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WARPLANES TO WASHING MACHINES

The Varied Career of a West Country Company

by *Paul Hulbert*

Paul Hulbert, our Membership Secretary and Webmaster, who lives at Yate, has been researching his local large electric manufacturing company.

When the names Parnall, Jackson or Creda are mentioned, most people will think of washing machines and cookers. But this company based at Yate, near Bristol, has a long and varied history.

Parnalls can trace its roots as far back as 1820, when Parnall and Sons Ltd was founded by William Parnall as a weights and measures company in Narrow Wine Street, Bristol. The company expanded into shop keeping equipment and shop fittings, a good fit with their range of scales and balances, many of which were Mr Parnall's own designs. They had a foundry at Fishponds in Bristol, and branches in London and Cardiff.



PARNALL & SONS,
The Old Firm, Established 1820. Totally distinct from Parnall & Co.
SHOP FRONT BUILDERS,
AND COMPLETE SHOP FITTERS.

The Old Firm, ESTABLISHED 1820.

Air-Tight CASES of every Description MADE TO ORDER on the Shortest Notice.

40 to 50 COUNTERS and FITTINGS of all kinds KEPT IN STOCK for GROCERS, CHEMISTS, TOBACCONISTS and OTHER TRADES.

Shop Fittings for Grocers, Drapers, Confectioners, Tobacconists, Wine and Spirit Merchants, Hotels, Offices, &c.

COMPLETE BAR FITTERS.
Brass and Copper Mullers, China Barrels, Beer and Spirit Measures, Bar and Parlour Cans, Coffee House Fittings, Tea and Coffee Urns, Tables with Marble or Iron Tops, Coffee Mills, &c.

21 & 22, Narrow Wine Street, Bristol.

Totally distinct from PARNALL & CO.

ALTERATIONS to PREMISES Contracted for. DRAWINGS and ESTIMATES FURNISHED for NEW FRONTS, FITTINGS, &c for any Trade. Revolving Shutters Supplied and Fixed. DISTANCE NO OBJECT.

1. Original Parnalls Advert

In 1889 Parnalls expanded into shop front design and construction, later disposing of their weighing machine business to W & T

Avery Ltd, and the foundry to George Adlam and Sons. During the First World War, Parnalls woodworking skills were in high demand for aircraft construction. Beginning with producing aircraft for other manufacturers, they went on to produce their own designs, particularly for the Admiralty. At a time when aircraft losses were running at 60% per month they made a vital contribution to the war effort.

Around 1918 George Parnall split from his partnership with Averys and set up a new company, George Parnall and Company, concentrating on aircraft design and manufacture, particularly for the Royal Navy. They were originally based in the cramped conditions of the Coliseum Works at Park Row, Bristol – a former exhibition hall and skating rink.



2. Parnall's Peto Floatplane launched from a submarine

The first of the new series of aircraft was the Parnall Puffin, which flew in 1920. When business expanded George Parnall acquired the former RAF base at Station Road, Yate. Later aircraft included the Pike, Pipt, Perch and Gyroplane, but few were sold. The Parnall Elf (1929) was technically excellent, coming 8th out of 88 in the Kings Cup Air race. With a top speed of 109 mph and a price of between £875 and £890 this could have been a commercial success except that the country was now in major economic recession. In the end only three were ever built.

Perhaps the most adventurous Parnall aircraft design was the Parnall Peto, a submarine-launched floatplane, a two-seater reconnaissance biplane that could be folded into the cramped storage space available in a submarine. Originally it was craned into the water for a conventional take-off, but in 1928 it was successfully launched by hydraulic catapult at a speed of 50 mph from HM Submarine M2.

Unfortunately the M2 sank in West Bay, Dorset in 1932 with the loss of the entire crew of 60. When the wreck was investigated the hangar door was found to be open with the aircraft still inside. Various causes were suggested for the sinking but the disaster put an end to the idea of submarine-carried aircraft within the Royal Navy.

George Parnall retired in the 1930s and sold the business to Nash & Thompson Ltd, who set up Parnall Aircraft Ltd. Archie Frazer-Nash was well known as a sports car designer, but as the clouds of war came back on the horizon he and his old partner Gratton Thompson resurrected their previous project for powered, totally enclosed gun turrets. As war loomed these were fitted to the Whitley and Wellington bombers, and the Yate production lines were working at full stretch.

