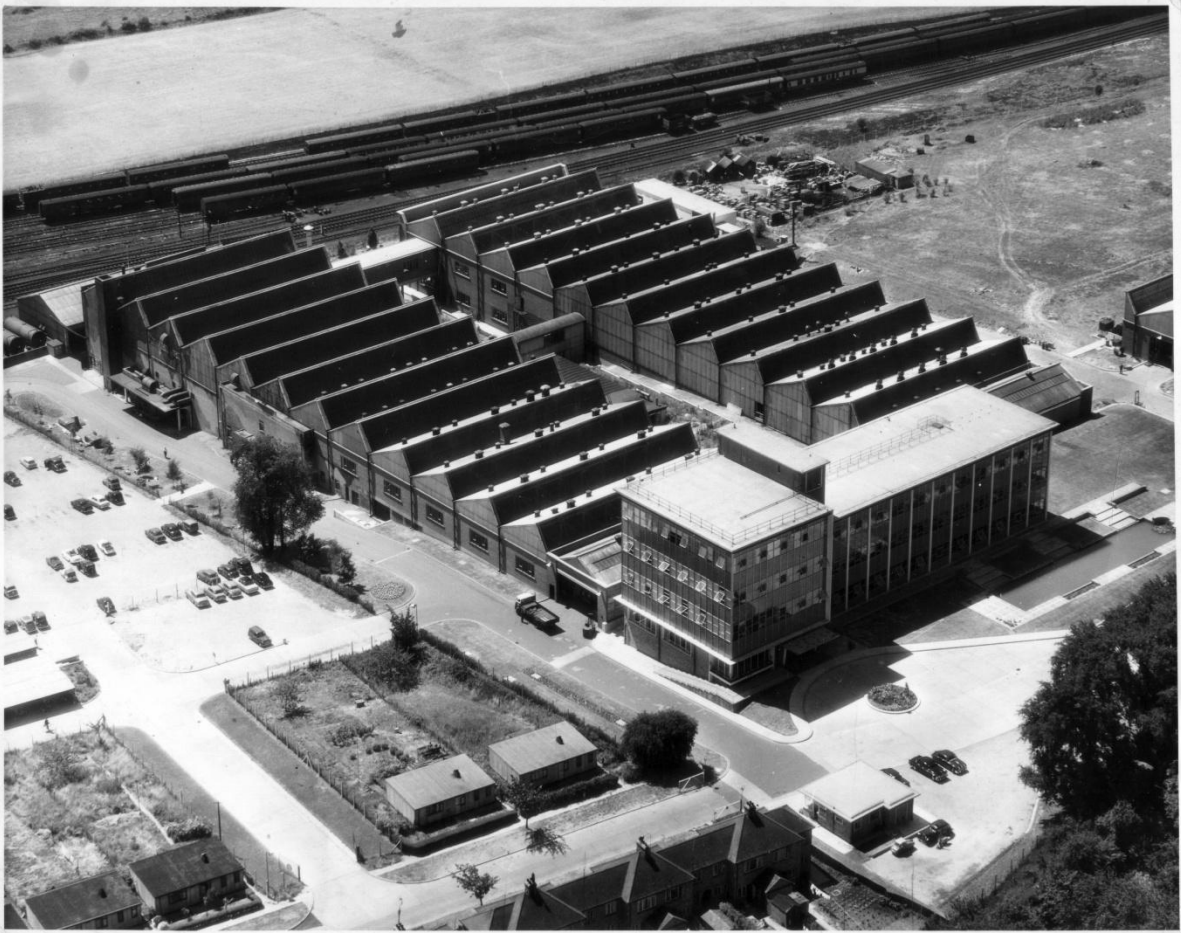
The black-out created an unprecedented demand for fans of all sizes, and scores of thousands of these were manufactured. During the war the Company again took up the manufacture of rotating electrical machinery, among which were the alternators for the Bofors guns. Special fans were produced for the 90 Cm. and 150 Cm. searchlights, together with a small centrifugal fan with a very wide application to high-speed ships, such as air speed rescue launches. Another interesting product was the 333.3 cycle three-phase alternator for use with the gyroscopic stabilising apparatus employed for gun control in naval craft.

An outstanding achievement was the supply of small motor generator sets for bombers, of which no less than 45,000 were made in five large factories. Similar machines were made for the radio equipment of the tanks. Miniature high-speed fans were supplied for radio location, cabin type fans for use in corvettes, and 56in. ceiling fans (on a scale probably without equal in any other part of the world) for use in India and Burma.

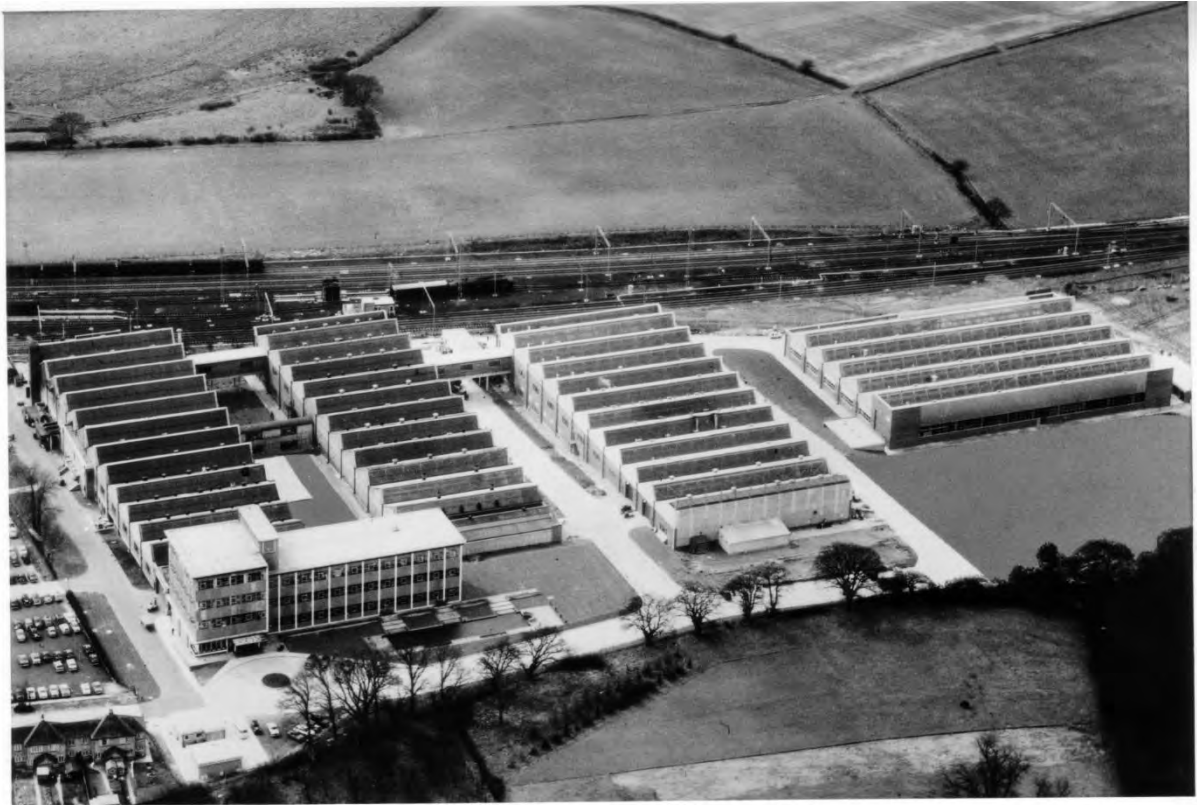
To give some idea of the magnitude of the firm's production, over 60,000ft. run of timber was used per month for packing alone, and in the five and a half years nearly 360,000 machines were produced. At the end of 1944 the Company employed 680 people, one half being women, and operated five factories in Colchester and one in Cambridge. Pre-war output had been increased five to six times. Stampings used in war-time output exceeded 87,000,000, wire for electrical winding 120,000 miles, and screws employed over 13,600,000.



