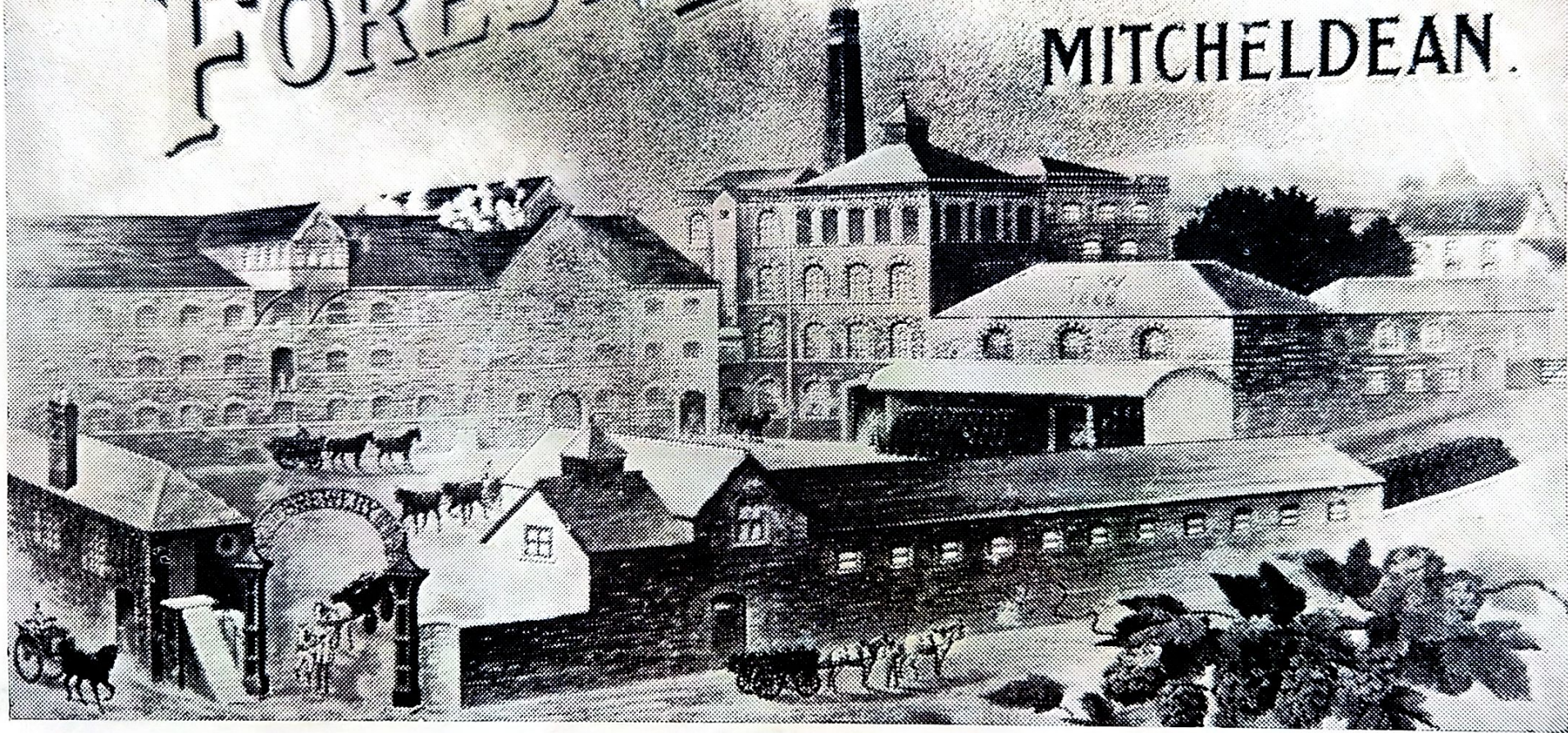
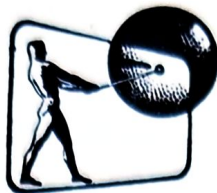


# THE FOREST BREWERY, MITCHELDEAN.







# **A SAGA OF ENTERPRISE AT MITCHELDEAN**

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**L**AST week it was a pleasure to announce that over a million pounds is to be spent in expanding the Rank Organisation's factory at Mitcheldean to manufacture the remarkably successful Xerox office copying machine. The following article tells the story of this Mitcheldean factory which is now making a great and important contribution to the industrial well-being of the Forest.

