

# RICHARD HOUGH LTD

*the history of how it all came about*





**T**HE HISTORY OF RICHARD HOUGH is an integral part of the History and Development of Bolton. The Industrial Revolution, over one hundred and eighty years ago, changed the small market town into a thriving textile and industrial centre and one which has developed into the busy commercial town of today.

As the town of Bolton developed so did the business of Richard Hough, an enterprising timber merchant, wheelwright and coachbuilder, who had founded his business in the hub of the town centre – the market place, Nelson Square. As a timber merchant he was able to develop, build and supply wooden bowls with metal shafts to mangle and calender textiles made in the town, (bowl originates from the ‘bole’ of a tree).

His trade developed still further with the advent of machine made papers and mass produced textiles. The wooden bowls needed to be improved to give the higher quality finishes required and were replaced by cloth-wrapped metalbowls, from which developed pressed cotton and paper bowls using the more resilient materials that were by now available in Bolton.

Today Nelson Square exists as a small secluded park, an oasis of shrubs and flowers and still the centre of the town. Richard Hough Limited, the largest calender bowl manufacturer in the United Kingdom, is based on the self-same site once occupied by the original wheelwright. From the exact spot where his smithy stood there now flourishes an electrical division supplying and repairing electric motors and control gear.



• RICHARD HOUGH •

Four generations of Houghs and three generations of the associated Bellis family later, the business has diversified and expanded into other towns and six bearing and transmission centres have been built to service the United Kingdom and overseas markets.

It is sad to relate that, in spite of the dynamic start given to the business by

the first Richard Hough, little is known about him. His son, Richard, succeeded him and became an Alderman of the East Ward of Bolton.

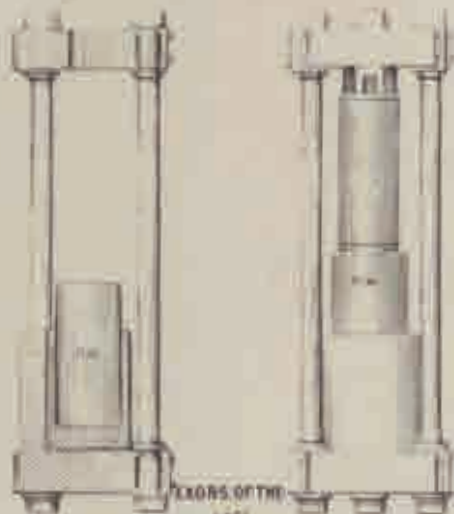
An undated cutting from a local newspaper of the time records that Richard Hough 'has long been favourably known in Lancashire in connection with a very important branch of mechanical industry' and continues to compliment Richard Hough on 'the flourishing concern which he has greatly developed by his energetic methods and technical skill'. Like father like son!

In 1895 large investments were made in machinery and buildings. Additional hydraulic presses and lathes were installed and a new grinding machine, said to be the 'most up-to-date', was delivered from the Argus Works in Sheffield. The handsome red brick offices with the adjoining Manager's house remain today as the Company Head Office.

At this stage, two Bellis brothers joined Richard Hough. Samuel was appointed Works Manager and Harry, always referred to as 'our Mr Bellis' in all the correspondence of the time, became Chief Salesman.

A NAME that has long been favourably known in Lancashire in connection with a very important branch of mechanical industry is that of Mr Richard Hough, who is himself, as was his father before him, for the manufacture of calender and calender bowls for bleachers, dyers, cotton-presses, paper makers, and bookbinders. Mr Hough was born at Bolton in 1811, and received his education in his native town. Sixty years ago his father founded the business of calender-making, and the subject of our sketch, having been practically trained in all the details of the trade, succeeded, in 1871, in the control of this flourishing concern, which he has greatly developed by his energetic methods and technical skill. His establishment, Nelson Square, Bolton, is most completely equipped for the purposes of the industry connected with, and employs a large staff of hands, whose labours are assisted by the most modern machinery available. The work

*The largest and most powerful  
Hydraulic Press in the world.*



RICHARD HOUGH,

Callender Bowl Makers

*Nelson Square BOLTON.*

*Above Right: Reproduction from page of an undated cutting from a local newspaper - describing the acquisition of a business. Richard Hough, then owner of the Company, is shown. Below Right: One of the original hydraulic presses used.*



The work involved Samuel and Harry Bellis in 1912.