Office block, A and B block, Tufnell Way.



The development laboratory added in C block 1958.



C and D block added c1972.



Gate Lodge. Alf Boggis.



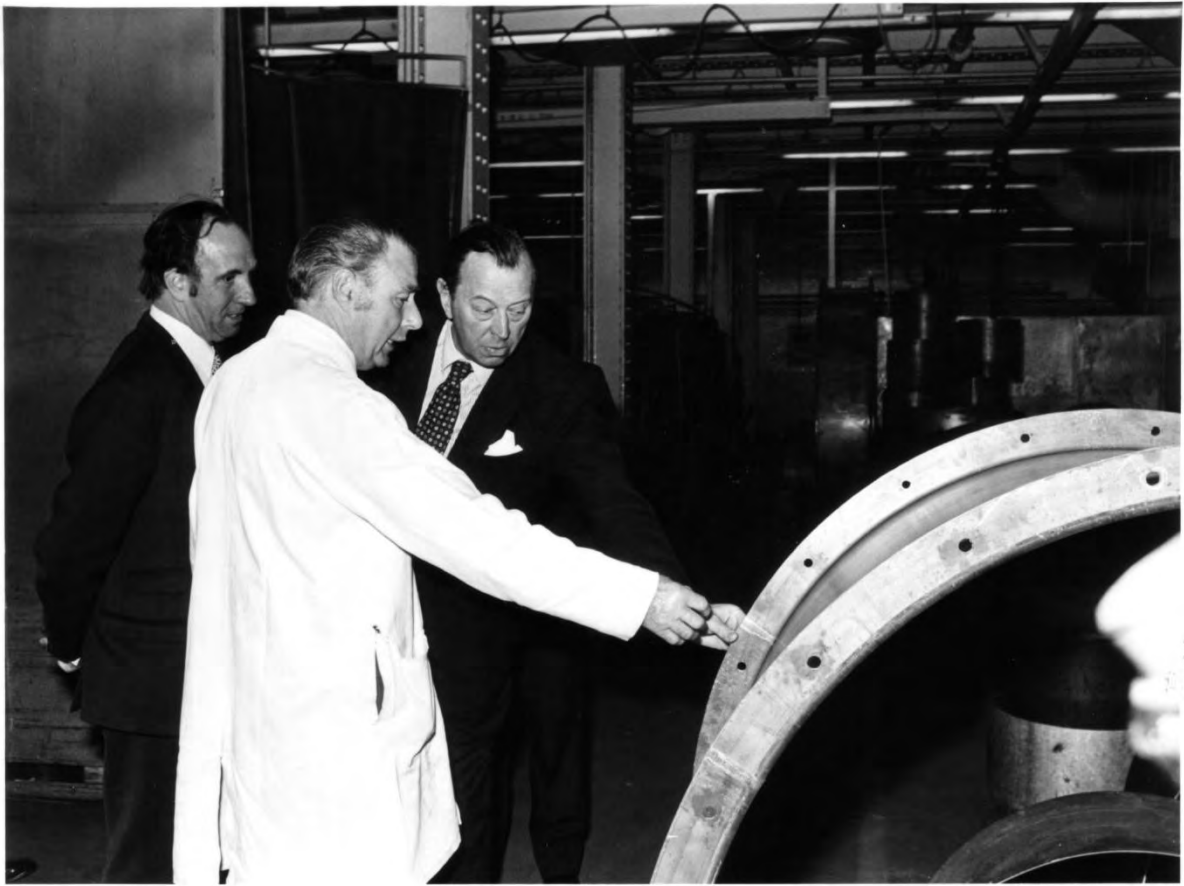
MD far right, Andrew Martin. Frank Coles. Kit Bush with moustache.



X Ray. Peter Hillier, Kit Bush.



Kit Bush, Sydney Burrells.



Duct Shop. Frank Coles.



A Varofoil hub under scrutiny c1975.



Joe Cairncross.



Dennis King 4th from left, Andrew Martin far right.



Duct Shop. Jim Rochester.



Philip Alston in the Dev Lab during an open day with an 800mm Varofoil being demonstrated. Also Paul Dines holding a piece of paper and then Graham Baldwin far right.



