Lancaster Civic Vision

Celebrating our Heritage – Enhancing our Environment – Shaping our Future

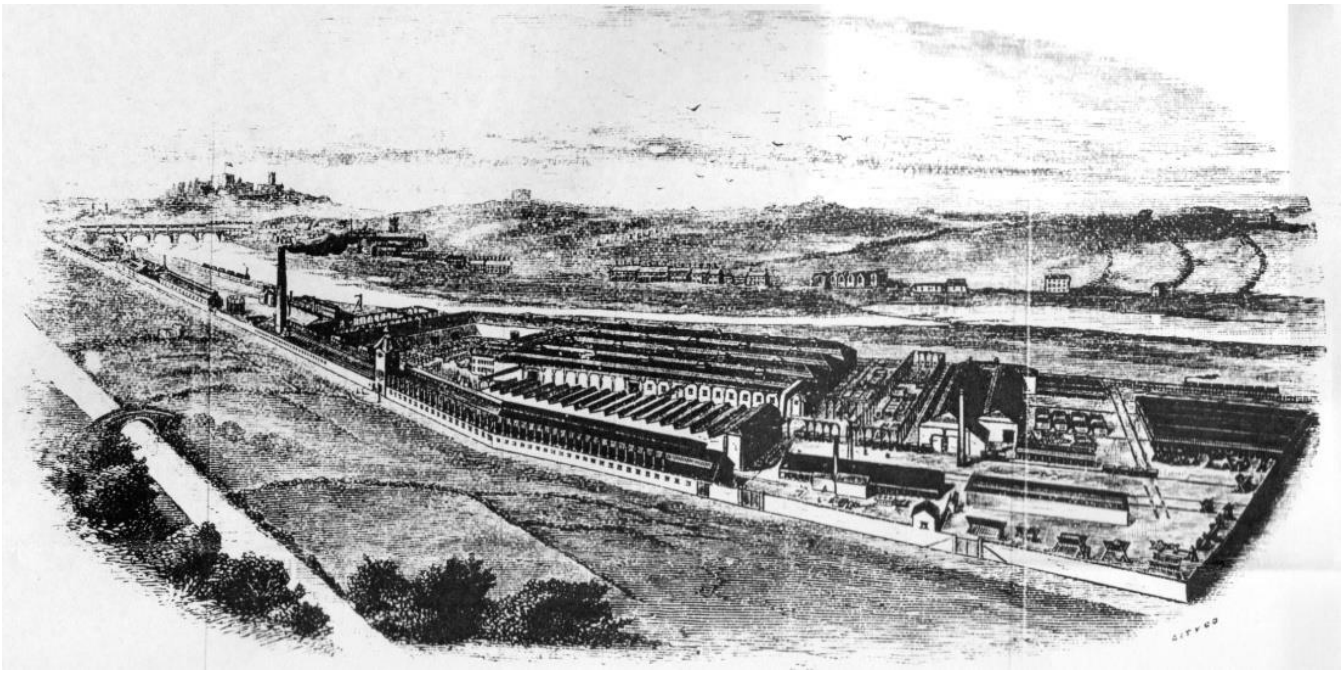
LANCASTER WAGON WORKS, CATON ROAD

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The Lancaster Railway Carriage and Wagon Company (as it came to be called) was established in 1863, its first chairman being Dr Edward de Vitre, a leading local doctor.

In 1865 the company moved into its newly-built premises on 15 acres between the River Lune and Caton Road. This was adjacent to the Little North Western Railway (later the Midland Railway) which permitted easy access to Yorkshire and to the London and North Western line (now the West Coast Main Line).

The offices and workshops were designed by E. G. Paley (a noted Lancaster architect) and they feature a central entrance gateway and clock tower. The rock-faced sandstone frontage is a Grade II-listed building.



The Lancaster Railway Wagon and Carriage Company's works, *c.* 1892 (*Tramway and Railway World*, 1892, 1(6), p205)

The company built railway carriages and wagons, trams, wheels and axles, for the home and foreign railway markets as well as providing wagons for hire.

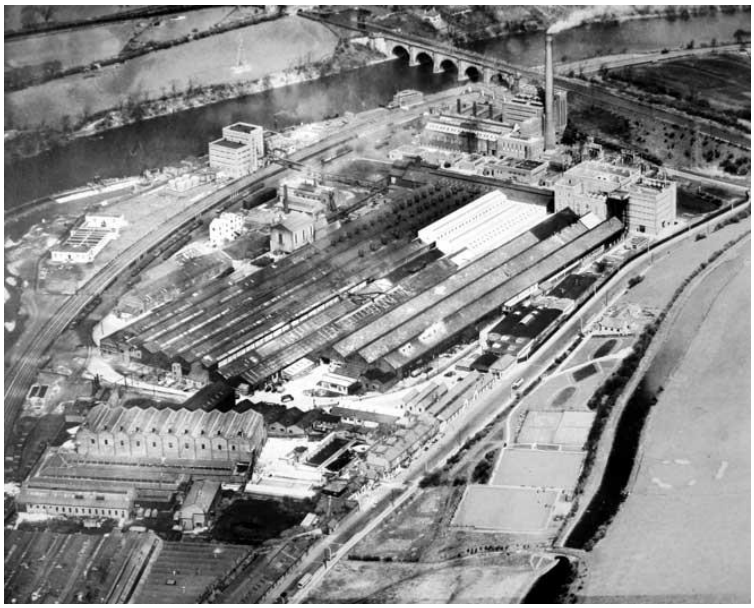
Under the leadership of William Shackleford, the manager from 1868 to 1908, it built up an international reputation as a rolling-stock centre, exporting to India, South Africa, Australia, Argentina, Mexico, Peru and Brazil. In its early years it exported wagons to St Petersburg through Morecambe, then a small port.

