

Joseph Cockshoot & Co. Ltd

The Museum holds company records for Joseph Cockshoot & Co. Ltd, a long-standing coachbuilding and car body manufacturer in Manchester. Two of the company's carriages are on display in the Museum, as are prize medals won by the company and two carriage models.

Joseph Cockshoot set up his own coachbuilding business in Major Street, Manchester, in 1844. Before this he worked in his uncle's hackney carriage business. The new business expanded quickly and in 1855 bought larger premises in Fountain Street. Continued success led to another move, to New Bridge Street, in 1865. The business became a private company in 1873 and five years later won a Premier Gold Medal at the Paris Exhibition of 1878. The company was widely known for the high-quality craftsmanship and elegant design of its carriages, and made technical improvements to brakes, axles and springs, which were taken up by other coachbuilders.

Joseph Cockshoot's partner, William Norris, was a founder member of the Institute of British Carriage Manufacturers and the Northern Counties' Master Coachbuilders Defence Association. William Norris died in 1894 and his son Sydney became managing director in his place. In 1895 Joseph Cockshoot & Co Ltd was established as a limited company.

The company built and maintained the Dress Coach for the High Sheriff of Lancashire. Each year the coat of arms and insignia of the new High Sheriff were added to the panels and hammer cloth of the carriage, and the entire coach was repainted in the colours of the newly appointed officer. One particular Dress Coach served the High Sheriff's office for over 40 years.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the emergence of the motor car as a form of transport and Cockshoot's were involved from the start. The company opened a garage on Deansgate in 1902, which was one of the first in Lancashire, and in the following year produced its first motor car body. The first agencies that Cockshoot's became involved with were the suppliers of the Stanley Steam Car, the Rex and the Velox. Soon after this, the company started to supply a wide variety of car bodies to European companies. The companies included Renault, Panhard, Mercedes and Deaunay-Belleville, as well as the British manufacturers Daimler, Wolseley, Talbot and Manchester-based Crossley Motors. The most famous of these customers was Rolls-Royce. Cockshoot's gained the East Lancashire and Cheshire agency for Rolls-Royce cars in 1907. It was a regular exhibitor at the Olympia Motor Show until 1938.



Cockshoot Garage, Knott Mill Arches, c. 1907.

With the success of the car body production, the company switched away from carriage manufacture. It acquired new premises on the corner of Great Ducie Street and New Bridge Street in 1906. Following the end of the First World War, carriage production ended completely and the range of cars produced was broadened. The company secured the agency for the new Armstrong-Siddeley cars and in 1919 became the East Lancashire and Cheshire agent for Morris cars. This agency also covered MG and Wolseley cars. The business dealings of Joseph Cockshoot & Co. Ltd expanded greatly during the inter-war period. As a result, the company acquired a building at 6 St Ann's Square and converted it into a showroom.



Cockshoot Globe Works.

During the Second World War the company was involved in aircraft production and built components for aircraft, including the Manchester, Lancaster and Halifax bombers. Cockshoot's had attempted to enter into this field of production during the First World War, but without success. Most of the equipment used in car production had to be removed to make space for the aircraft manufacturing equipment. Cockshoot's stopped producing car bodies and moved into the sale and servicing of cars. In 1947 the company acquired the Globe Works, which opened in 1949 as a repair site for Nuffield vehicles.

Cockshoot's developed into one of the largest Morris distributors in Britain, and remained a Rolls-Royce retailer. The company also extended its operations outside the central Manchester area to include sites in Stockport, Bury, Marple, Didsbury and Ashton-under-Lyne. In 1959 Cockshoot's became a public company. It joined with Lockers Ltd and Colmore Depot Ltd to open a parts department for warehousing and marketing in Store Street under the name The Parts Service Combine Ltd. Another joint company, Combine (Manchester) Ltd, was formed for data processing, stock control and financial work.

In 1965 the Cockshoot Group opened new premises, including offices, a central accounts department and a publicity department, in Roebuck Lane, Sale. In 1968 it ceased to be an independent company when Lex Garages Ltd bought the Group for just under £1 million.

For more information:

Consult The Joseph Cockshoot & Co. Ltd archives in the Collections Centre Study Area.

The Cockshoot information file in the Collections Centre Welcome Area.

Visit The 'sociable carriage' and the horse-drawn gig in the Air & Space Hall.