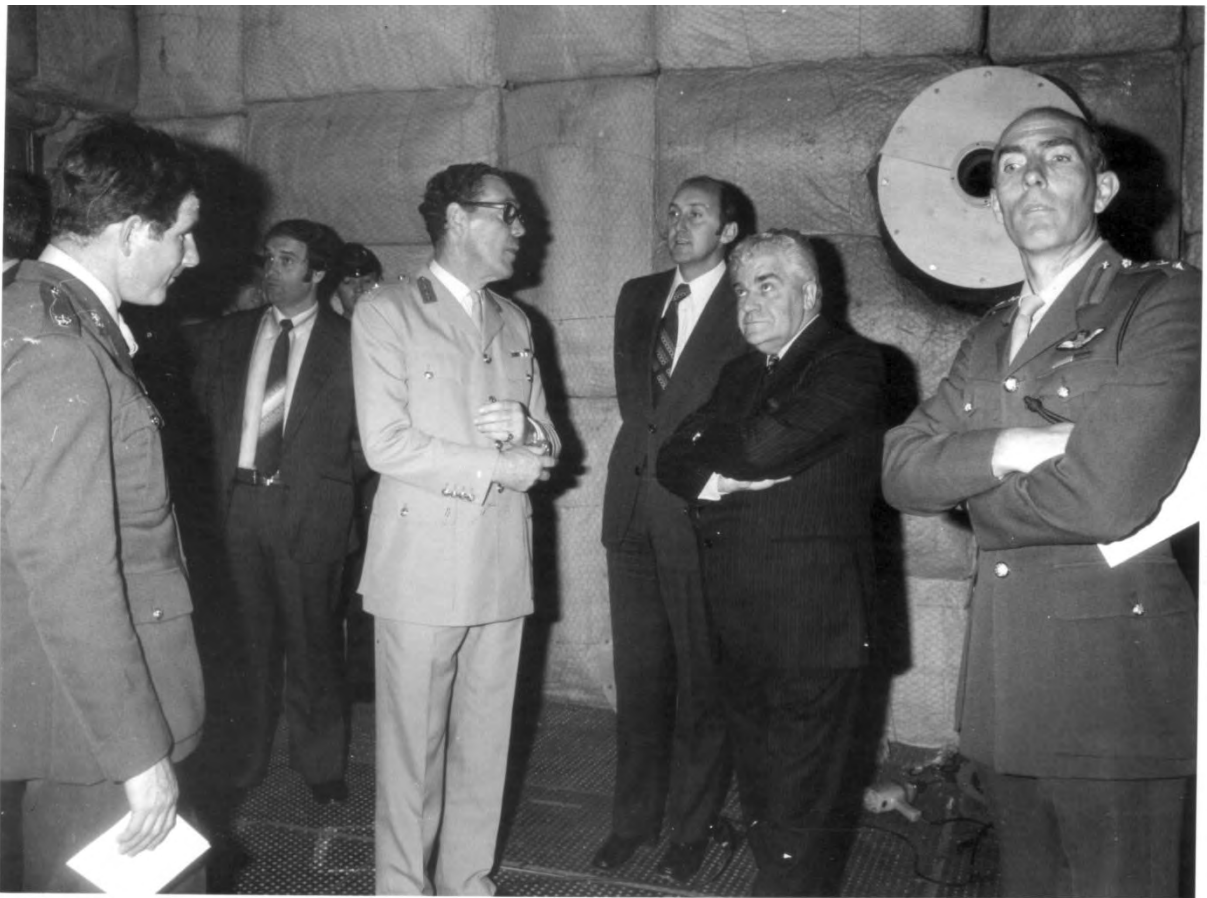
Interior of mobile exhibition bus. October 1958. K Finch facing us.



Scott Comiskey in the middle of the group. Mick Norrington to the right.



Ken Rycraft in white coat.



Anechoic chamber in the Dev Lab.



Bill Woods-Ballard centre, Bill Deeprise, Andrew Martin.



WTEC Course IV Buffet Supper 1st May 1962.





Varofoil assembly shop.





WTEC. Third-course students talk to Mr G Woods. See Fanfare 1962. Is that Bill Donnison far left?



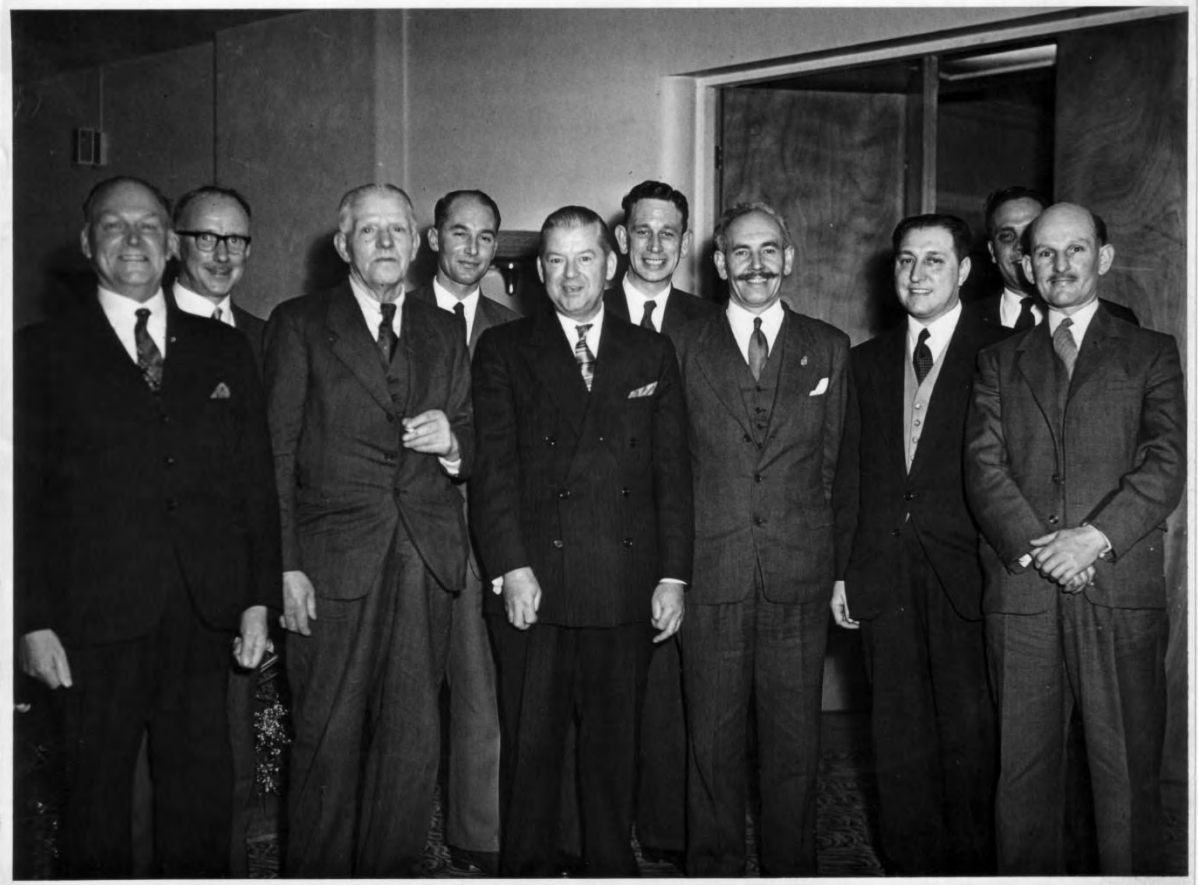
Miss E Stringer, housekeeper at Lexden Rise with Mr Geoffrey Woods, Director and Chairman of Woods of Colchester Ltd.



Mr M P O'Leary of Leeds Branch being presented with his diploma at WTEC 10th April 1963.