Its last major contracts were to build electric trams for Lancaster Corporation (1903) and with Gillow (the Lancaster furniture makers) a carriage for a new royal train for Edward VII (1902). There were also a sumptuous saloon for the Emperor of Brazil and a *train de luxe* for South Africa. They also made dining and sleeping cars.

The Wagon Works was the town's second largest employer (after Williamson's, the linoleum manufacturers). Many of the workers were highly skilled artisans – around 800 employees in the 1880s. The company paid the best wages and was the most highly unionised in Lancaster. Employees also benefitted from a canteen (The Coffee Tavern) where a three-course meal could be bought for 4d (four pence in old money) and beer for 2d a pint or they could eat their own food.

The working week was 53 hours. In 1902 the antiquated works were taken over (at far less than book value) and merged with four other companies into the Metropolitan Amalgamated Railway Carriage and Wagon Company, centred on Birmingham and Manchester.

Lancaster's Wagon Works went into decline as orders were diverted and it finally closed in 1908. Although some men transferred to Openshaw and Saltby, about 2,000 were put out of work. In the UK, Lancaster-built carriages can still be seen at the Weston Clevedon and Portishead Railway and the Talyllyn Railway.



An aerial view of the Wagon Works (bottom left), National Projectile Factory (centre) and power station (top right) in 1949 (Lancaster City Museum)

The factory stood empty until the start of the First World War in August 1914 when the 5th Battalion King's Own Royal Lancaster Regiment used the redundant works as a temporary base until they moved south to Didcot. It then became an internment camp for enemy aliens until early 1916 – "a dirty, draughty place, littered with scrap metal" as Robert Graves, the poet, saw it when officer-in-charge, as his autobiography noted (*Good-Bye to All That,* 1929). Between 1916 and 1919, Caton Engineering used the Works to make 18-inch torpedoes for the Admiralty who eventually bought the site from Metropolitan.



5th Battalion, King's Own marching along Caton Road, Lancaster, 1914
(King's Own Royal Regiment Museum, Lancaster)

In June 1916 a large new factory north of the Wagon Works was opened as the National Projectile Factory (NPF), operated by Vickers for the Ministry of Munitions. It was one of 15 such projectile factories in the UK. The site made grenade mortars, 9.2in, 6in, 8in and 60-pounder shells, and carried out repair and trench warfare work. Two million shells were made in total.

The basic shells came here from various National Shell Factories. The propellant (cordite) and high explosive (TNT) came from the HM Explosive Factories for the filling of the shells at the National Filling Factory on White Lund, Morecambe.

The National Projectile Company built its own electricity-generating station to the north of the site beside the Lune, which was taken over by Lancaster for the borough's electricity supply after 1924. The station closed in 1975. In November 1918 the National Projectile factory employed 4366 men, 318 boys and 4212 women.

After the War, repairing railway wagons resumed for a short while, in August 1920 employing 506 men (mostly ex-servicemen), 38 boys and 17 women. In 1928 the National Projectile Factory site was re-opened by the Cellulose Acetate Silk Co. to manufacture artificial fibres, employing 1800 people by 1931. It changed its name to Lansil (*Lan*caster *sil*k) in 1937.

From the mid-1920s James Nelson produced acetate rayon on another part of the NPF site. Purchased by Courtaulds in 1973/4, the Lansil works closed in 1980, as did Nelson's, bought by Courtaulds in 1963.

In 1923/4 Morton's (of Carlisle), trading as Sundour Fabrics, took over the Wagon Works site for the manufacture of carpets and furnishing materials. Under the name of Standfast, they also made dyes and bookcloths.

Today, as Standfast & Barracks, they are a major producer of high-quality, printed fabrics. Since 2000 they have been part of Walter Greenbank PLC (now Sanderson Design Group) with great expertise in a range of printing techniques for a variety of fabrics. The company has an extensive design studio, working with clients to develop their products.

They can produce modern camouflage materials in the visible and infra-red spectra, continuing the site's military connection. The company also has an extensive archive of designs see https://standfast-barracks.com/archive/



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