

The Linotype & Machinery Co. Ltd

'Machine That Sets Type Conquers The World'

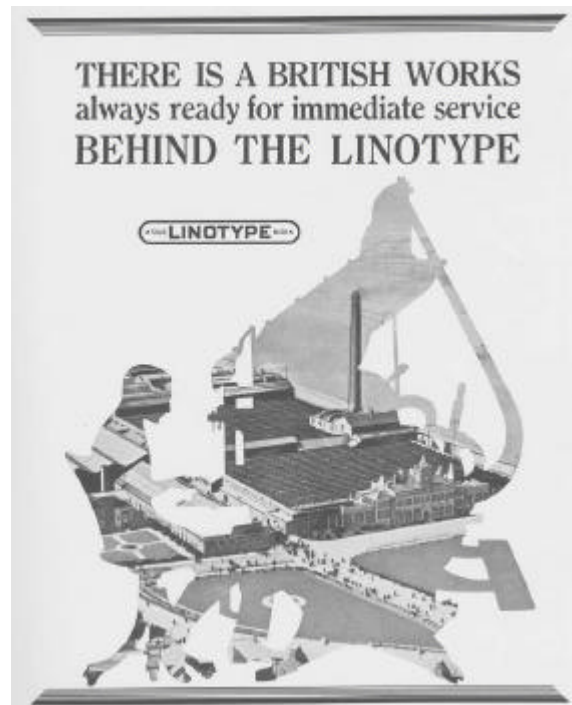
The Museum holds the Linotype & Machinery archive and the Whittaker Collection of linecasting machines, which includes a good cross-section of linotype machines.

The Linotype Company was formed in 1889 by the publisher Joseph Lawrence, founder of the *Railway Magazine*. Lawrence first saw linotype printing in action on a visit to the United States. The linotype machine had been developed by the German watchmaker Ottmar Mergenthaler. It helped to solve a problem for stenographers – how to produce good copy that could be read easily from shorthand notes. Most methods were slow and expensive. Mergenthaler is usually credited with solving the stenographers' problem. The new machine cut down on labour and saved space. It was also much faster than other machines and thus enabled newspapers and periodicals to increase production. In 1889 Lawrence and Stilson Hutchins, a representative of the American manufacturer, the Mergenthaler Linotype Company, brought three experimental machines to England. These caused great interest amongst the printing and newspaper industries. Lawrence was chairman of the Linotype Company from 1895 until his death in 1919.

The company acquired property in Hulme Street, Oxford Road, Manchester, and began to make its own machines. Manchester had an abundance of skilled labour and had good rail and canal networks for transporting raw materials, such as iron and coal, and for distribution of the completed machinery. As the company became more successful, the Hulme Street factory became crowded. Linotype purchased land at Broadheath, Altrincham for a new factory, which was formally opened by Lady Kelvin in 1899. In 1903 the company became known as the Linotype and Machinery Co. Ltd (commonly shortened to L&M) when it amalgamated with the Machinery Trust Ltd.

The linotype machine spread throughout the world, often following the paths of British colonialism. Linotype manufacturers almost worshipped the machine and its ability to spread the printed word. At the outbreak of the First World War, it was estimated that there were 30,000 linotype machines in operation across the world. Julius Muller, who wrote a history of the linotype machine, argued:

“Let these thirty thousand Linotypes but fall into tune, and there shall arise a chorus, that will, indeed, sweep War from the world forever.”



Just as computers today are seen as part of a technological revolution that has vastly accelerated the speed at which we can communicate, so too the linotype machine was believed to be part of a similarly drastic change. Its invention was compared to the advent of the railways and the telegraph.

Linotype machines were exported early in their history. L&M had branches in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt and Borneo. The linotype machine was adapted for printing in many scripts,



From L&M News, September 1933

including Devanagari, Gujarati, Tamil, Telegu, Kanarese, Malay, Hindustani, Uriya, Persian, Sanskrit and Arabic. L&M were particularly proud of the fact that the Vatican installed four linotype presses in 1914.

During both world wars, L&M made munitions, gun parts, aeroplane engines, and tank parts. During the 1960s the company started to investigate the use of computers. However, L&M suffered during the 1970s and 1980s from increased competition. The American company retained the name 'Linotype', while the British company adopted 'L&M' as its official name in 1983. The company still exists today, and now manufactures machinery such as printing presses and stitching machines. As sales fell, the company structure was altered. The company at Broadheath is now divided into separate groups, each responsible for different products. It is entirely based in Manchester. Today, publishing and printing firms no longer use letter presses and the process is rarely seen.

How the early Linotypes worked

There are two main kinds of machine for setting and casting metal type – monotype and linotype. Monotype machines cast each character individually. Linotypes cast a line of type, called a slug.

1. The operator types on a keyboard and a letter is chosen from the magazine at the top of the machine.
2. The machine automatically puts the letter matrices into a line and then casts a line of type from the letters in hot metal.
3. The machine automatically returns the letters to the magazine.

For more information:

Read Bryant, F. *A Short History of Linotype & Machinery Ltd.* Altrincham, UK: L&M, 1997.

Clair, Colin. *A History of Printing in Britain.* London: Cassell, 1965.

Wallis, L. W. *A Concise Chronology of Typesetting Developments 1886-1986.* London: The Wynkyn de Worde Society and Lund Humphries Publishers, 1988.

Consult The L&M archives in the Museum's Collections Centre.