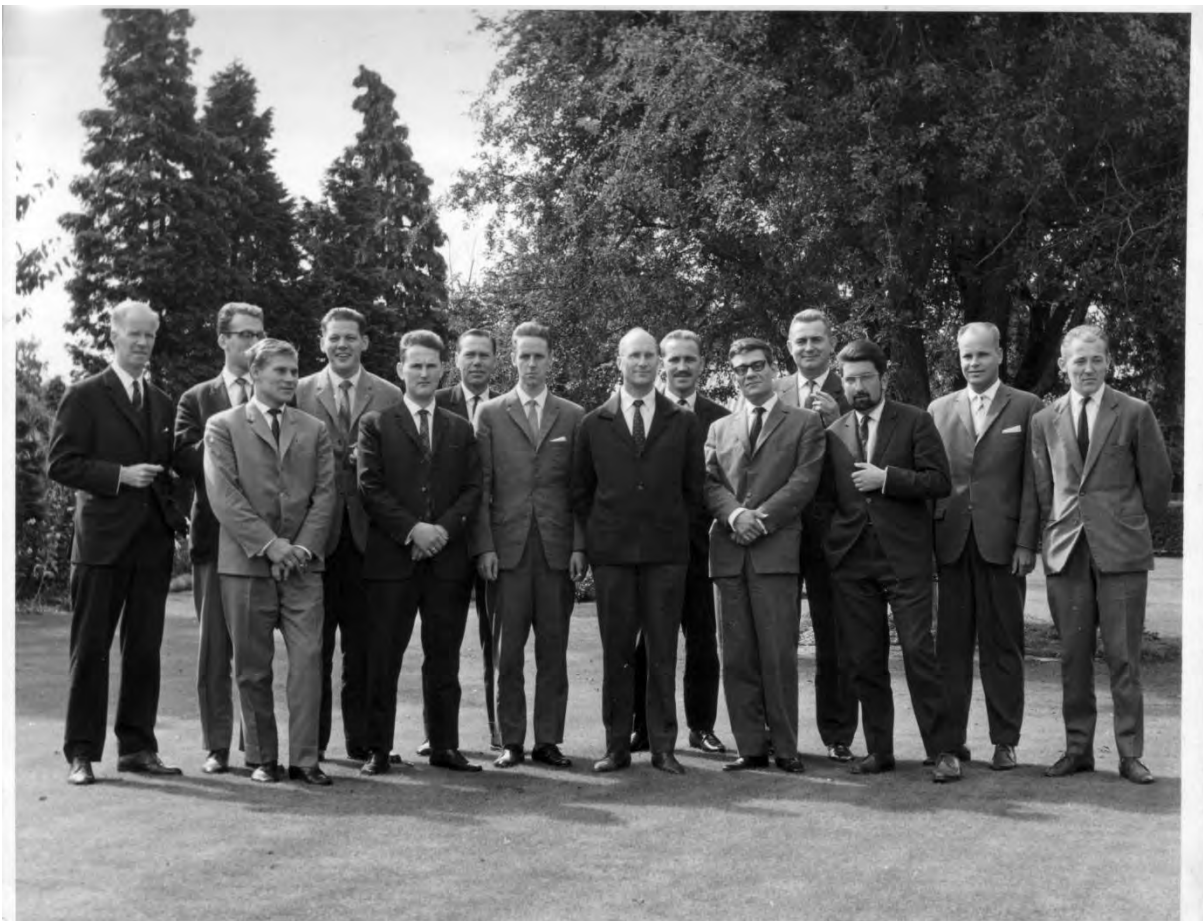
Geoffrey Woods addresses students Feb 1962.



Gold Watch Presentation Dinner 22nd March 1957. A R (Reg) Smith, W H (Bill) Wayne, A Joy, J Hipplesley, Mr Geoffrey Woods, Bill Sutton, A C (Albert) Pallant, F Manning, H V (Vic) Cole, W F Clark.



Presentation Night for Course VII at WTEC, 26th October 1963. Front Row – E A Cousins, Geoffrey Woods, R Stuart, A Rawlings, A C Smith, Roland Smith.





Refresher course at WTEC. J C Llewellyn, Ray C Dick, G S Wright, H Clark, F A Stokes, F A Faulkner, G Vaughan, J P Bell, Henry C Nicoll, P Bisson, K Finch, L Moran. November 1962.



Refresher course 3, November 1962 with P A Hirst, B L Hoyes, D I Masterman, Lance M Conabeare, B R Newby, H E Clarke, T Lindsey, A R Sales, D B Brinkley, T E Michell, S Murrey, D H Charles.



Denmark Street. A presentation ceremony of a clock and a teapot, to workers at Woods of Colchester, Denmark Street, Colchester. Note the gentleman in 'plus fours' who was Geoffrey Woods' brother Cyril Handscomb Woods and who was financial director until the war and was ordained into the church of England. Maurice Walter Woods (Maurice Geoffrey Woods, later known simply as Geoffrey Woods, is NOT in the picture) is standing to the right of the chap holding the teapot. In April 2012, we heard from Annette Lewis, who has lived in the USA since 1973. She told us that,

'My grandfather, Frank Overton Parker, is the man on the left of the grandmother clock. The clock was presented to him as a retirement gift. I do not know the year but my grandfather was 48 years old. He had been manager of Woods for some years. The two Woods sons came into the business at that point and they did not see things as my grandfather did, so he was persuaded to retire. I do not know what pension he was given but he never did work again. I have a copy of this photograph. I do not recognize the teapot so perhaps that was given to someone else. The clock stood in the hall of my grandparents' house for as long as they lived. I do not know the date of his death but believe it was in the 1950's. My mother was Frank's middle daughter and she died just short of age 101 this February.'

Frank Overton Parker was born in 1881, so if this picture was taken when he was 48, it is therefore dated 1929.