The first bombing raid involving the new Nash & Thompson turrets was on Wilhelmshaven on 4th September 1939. 10 Wellingtons were lost, but gunners proved the worth of the new turrets by shooting down 12 Messerschmitt BF100 fighters.

The RAF expanded into longer range bombers such as the Lancaster, and most of the Lancasters produced in the war were fitted with Parnall's FN20 gun turrets made in Yate. The factory was also a centre for producing Spitfire airframes.

The German Air Force had identified Parnalls as a major manufacturer of gun turrets, and after a series of unsuccessful raids a single Heinkel 111 bomber commanded by Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant-Colonel) Hermann Lohmann dropped eight bombs directly on the works on the afternoon of 27 February 1941. An eyewitness reported that "The German aircraft came in so low that you could see the pilot".



3. Devastation after The Raid

The youngest member of staff, Des Watkins, was in one of the buildings that received a direct hit. He rescued many of the young women who worked there. He described it vividly in a letter to his brother: "The girls legs just drag – they're OK, but knocked silly. They're big girls but they feel light as dolls. Everyone who can run is scrabbling madly over the mess. I'm not here really of course – that isn't me walking down there – it's – funny feeling as though you're outside of

yourself watching yourself from a distance. My God look at those Cost Office girls, ragged and bloody and powder blackened. They're in heaps – all bloody and tangled”

“I could write a book on the miraculous escapes of others besides us, and the awful injuries of others. How one of our fellows, saw a wall about to crash on him, just as it fell a cistern out of the girls’ lavatory blew over his nut, the bricks peppered on there like a tin hat. He’s in hospital with terrible bruises mind, but if it had hit his head it would have finished him. He’s very annoyed about it, he said he wouldn’t have minded one out of the mens’ bog, but one out of the girls’ he objected to”

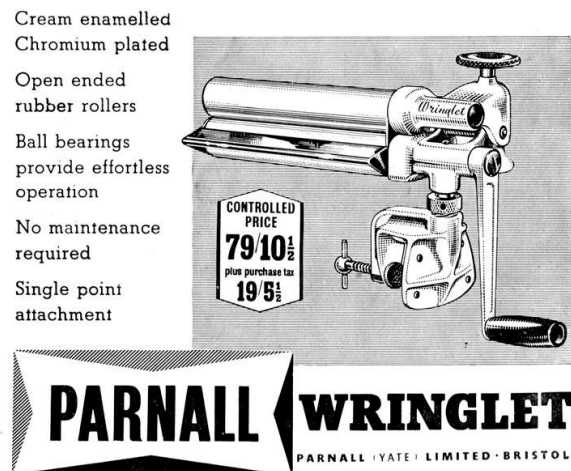
The works nurse was dug out of debris after 45 minutes to give wonderful service at the clearing centre. The results were devastating. 52 workers lost their lives and 150 more were injured. The Heinkel had been flying so low that air defences – Bofor guns and light machine guns - hit the plane 15 times with anti-aircraft fire (surprisingly accurate seeing that only 48 rounds were fired). Oblt. Lohmann limped his Heinkel back to base at Bourges in France on a single engine.

A further 3 people were killed in another raid on 7 March, including an RAF Wing Commander who was assessing the damage from the first raid. Once again the pilot was Oblt. Hermann Lohmann – he and his crew were mentioned in despatches for the two raids.

Des Watkins had moved to another Parnalls factory in Wick, which was bombed again the same day. He said he was looking forward to being old enough to be called up: “I shall be glad to get in the RAF for some peace”

The raids are commemorated in Yate every year on Remembrance Day, when after the service at the Lytch Gate of St Mary’s Church the congregation processes to the Parnall memorial for further prayers and the reading

of the names of those killed in the raids. The first wreath at the memorial is always laid by a representative of the company owners. The author, as a local councillor, has taken part in this service a number of times.



4. Parnalls Wringlet

Aircraft-related manufacturing was soon dispersed to other sites including a soap works and a foundry, but by the end of 1944 the main Station Road works was back in full production. At the end of the war Parnalls had to reinvent themselves once more, and they realised the potential for the domestic appliance market.

