



Made in Derby 2018 Profile

Charles Rolls and Sir Henry Royce

For more than 100 years, the name of Rolls-Royce has been synonymous with Derby.

Since 1907-08, when the Derby factory was first set up, thousands of people have earned a living there making first cars of quality and then aero-engines that would help win the Second World War and set a very high bar for worldwide engine manufacture.

The company was founded by two pioneers of the motor and aero-engineering worlds - Charles Rolls and Frederick Henry Royce.

They famously met in April, 1904, at the Midland Hotel, Manchester, when the Hon Charles Rolls was already the aristocratic young pioneer of motor racing with his own car sales firm and Henry, had set up F H Royce and Co, at Manchester making electric lamps, then cranes before turning his attention to cars, after he decided he could make a better one than the one he had bought in Paris in 1903.

An agreement was reached that Royce Limited would manufacture a range of cars to be exclusively sold by CS Rolls & Co - they were to bear the name Rolls-Royce, which was limited and formed in 1906. Initially the fledgling company favoured Leicester for its new factory.

But Derby's offer was too good to disregard - not only did council officials propose suitable land at an affordable price, they gave assurances regarding additional land for future development. There was also a commitment to provide electricity at advantageous tariffs and provision for all other mains services.

As well as building roads, there was provision for a railway siding into the factory site and the council said it would not oppose the building of homes for workers. Rates of pay were lower in Derby and there was a skilled labour market courtesy of the rail works.

Nearly 80 employees came from Manchester when the company moved to Nightingale Road, Derby in 1908 with more transferring later. Royce moved from Knutsford in Cheshire to Quarndon to be nearer to the factory. The Quarndon home now has a blue plaque on it to commemorate his time there.

As production of cars increased, pioneer aviator Rolls was keen to go on into aero-engine production. Rolls' own outstanding flying achievement was the first two-way crossing of the English Channel on June 2, 1910.

But the partnership between Rolls and Royce ended on July 12, 1910, with the death of Rolls when his modified French-built Wright Flyer crashed making him the first Englishman to die in an air crash.

It was the start of the First World War when Royce designed the Eagle engine - derived from one bank of six cylinders of the Rolls-Royce Eagle engine. In January, 1915 the Admiralty ordered twenty five new engines for planes.

The Eagle first ran off a test bed at the Derby works in February 1915, after further testing it was decided to approve the engine for production. The first engine flew on a Handley page O/100 bomber in December 1915 – the first flight of a Rolls Royce aero engine.

This development paved the way for huge innovations in aero engine and plane flight.

The Eagle engine also powered the first direct transatlantic flight as well as the first flight from England to Australia - both in Vickers Vimy aircraft.

The late 1920s saw Rolls-Royce develop the 'R' engine to power Britain's entry in the International Schneider Trophy seaplane contest. The engine established a new world air speed record of over 400mph in 1931. Subsequently, it also established new world records on both land and water.

For his services in enhancing British engineering, Frederick Royce was made a baronet in June, 1930 and became Sir Henry Royce

Royce had moved from Derby to live in West Whittering in Sussex after a couple of years living in Derby and then increasingly after the First World War he lived largely

in the South of France due to increasing ill-health. He continued to work on engine designs- right up to his death in 1933.

Most importantly, he was involved in work on the PV12 engine project that became the basis of the Merlin engine before he died and which was to feature on the Spitfire and Hurricane aircraft of the Second World War and all the Merlin-engined aircraft taking part in the Battle of Britain had their engines assembled in the Derby factory.

A statue of Henry Royce is outside the Rolls-Royce factory and there are a series of busts displayed with Rolls-Royce.