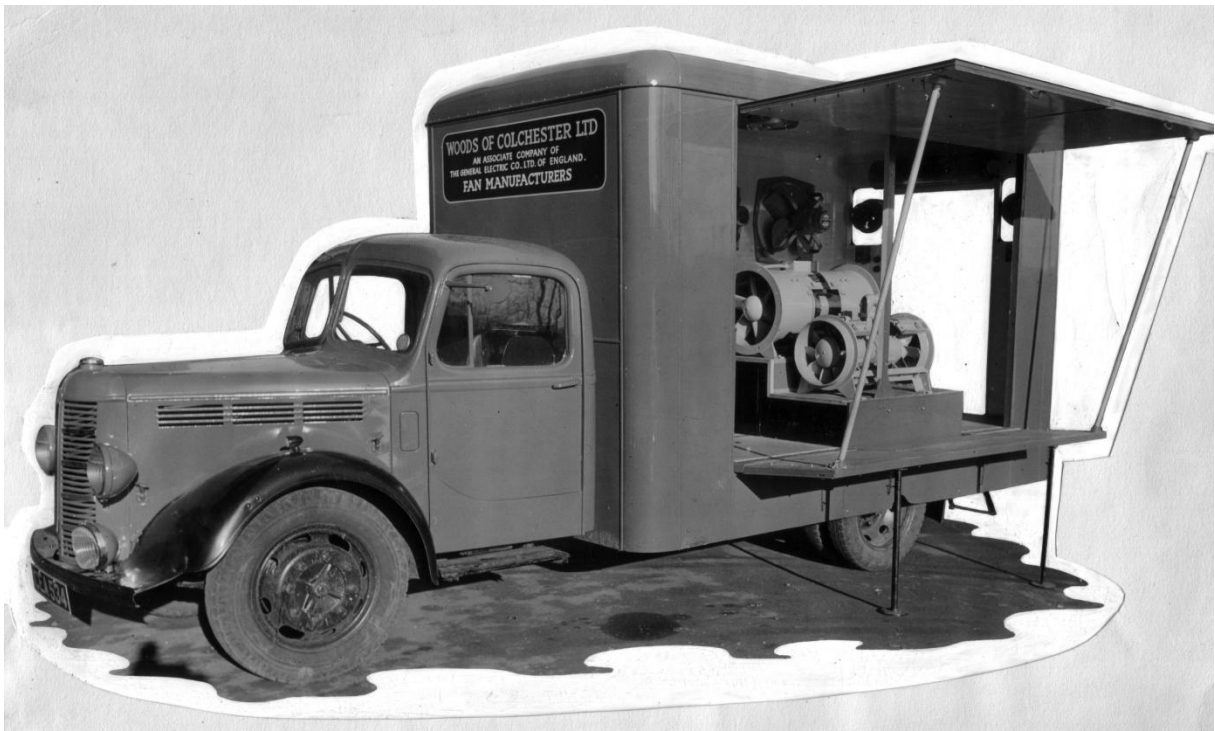


The above picture is believed to be that of the workforce of M Woods Electrical Engineers of Denmark Street, Colchester, the company that went on to become Woods of Colchester. The date would be around 1915.











Roy Stebbing – Fettling.

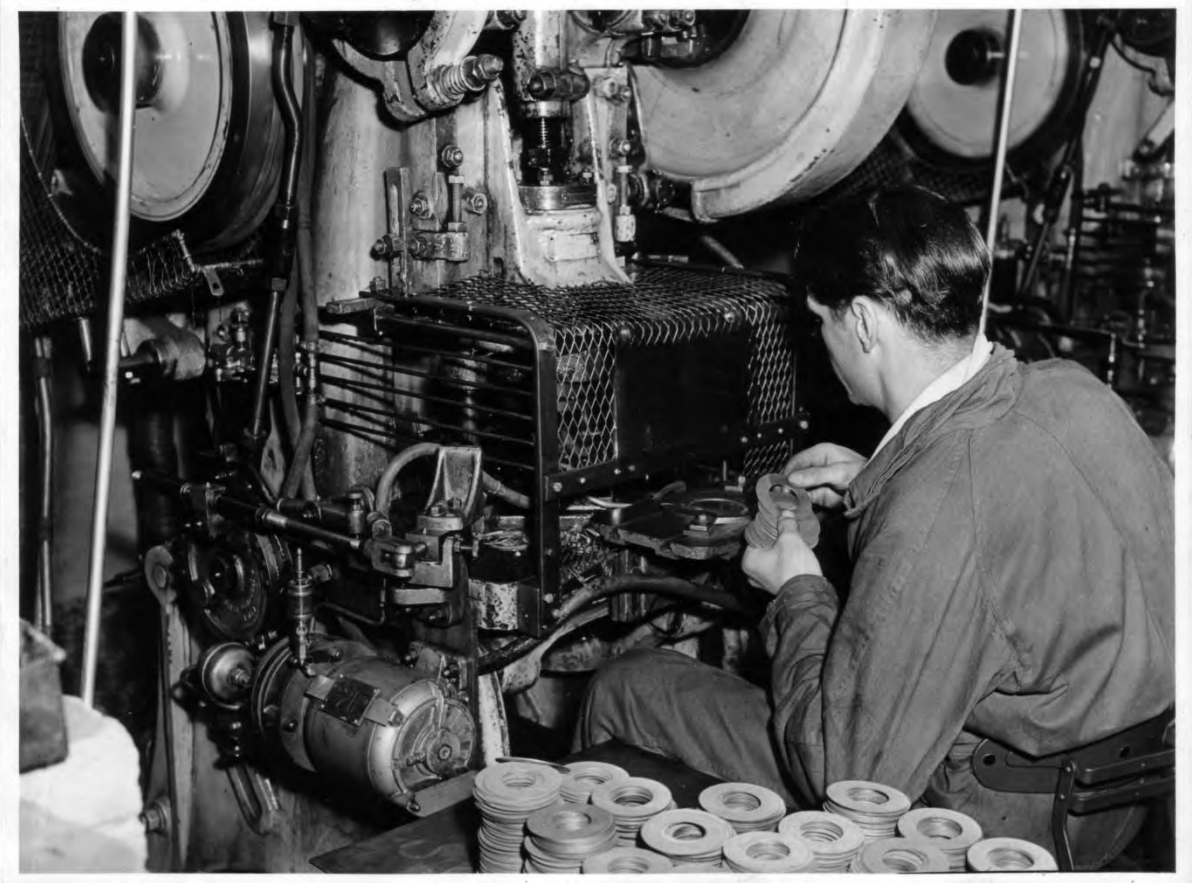




Assembly Shop. Ken Bloomfield (a goalie).



Press Shop. August 1956.



Press Shop. August 1956.





