

# NATIONAL MUSEUMS LIVERPOOL

## ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT

### INFORMATION SHEET 63

## BRITISH INSULATED CALLENDERS CABLES PLC

The Archives Department is responsible for a number of collections that range from the business records of local manufacturers to local societies and research collections, and includes the records of our parent organisation, National Museums Liverpool.

British Insulated Callenders Cables Plc has its origins in two 19<sup>th</sup> century pioneering electrical cable companies: Callenders of Erith (formed 1882) and British Insulated Wire Company of Prescot (formed 1890). In 1902 British Insulated Wire merged with the Telegraph Manufacturing Company of Helsby, and became British Insulated & Helsby Cables Limited. In 1925 it was re-named British Insulated Cables Limited. In 1945 British Insulated Cables merged with Callenders and became British Insulated Callenders Cables Limited.

### **British Insulated Wire Company of Prescot**

In 1890, the Atherton Brothers joined T.P. Hewitt, Managing Director of the Lancashire Watch Company, Colonel Pilkington of St. Helens and Sebastian Ferranti, the Liverpool born electrical genius, and established a factory in Prescot to manufacture paper insulated power cables under licence from US patentees. The decision was part commercial and part philanthropic. The directors had the vision to realise the potential of the emerging need for and use of electricity. The development of electric traction world-wide was of itself enough to justify the venture.

Within a decade the firm has secured its position in the power distribution industry while continuing to establish itself locally, producing the lighting for Lord Derby's house, Knowsley Hall, and street lighting in Prescot and its surrounds.

The merger in 1902 with the Telegraph Manufacturing Company brought with it the expertise of E.K. Muspratt. Dane Sinclair was Chairman for a long period prior to 1930, when Sir Alexander Roger, a financial wizard, succeeded him. Roger and his financial manager, William H. McFadzean, organised the key merger with Callenders in 1945. Roger was the first Chairman and was followed by McFadzean. Other companies merged or were taken over, including the Anchor Cable Company of Leigh, Telegraph Construction and Maintenance Company Limited (or Telecon as it was known) and Balfour Beatty, Civil Engineers.

### **Callenders of Erith**

Founded on 19 April 1882 as Callender's Bitumen Telegraph and Waterproof Company Limited, the company reformed in 1896 as Callender Cable & Construction Company Limited. Callenders was a family based firm formed by William Ormiston Callender who started out as a manufacturer of bitumen. His sons, Thomas Octavius Callender, William Marshall Callender and James Ormiston Callender, joined the business later and all contributed their various skills to the business, ranging from research and development to marketing. For example, William experimented with a mix of bitumen and elasticon (a waste product given to William by James Irvine & Company of Liverpool). He produced 'Vulcanised Bitumen' - a less expensive substitute for gutta percha or indian rubber that could be used for waterproofing or as an insulant for telegraph and arc lamp electric wiring.

This led the firm to move from the manufacture of bitumen to the manufacture of electric cables.

During the 1880s Callenders supplied cables as far apart as Sydney, Gibraltar and Stafford. During the late 1890s the company won several major contracts for the provision of cables for several tramway companies throughout the UK. This expanded at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to include India, Burma, Denmark, France and Australia.

During the 1930s the company went on to benefit, as did many others, from the construction of the National Grid in the UK following the 1926 Electricity Act.

W.T. Glovers of Trafford Park and Callenders at Erith both played an important role in the manufacture of PLUTO (Pipe Line Under The Ocean) which played such a big part in helping the Allies in Europe during the Second World War, supplying fuel from refineries in England to Dungeness and Boulogne. Callenders also supplied cables for the Spitfire and produced a buoyancy cable that deflected enemy magnetic mines.

It was during 1943 that Callenders entered into discussion with British Insulated Cables about the merger of the two companies. Following earlier failures the two companies merged in 1945.

Further information about the history of the company can be found in *Callenders 1882-1945*, by R.M. Morgan, published by BICC plc, 1982.

### **Present Day**

BICC Plc is now an international group, with world-wide interests, especially in Asia and North America. Balfour Beatty, Civil Engineering and Construction Division, is very strong in the UK railway infrastructure maintenance sector, after the acquisition of three former British Rail units.

### **ARCHIVE COLLECTION**

The BICC archive collection consists of the records of the founding companies - Callenders and the British Insulated Wire Company. The types of material held in the archive include minute books, deeds and agreements, photographs, staff newspapers, price lists and sale brochures, including the various subsidiary companies. It also includes papers from Mr. R.M. Morgan, former group publicity manager and Burkewood Welbourn, director of BIC (1942-1945).

### **BICC SUBSIDIARY COMPANIES**

The following is a list of subsidiary company records held in the BICC collection by National Museums Liverpool:

- Anchor Cable Company of Leigh
- Atlantic Cable Company
- British Copper Refiners Limited
- British Insulated Cables
- British Insulated & Helsby Cables Limited
- Callenders Bitumen Telegraph & Construction Company Limited
- Callenders Cable & Construction Company Limited
- Croydon Cable Works Limited
- Electric Supply Company of Victoria Limited
- W.T. Glover & Company Limited
- Helsby Cables Limited
- Macintosh Cable Company
- F. McNeill & Company Limited

- Metropolitan Electric Cable & Construction Company Limited
- Selbourne Plantation Company Limited
- St. Helens Cable & Rubber Company Limited
- Telegraph Construction & Maintenance Company Limited
- United Telephone Cables Limited

## **RECORDS HELD ELSEWHERE**

The Museum of Science and Industry, Manchester, holds some material relating to W.T. Glover & Co., Ltd. For further information contact the Museum of Science and Industry, Liverpool Road, Castlefields, Manchester, M3 4FP (Tel: 0161 832 2244).

## **ADVICE AND INFORMATION**

Enquiries can be made by letter, fax and email. We may not be able to answer all enquiries, but will endeavour to point you in the right direction.

We are able to provide copies of material where they are suitable to be copied (items are copied at the Archivist's discretion). This is subject to charges to cover copying and handling.

## **ACCESS AND OPENING TIMES**

This collection is closed at present. Urgent access is strictly by appointment. Please contact the Archivist to book an appointment. Times can be booked between 10.30 am and 4.00 pm. We are closed between 12.30 - 1.30 pm for lunch. There is no disabled access in North Street as the Searchroom is reached by two flights of stairs. Alternative access arrangements could be made in certain circumstances.

## **CONTACT**

Maritime Archives & Library  
Merseyside Maritime Museum  
Albert Dock  
Liverpool L3 4AQ  
Tel: 0151 478 4424  
Email: [maritime.archives@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk](mailto:maritime.archives@liverpoolmuseums.org.uk)  
Website: [liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archives](http://liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archives)