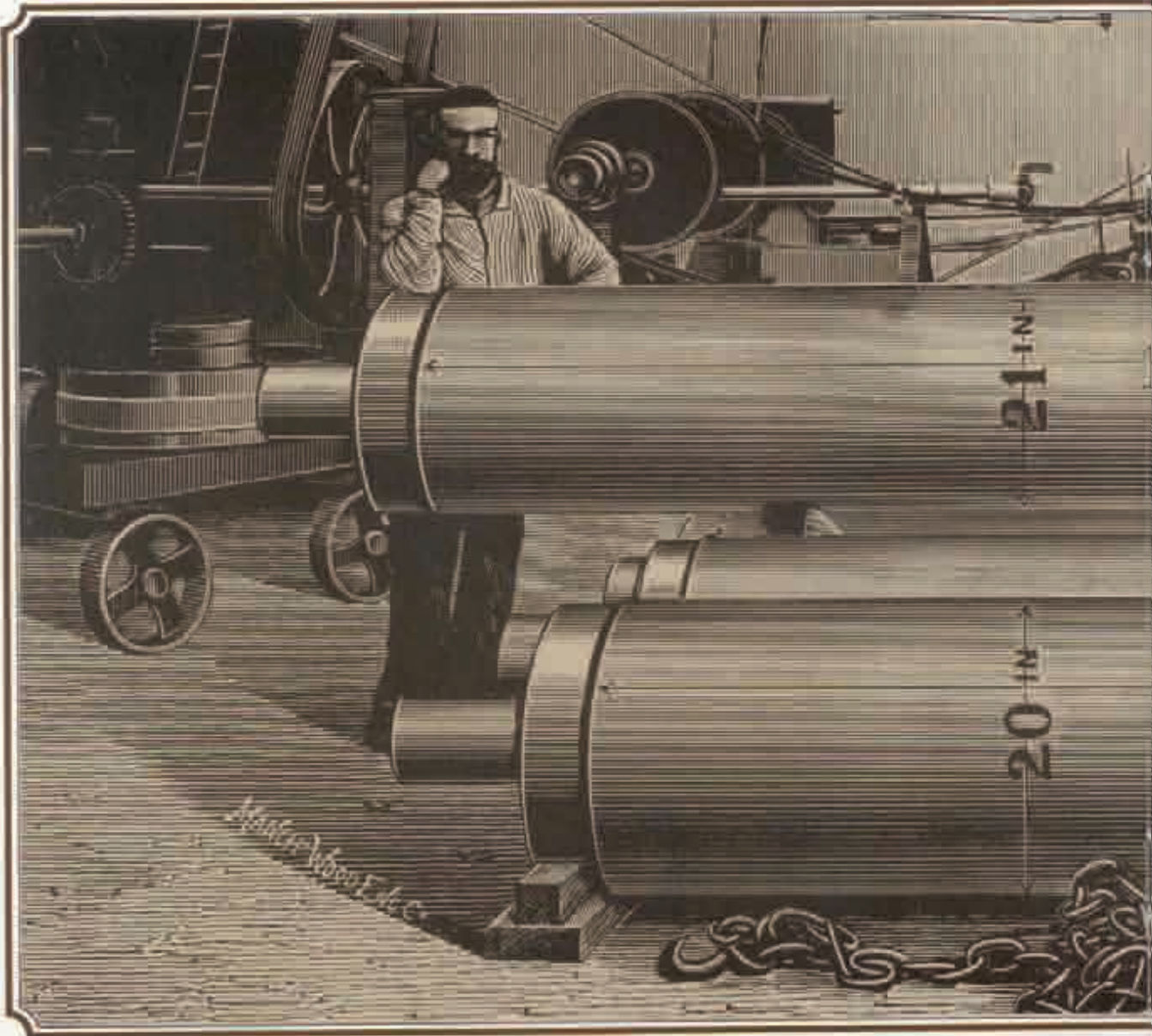
**T**HESE TWO MEN were the Grandfather and Great Uncle of the present Managing Director and when in 1902 the Company became 'Limited', Samuel and Harry were appointed Directors. Their names, along with other employees, can be seen on a magnificently illuminated address complimenting the third Richard Hough on the occasion of his forty second birthday in 1906. 'We the undersigned', the message runs, 'herewith desire to record our appreciation of your generosity as our employer'.