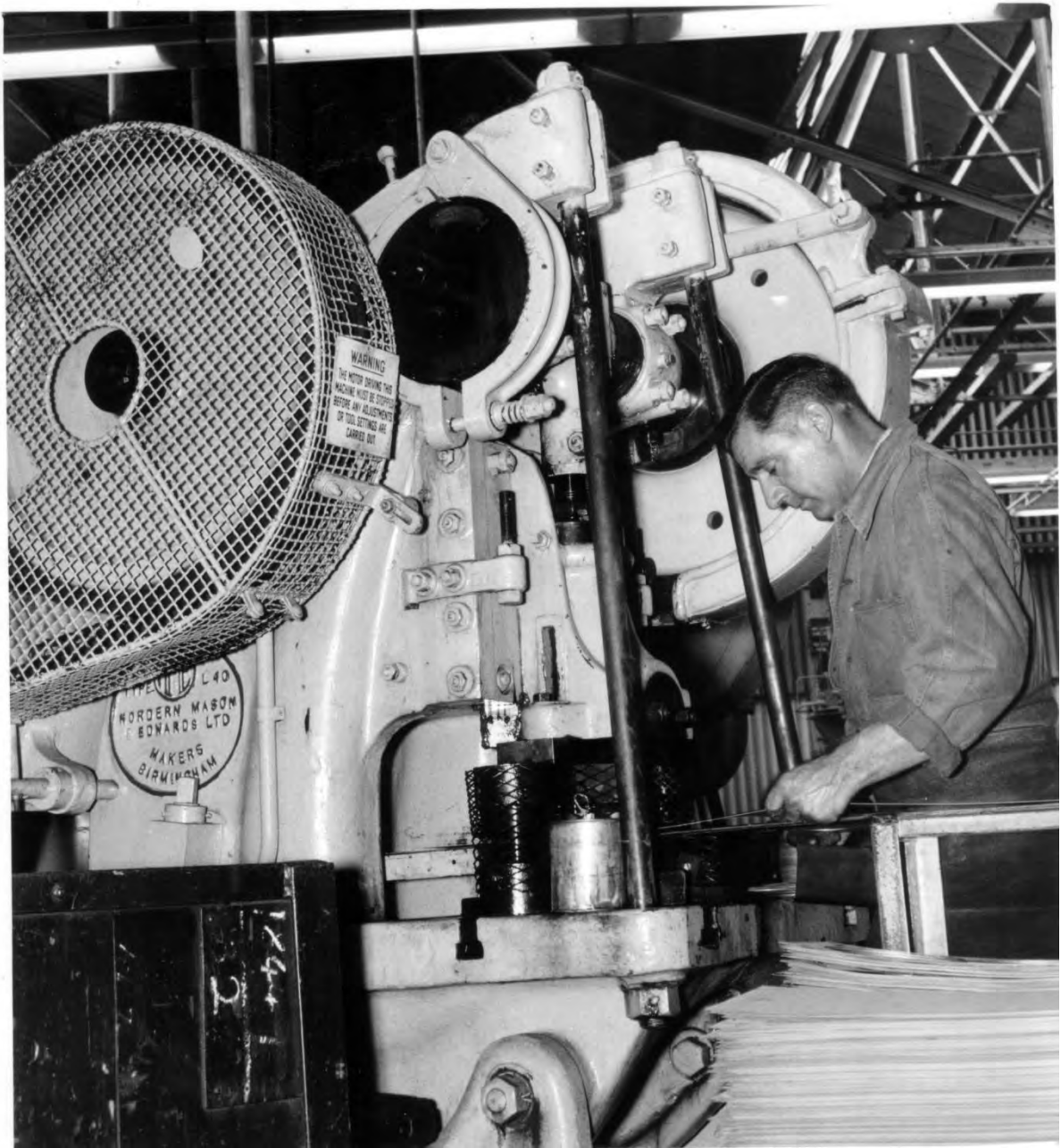
Roy Mann, Press Shop, 31st August 1959.















Spinning. August 1956.



New D Block for quantity production of the 6 inch Xpelair. Presses.

