

Craven Brothers

The Museum holds some of the company records of Craven Brothers, a longstanding Manchester machine tool company. Other records are held by the Manchester Central Library Local Studies Unit and the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.

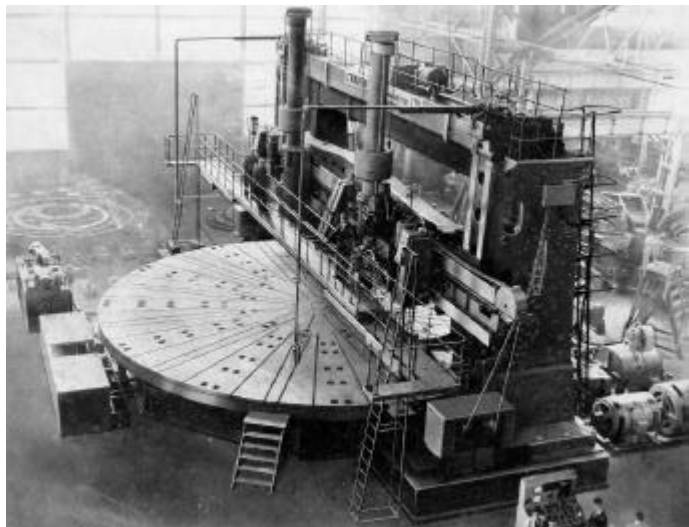
Craven Brothers was run by the three brothers Greenwood, William and John Craven. Their father, Thomas, was a loom maker in Bradford. In 1839 the family moved to Manchester, and Thomas began to work for Sharp, Roberts & Co. (later Sharp, Stewart & Co. Ltd), machine makers. He later set up his own company selling and servicing machine tools.

Greenwood Craven was educated at Bradford Grammar School. He worked for Sharp, Stewart from 1840 until 1852 and then went to Fairbairn & Co., Canal Street, Manchester. William Craven worked for John George Bodmer, in Cambridge Street Mills, off Oxford Road, Manchester. Bodmer was an inventor, who had more than 150 patents in his name. In 1852 William moved with his brother to Fairbairn's. John Craven, an accountant, started off in business with his father. He joined Craven Brothers a year after the company was founded.

Craven Brothers was formed in 1853, at Dawson Croft Mill, Salford. Initially the brothers made machine tools for locomotive manufacturers, but they later branched out into many other types of machine tools, particularly for armament manufacturers. Machine tools make metal and wood parts for other machines. They range in size

from hand-held devices to objects that weigh hundreds of tonnes. Craven Brothers specialised in outsize and individually built machine tools, such as a 42-foot (13-metre) Craven Vertical Boring and Turning Mill, weighing about 600 tonnes. The company built up a huge export trade, with agents in India, Finland, Australia, Canada, South Africa, Argentina and Brazil.

The company expanded so rapidly that it had to move several times. In 1863 it moved to Osborne Street in north Manchester. Further growth prompted the construction of the Vauxhall Works at Reddish, near Stockport, in 1900. The company kept the Osborne Street works, with about 500 employees, open until 1920. In 1939 Craven Brothers bought the Victoria Works at Denton from Knight & Hale. In 1956, during one of the company's best periods, 250 people worked at Denton.



During both world wars Craven Brothers was under government control. The company made machine tools and armaments, particularly explosive shell cases. It was very badly affected by the economic depression after the First World War. Many companies were forced to close but Craven's survived, partly because it managed to expand its export trade into Russia – in fact during 1930 this accounted for 75% of its output. In 1928 Craven Brothers merged with Sir W. G. Armstrong Whitworth & Co. Ltd (Machine Tools Ltd), Joshua Buckton & Co. Ltd, based in Leeds, and Thomas Shanks & Co. Ltd, based in Johnstone. The works of the other companies were shut down, and the works at Reddish were extended accordingly. Late in 1933, Craven Brothers began to show signs of recovery from the depression and orders began to increase.



One of Craven Brothers cranes being used to move carriages for the Midland Railway, Derby.

Craven Brothers boomed under the leadership of Joseph Richard Greenwood, managing director from 1929 until 1936 and chairman from 1936 until his death in 1959. After his death the company's fortunes changed greatly. Profits dropped and the company had problems competing with firms in the rest of Europe. In 1961 the Denton branch works were sold to J. Brockhouse and Co., of West Bromwich. By 1964, Craven Brothers was losing money and there were many boardroom changes in the following three years. Then in 1967 the company was bought by Staveley Industries Ltd., which had already bought the well-known Manchester firm Kendall & Gent. The Reddish factory was closed in 1970.

For more information:

Read Jones, G. *A History of Craven Brothers (Manchester) Limited*. UMIST, Manchester, UK: unpublished BA dissertation, 1973.