Generous for those days, no doubt. To modern eyes the weekly wage bill looks pitiful and the hours worked extremely hard. The brass-bound wage book for 1912 shows that the total weekly wages for the

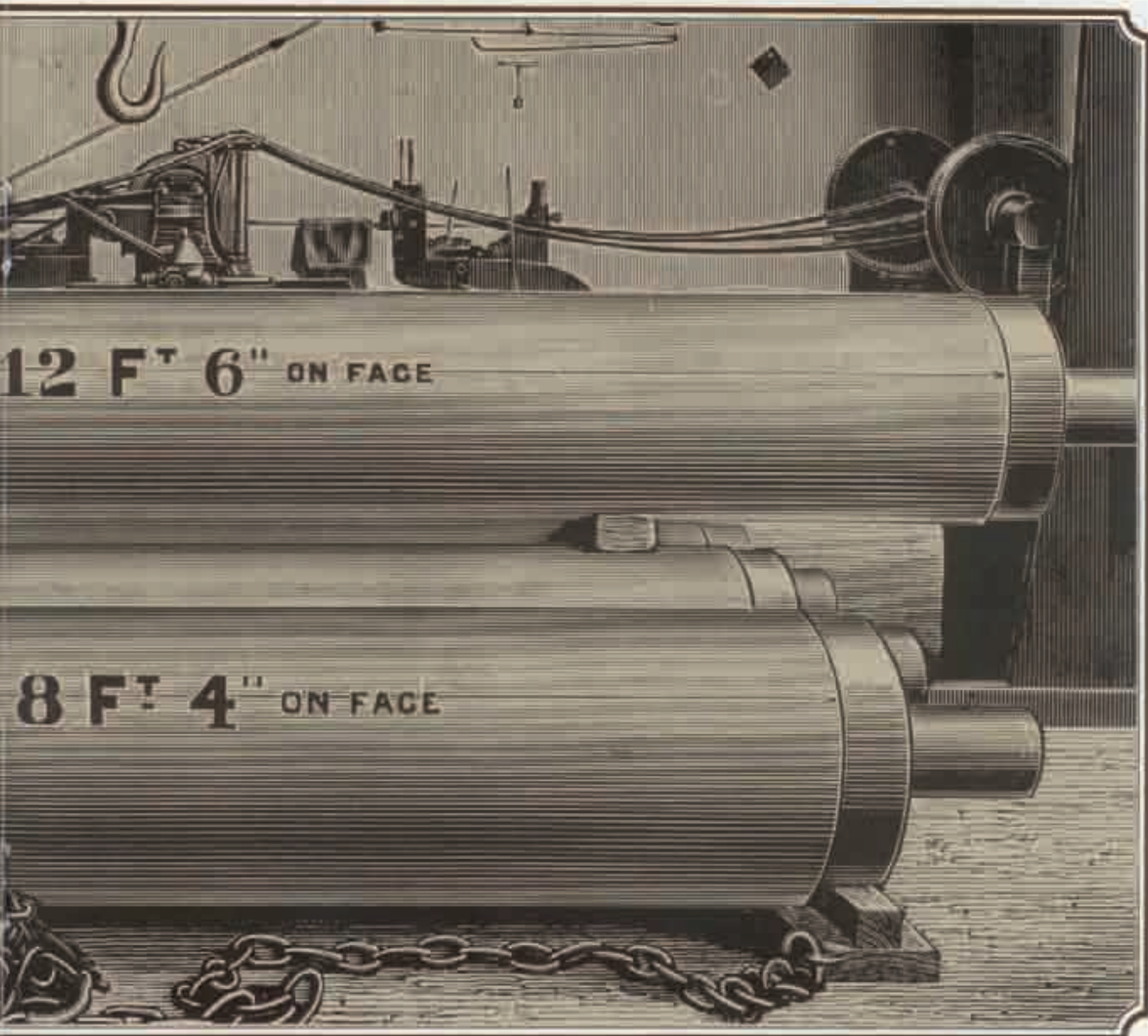
seventeen men employed in the works came to £26. 4s. 6d for an average of fifty two hours worked, with as much as seventy two hours recorded.

After the First World War the firm was joined by Jack Hough, the last of his family to be associated with the business and a little later by the two sons of Samuel Bellis, Samuel and Norman. They had completed their engineering training elsewhere and in 1933, after their father's death, bought complete control of the Company from the Hough family.