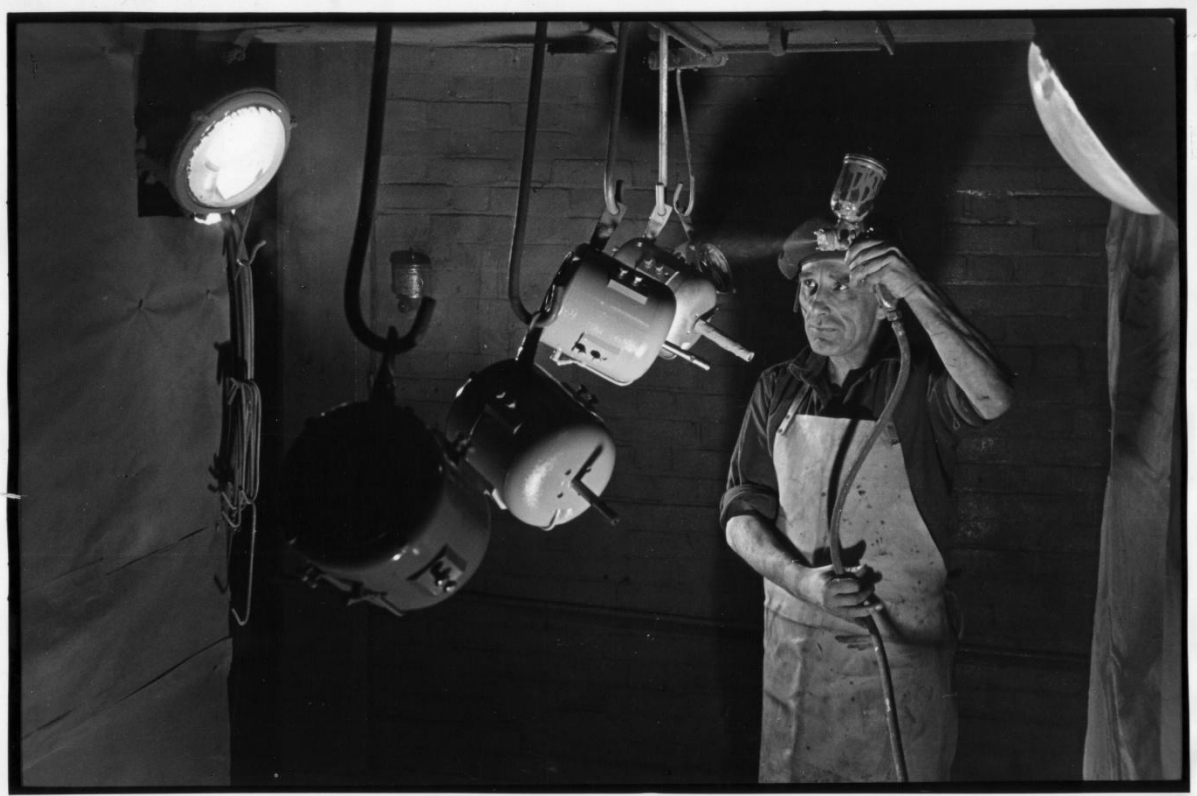




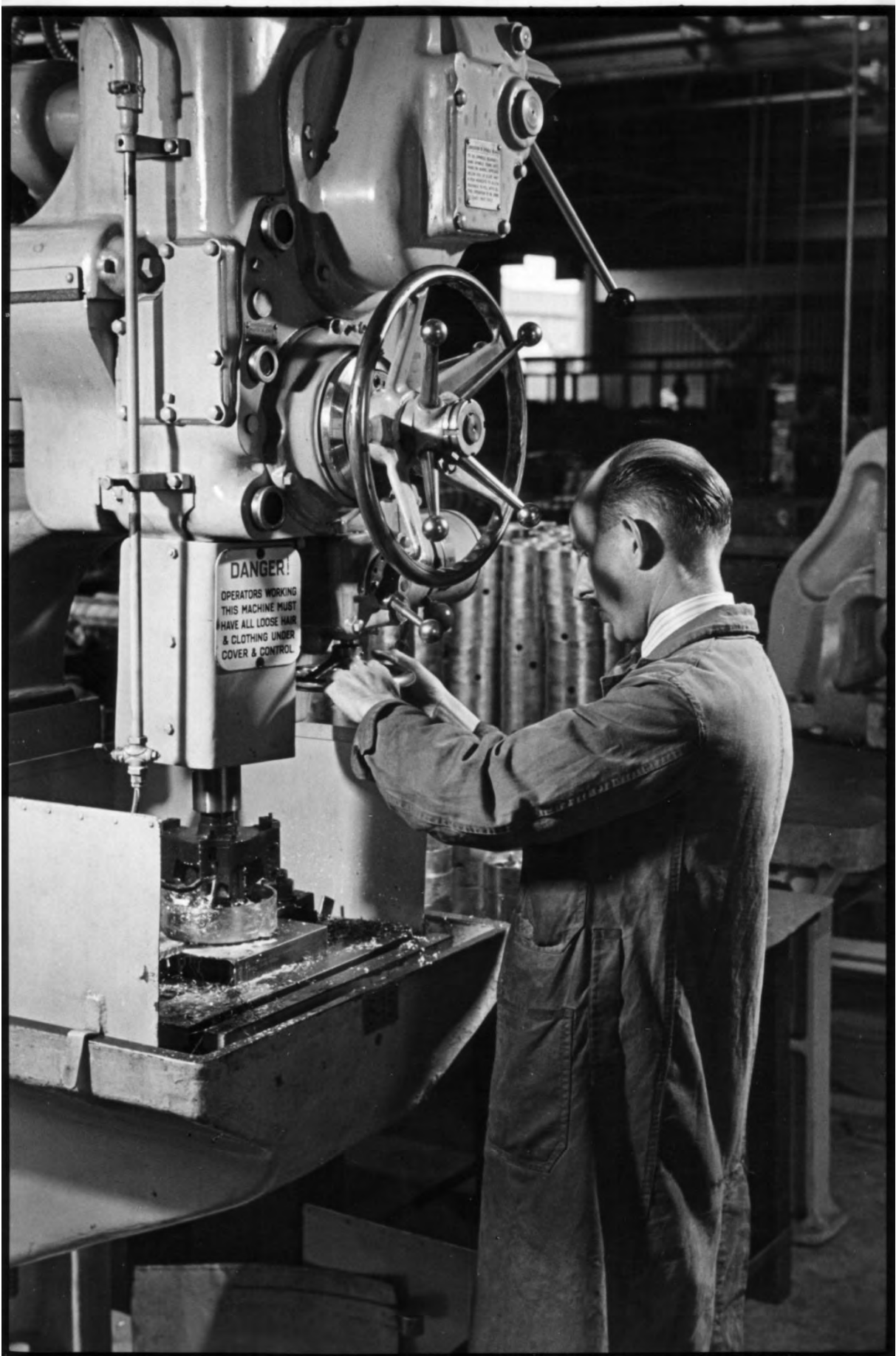














David Osborne.

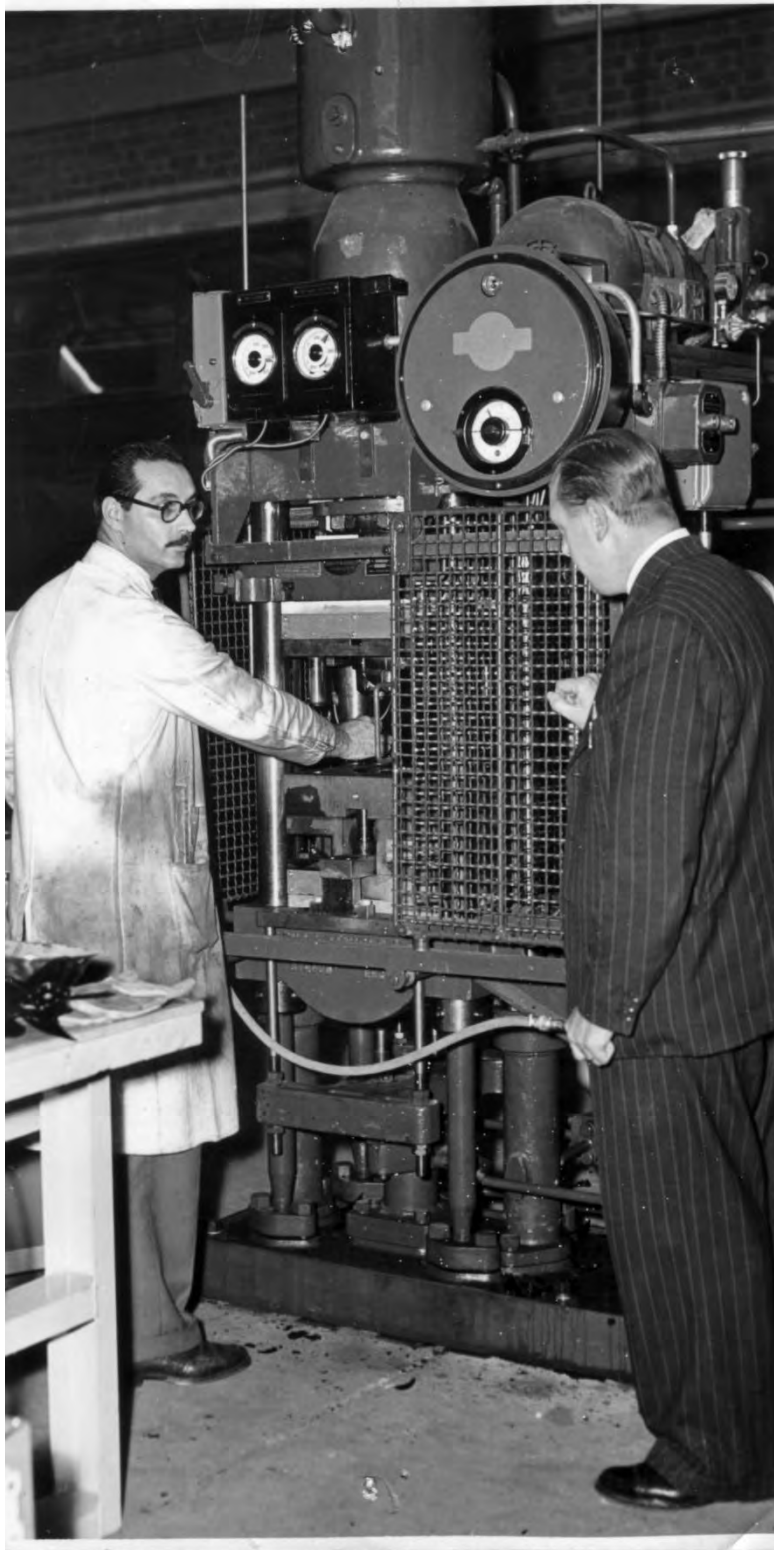




Dave Buller.



Reg Gainsford, later a supervisor.

