

British Insulated Wire Company

Joseph Atherton and his brother Jacob established the British Insulated Wire Company in 1891. They were pioneers in the manufacture of paper insulated power cables and also produced all the equipment for their installation.



Workers spilling out of the gates, Warrington Road

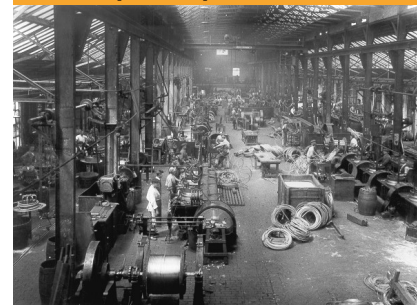
The Atherton Brothers were joined by TP Hewitt, Managing Director of the Lancashire Watch Company, Colonel Pilkington of St Helens and Sebastian Ferranti, the Liverpool born electrical genius. The directors had the vision to realise the potential of the emerging need for and use of electricity.

The company acquired the British rights to manufacture the paper insulated cables under licence from US patentees. Within a decade the firm has secured its position in the power distribution industry while continuing to establish itself locally. In 1892 the company gained the contract to produce and install electric lights in the nearby home of Lord Derby at Knowsley Hall, one of the first houses in the country to have electric lights. In the same year they also installed electric street lighting in Prescot town and surrounding areas, replacing the old gas lamps with arc and incandescent lamps.

From its first beginnings the company expanded rapidly through amalgamation and expansion into a multinational enterprise. The company eventually became known as BICC, British Insulated Callender's Cables.

<http://www.knowsley.gov.uk/things-to-see-and-do/galleries-and-museum.aspx>

The busy factory floor

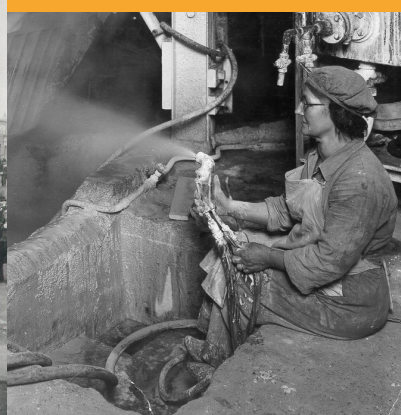


Cables made in the Prescot factory were exported all over the world. They provided electricity to homes in Canada, supplied power to cities in Australia and China, railway lines in India and cables for the London Underground.

Worker's outside the British Insulated Wire Co.



Female worker



British Insulated Wire Company



British Insulated Cables horse & cart

In 1902 the British Insulated Wire Company merged with the Telegraph Manufacturing Company of Helsby, and became British Insulated & Helsby Cables Limited. In 1925 it was re-named British Insulated Cables Limited. Then in 1945 British Insulated Cables Limited merged with Callenders of Erith and became British Insulated Callender's Cables, known as BICC.

BICC became the largest employer in Prescot of the 20th century. The company built an extensive industrial complex covering a large area to the south east of the town. So many people worked at the factory that it had its own social clubs, sports teams, fire brigade and even a hospital with full-time nurses. As the factory was spread over a large area, it had its own transport system with roads and a steam railway to move the supplies around the site. The end of shift whistle that told people it was time to go home could be heard all over the factory and across Prescot.

Between 1989 and 1991 the fortunes of the company declined, the large factory closed and work continued in a smaller building for a time. Parts of the company were sold off to various companies, and the BICC now ceases to exist. The BICC site was left as waste ground until recently when the Cables Retail Park was opened.

Atherton Street in Prescot was named after the Atherton brothers, and Prescot Town Football Club was renamed Prescot Cables FC in the company's honour.

Advert for British Insulated Cables

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Male and female workers inside the wire works



The Lady Mayor's visit to BICC