The next company Parnall (Yate) Ltd started with the Parnall Wringlet (1946), a clothes wringer that could be attached to a draining board – more than 250,000 of this early example of kitchen automation were sold. The price was £3 29s 10½d (plus purchase tax of 19s 5½d). This was followed by a power wringer and then a self-emptying washing machine. They also produced cookers and smaller appliances such as toasters, irons, alarm clocks and vacuum cleaners.

Parnalls produced a tumble dryer as early as 1955, but the market was not yet ready for this innovation and the factory concentrated on washing machines. The precision skills of the workforce were also in demand for air compressor parts, brake and clutch units and jet engine fuel pumps.



5. Parnall's Spinwasher 1960

In 1958 Parnalls merged with the Radiation Group, best known for their range of Jackson electric stoves. Radiation Ltd had been formed in 1919 as a manufacturer of gas stoves and appliances, introducing innovations in thermostat design. They branched out into gas fires, water heaters and commercial gas appliances. Radiation Ltd also designed the Parkray convector solid-fuel fire to fit into existing grates – a common “retrofit” for modernising pre-war council houses that did not have hot water supplies.

The Jackson Electric Stove Company was formed in 1914, and also manufactured electric kettles. Jackson cookers were very popular – in 1953 celebrity chef Philip Harben featured in one of their adverts, saying "I recommend a Jackson 'Cleanline' Electric Cooker - Whether you are expert or beginner, I recommend to you without hesitation a Jackson Electric Cooker for ease, economy, cleanliness and perfect cooking"

Around 1958 the Radiation Group acquired Jacksons and then Parnalls, and were now able to offer a wide range of gas and electric appliances.

Jackson Cooker production was moved to Yate in 1961, peaking at 2000 cookers per week. They also produced the Jackson “Thor” washing machines, which was a victim of its own success. These machines had been produced since the 1940s, but they were so well made that they rarely broke down, and demand simply dried up. The company suffered in the recession of the 1970s and 1980s and there were many redundancies.




6. Jackson's 91J Cooker 1920's

The Jackson name was abandoned and the main trading name in the 1980s became Creda (another famous manufacturer dating back to 1932), who concentrated on the tumble dryer market. Creda merged with Hotpoint in 1989 as GDA (General Domestic Appliances Ltd). The Italian company Merloni bought the Yate factory in 2001 and the name was changed to Indesit in 2005.

Indesit invested heavily in producing a very energy efficient tumble dryer, and the Station Road factory became the largest appliance domestic manufacturer in the UK and one of the biggest tumble dryer plants in Europe.

ALL-ENAMEL "DE LUXE" COOKER
WITH AUTOMATIC OR
3-HEAT SWITCH OVEN CONTROL



MODEL 91J
For 2-5 persons

**HIRE
CHARGE**
5/-
PER QUARTER

DIMENSIONS.

OVERALL. inches.			OVEN. inches.		
Height.	Width.	Depth.	Height.	Width.	Depth.
37½	20¾	19	10¾	13¾	13¾

LOADING.

Watts.		
Top.	Oven.	Total.
3250	1400	4650

OPTIONAL EXTRAS.

	If ordered with Cooker. £ s d	If ordered later. £ s d
Splash Plate and Plate Rack ...	16 0	19 6
Short Splash Plate ...	4 6	7 0

This Oven will be fitted with a Thermostat to enable the heat to be controlled at any desired temperature, unless a 3-heat switch is requested at the time of ordering.

7. Jacksons 1929 Advert

Their 20 millionth tumble dryer came off the production line in early 2015. Indesit is now majority owned by the American Whirlpool company, which also has interests in Russia.

The Yate workforce has changed immensely over the years. Around 1970 there were about 2000 workers. The number is now closer to 350, but the factory is still one of Yate's major employers. Let's hope that it continues to thrive in today's precarious economic climate.

For more information about Parnall's and the Parnall Industrial Site, readers are referred to "Planes, Turrets & Tumble Dryers" by Alison Newey. This is available from Yate Heritage Centre, who recently mounted a major exhibition about the history of Parnall's. The eyewitness accounts of the bombing raid are available in full at deswatkins.wordpress.com/category/bomb/



8. Parnall's War memorial in St. Mary's Churchyard, Yate