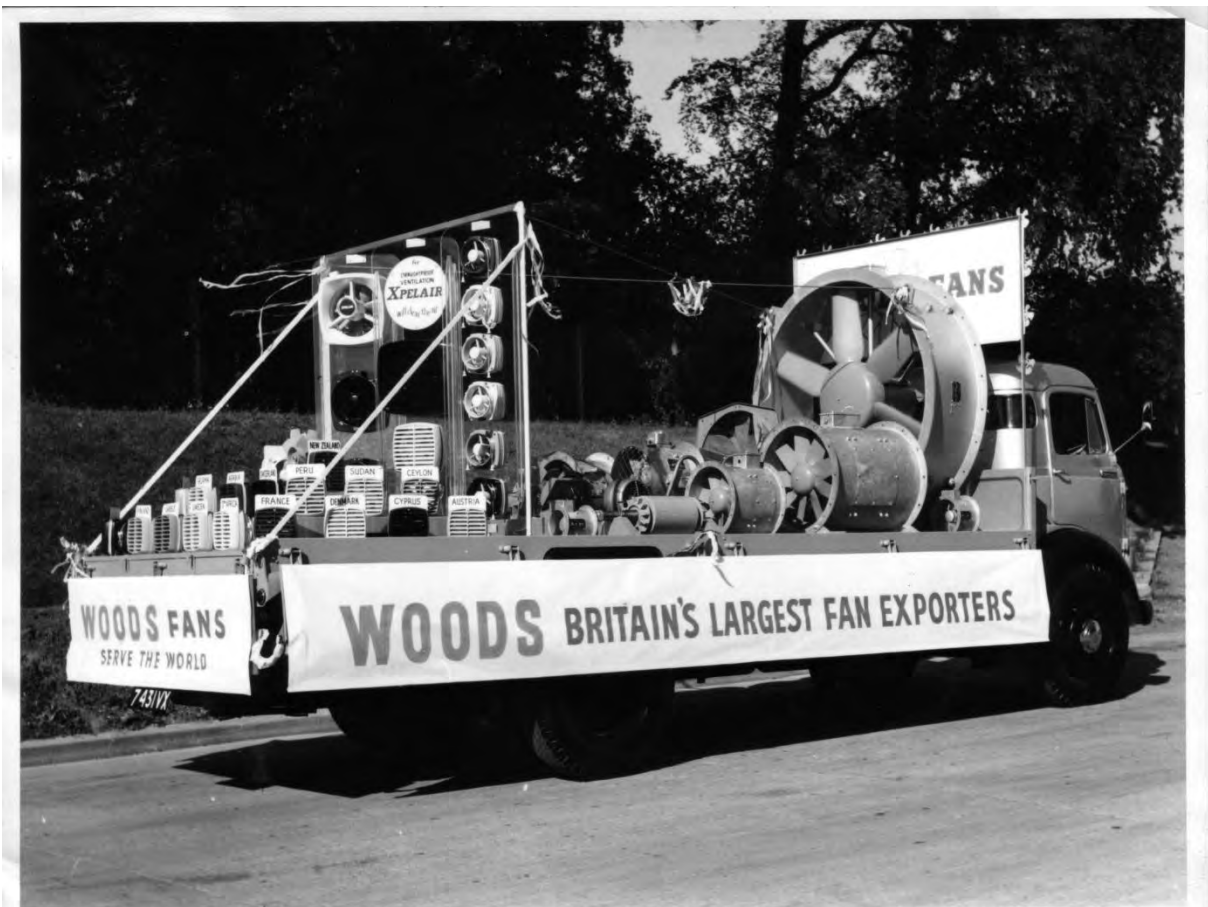


Bill Jennings in white coat.



Final test and inspection. Dick Sadler?





Woods float at carnival procession 1961.



A touch of glamour. Six candidates for Colchester Carnival Queen 1961.



Wendy Meadows of the Winding Shop, and Christine Risley (later Runnacles), shorthand typist at Airwoods in attendance to Christine Loughton? (not of Woods). See Fanfare July 1962.



November 1956.



Mystery Lady.

HERE ENDS THE SECTION

HERE FOLLOWS A SELECTION OF PHOTOGRAPHS THAT HAVE BEEN GATHERED
FROM VARIOUS SOURCES OVER THE YEARS

EXTRA IMAGES

Typing Pool – A Block



SERVICE DEPARTMENT















‘Jeph’ Jephcott (far left). Andy ? 5th from left.



The second XI of the newly formed Football Section. Top, left to right, Mr M. Steel (Section Sec.), D. Petch, J. Merrett, S. Barton, G. Bilton, K. Edwards, A. Turner, A. Leech, trainer. Front row, L. Wright, A. L. Holness, F. Mugford, P. C. Walsh, L. R. Theobald



Snow-ball? Only by careful scrutiny can the ball be found—at the end of L. Sears' stick. Others in this Woods Hockey team are: left, F. Merchant, looking apprehensive; right J. Tralau; centre (in squared shirt) P. Southgate; whilst in the background, left, Miss E. Robins shivers in the snow and in the far distance at right is E. Riley. The opposition—determined looking too—were the Halstead All-Blacks.



Our most successful competitive sports section, the Hockey Club can be proud of fine results this season. Left to right, Mr. Riley, Secretary and Trainer, Mr. Anderson, Mr. Daring, Mr. Old, Mr. Milford, Miss Edmunds, Miss Frost, Mr. Duckling, Mr. Sears, Miss Fisher, Miss Wood and Miss Lethbridge.





L-R - Paul Mason, Alan Butcher, Galli, Peter Chisnell, Boyk, Bob Simons, Phil Raske, me, Potty, Neil Kidman . 1985.











M.W. WOODS, L^{TD}

WINDIFAN WORKS, COLCHESTER

Manufacturers of
HEAVY DUTY "Propelair" ELECTRIC FANS

FLAMEPROOF MOTORS FOR GARAGE PETROL PUMPS
"LOTORK" CAPACITOR TYPE ELECTRIC MOTORS
FOR POLISHERS, BENCH GRINDERS, DENTAL LATHE WORK, etc.
MOTORS FOR "DODGEM" CARS AND "ROBOT" STOKERS, etc.



Established over 30 years ago, Woods of Colchester have built up a reputation for sound design and high quality of workmanship. Today, their products are known throughout the World.

May 1937
67 20 Std
Coronation Supplement













*Back row : F. Harvey (Press Shop), D. Salmon (Press Shop), J. Carroll (Press Shop),
A. Felgate (Duct Shop), D. Hockett (Duct Shop), L. V. Harris (Main Dept.), G. Baker
(Press Shop), J. Fossey (Machine Shop)
Front row : K. Rycraft (Press Shop), S. Foster (Machine Shop), F. Fisher (Press
Shop), J. Merrett (Specials Works)*

Woods Fire Service

JOE MATTACK'S REUNIONS FROM 2001 AND 2002.

























































Woods Apprentices

THE END



All gone. 100s of jobs lost. Asset stripped. Houses built. The state of the nation!