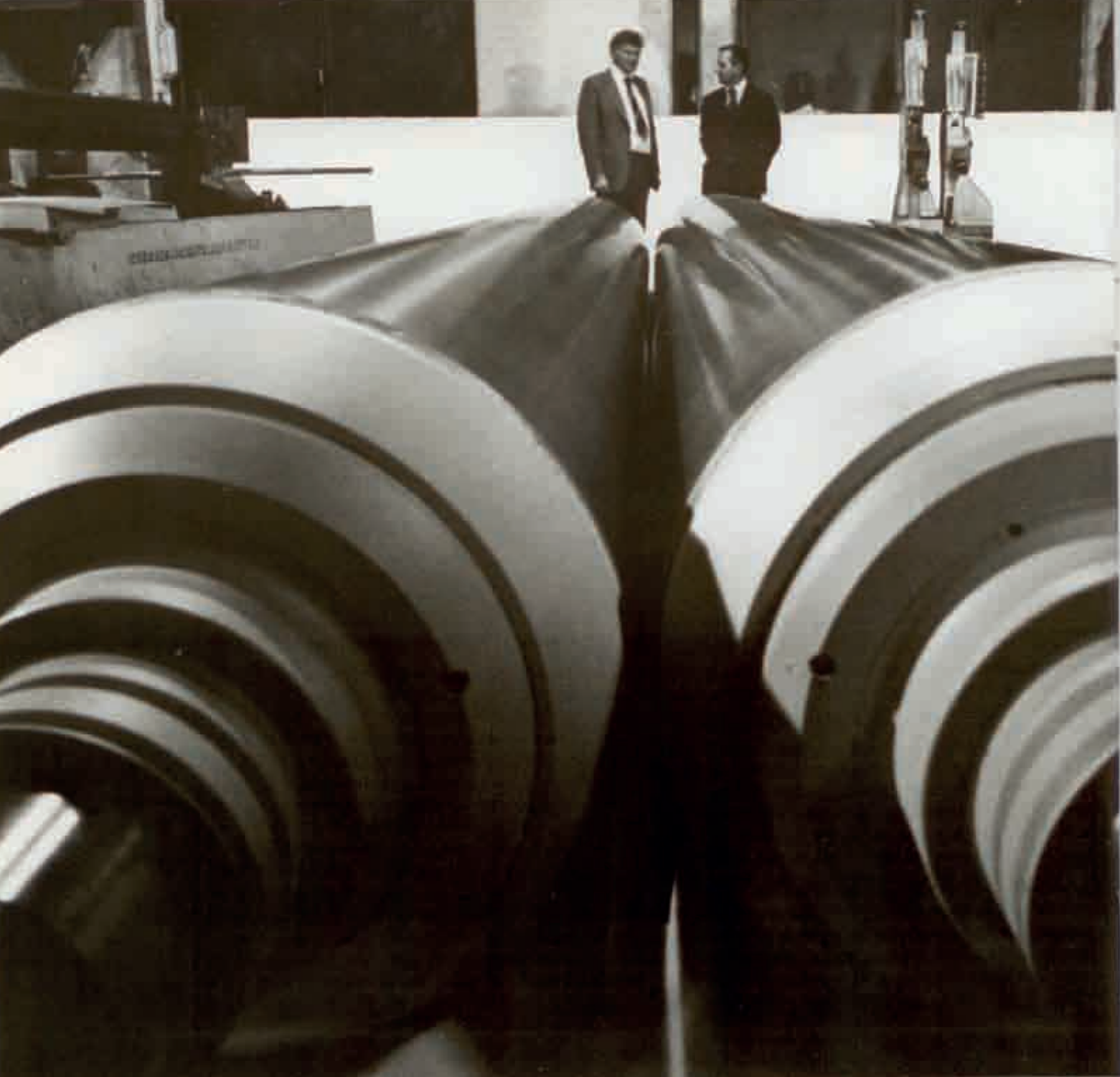
Six years later the war came and Richard Hough turned to munition making and boring gun barrels. It was during this time in 1942 that Ronald Bellis, the present Managing Director, son of Samuel Bellis, joined the Company.



Richard Hough & Co. Ltd.



Super-colossal rollers of 1890, with a grinding machine in the background. One of the bolts supports the 250 ton working force.



**W**ITH THE WAR OVER, the firm returned to bowl making and the first years of peace saw the beginning of the Company's diversification. In 1946 an armature and stator winding electric motor division was formed. This has been expanded and developed into a modern servicing organisation, dealing with repairs, maintenance work and the sale of new electric motors and switch gear.

A further expansion followed the formation of the electrical division. Bearings were required for the electrical repairs and although these were difficult to obtain, Richard Hough managed to buy two hundred pounds worth of stock for their own use. Unintentionally they had taken their first steps into the world of bearing distribution. Bearings being in short supply, their customers had great difficulty in obtaining supplies for themselves and pressed to buy from Richard Hough. And so it continued informally until 1950 when the first bearing depot was opened in Nelson Square.

From this modest beginning the bearing business grew rapidly. In 1970 the decision was made to operate purpose-built modern depots and to expand. Now there are six Bearing Centres - Bolton, Blackburn, Dewsbury, Stockton-on-Tees, Liverpool and Rotherham serving the United Kingdom and overseas markets, specially designed to be full transmission service units.

With the contraction of both the textile and paper industry in home markets, the Company has had to seek wider outlets.

*Today more than 50% of the Company's bowl production and large quantities of bearings are exported throughout the world.*



The reception area of the Electrical Division.



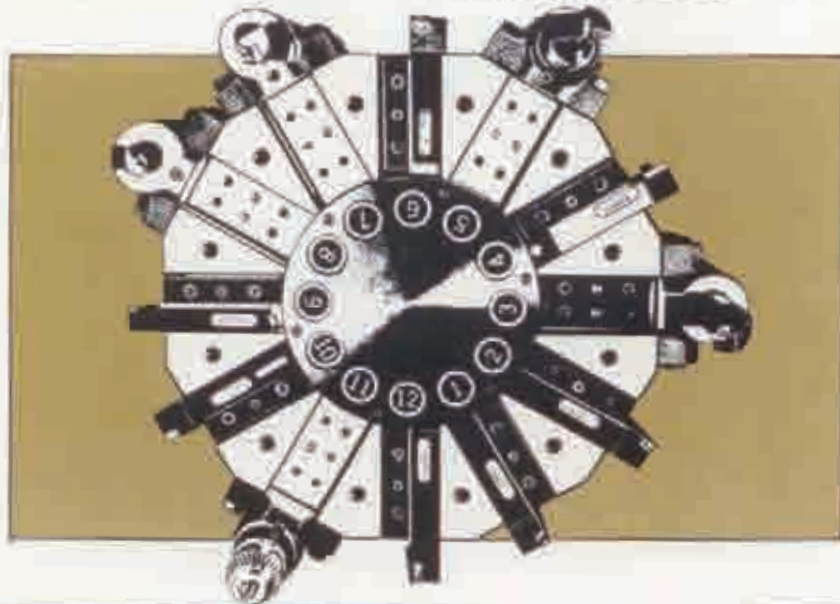
The electrical division repairs all types of winding gear motors.  
Fig 2 left - 750-hp 11.5kv motor.  
Fig 2 right - 2.2 kw motor from a textile mill.  
Small paper cup - 1000 rpm.

**A**LTHOUGH THE PACE OF CHANGE and expansion has accelerated with the present generation, Richard Hough remains very much a family firm, directed by Ronald Bellis and his brother-in-law James Ashton, who joined him in 1956.

Still remembered are the days when the bowls were transported by horse and cart and later steam wagon. The carter would be given 6d for a 'pie and a pint' at the local public house. Nowadays articulated lorries manoeuvre through the same gates. Hough bowls have kept pace with these changes. Constant research and development ensures that, as in the days of the founder, their bowls remain in the forefront.

Richard Hough have retained many of their original customers for over 180 years. As recently as 1983 the Company bought Middleton Bowl manufacturing division, which was transferred and incorporated into the Hough bowl-making section.

Richard Hough entered the age of the computer some 10 years ago and are currently investing in further computerisation to maintain both the efficiency and expansion of production and distribution. To Richard Hough building for the future is as important today as it was when the 'enterprising timber merchant' started it all, over 180 years ago.



Left:  
The turret from a GPO  
armory machine

Right:  
Inside the Pressing Room of  
the Bolton Works, 1905



**Richard Hough Limited**  
— calender roll technology



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