When the Directors of the original British Acoustic Film Company came to the Forest of Dean seeking an expansion site, they could have had little idea of the tremendous undertaking which was to grow from the industrial seed they were to plant. As their car turned up the hill into the ancient village of Mitcheldean, with its aged church and tall steeple, its little derelict chapel hidden away in a loft at the rear of the few crumbling shops, one wonders if they had any prevision of the village expansion which would ensue or of the fleet of buses which would one day bring their daily load of workers from miles around?

### MEMORIES

Nevertheless, close by the old chapel where it is said Wesley once preached, they found the old Wintle Brewery. What a comparison they must have made between old Mitcheldean with its hidden chapel, and a suggestion perhaps of proscribed dissenters, the old sandstone Brewery still reminiscent of huge dray horses and brewery wagons, and the London they had recently left with its air raids and wartime activities.

The Brewery at this time was in partial use only. Brewing ceased in 1930, but the manufacturing of malt was continuing in part of the buildings and the lease covering this activity had six or seven years to run. It is now a classic story that the Directors viewed the vacant property and then adjourned to discuss the matter over a packaged lunch eaten at the roadside. Here the decision was taken that gave birth to the Mitcheldean Factory.

### THE START

Before long, the late Mr W. Smith and Mr Richardson were on the site, taking out floors, reinforcing others and installing machinery, etc., ready to go; meanwhile, a nucleus labour force was being recruited at the Shepherds Bush Factory. Eventually, in 1941, production started. This was war work, of course, and covered the manufacture of Fire Direction Table and Search Lights, and part of the 9 m.m. predictor used by anti-aircraft forces as well as A.N. type cine-projectors.

The late Mr R. A. Tomes was the first Works Manager and the task he faced must have appalled him. The need to find accommodation for the 90 employees brought from London, as well as the Trainees, etc., who were directed to the factory, involved renting, purchasing, and often renovating properties up to 14 miles from the factory. Once installed people had to be transported daily to and from work.

### STORIES

There were many humorous stories of this time, some of them, like other wartime anecdotes, told with a wry twist. The first organised transport was by a fleet of cars obtained from various sources, but eventually three buses were purchased, one of which, believe it or not, was the old charabanc complete with all weather hood, one from Gloucester, one from Lydney and the charabanc from Monmouth. One old employee tells of the time when the hood on the charabanc would not move and they rode all the way to work in the open bus on a day when the river Wye was covered with ice floes. On another occasion local boys stoned the charabanc passengers as they passed because they believed they were prisoners of war.



### A VEIL

It is better, perhaps, to draw a kindly veil over some of the comments made by Londoners about the rural housing they were compelled to use. In spite of these and other difficulties the factory rapidly progressed and before long some 250 employees were established and continued production until the war ended.

Factories, however, consist not only of employees, but of floor space and plant. At the outset, it was realised that more floor capacity was necessary and the first additional building was built by the Ministry of Supply in 1941.

At the end of the war, steps had to be taken to ensure a future for the Factory and British Acoustic Films turned to its old love the cine trade. In 1946 an agreement was made to manufacture Bell and Howell equipment under licence and Mitcheldean's second phase of life commenced. At this time the "maltings" building became available, as the lease to the tenants expired, and with this building as an assembly department and the "Ministry" building as machine shop the manufacture of the very successful and popular 600 series of projectors commenced.

Around this time Mr Tomes' health gave rise to anxiety and he returned to London, his place being taken by Mr Dudley Newstead. Like a growing child the factory required more and more techniques and skills and before long a heat treatment section was installed. Shortly afterwards, in early 1948 a plating shop was commenced in the old buildings. Both these activities brought new skills to the Forest of Dean and the dissemination of this knowledge in the training of local labour can only be beneficial to the area. Similarly, setters for automatic machines were very scarce and the company has had to pursue a training policy in order to cope with this need. The success of these efforts can be measured by the continued success of the company.

### GROWING

Again like the growing child the factory soon began to burst its seams, and new buildings became an urgent necessity, but in this year of 1948 a man had arrived at Mitcheldean to control Production who was to be a dynamic force in the factory's growth. This was Mr F. Wickstead, who is now the Chief Executive. In 1951 Mr D. Newstead left to become General Manager of Kershaws in Leeds and Mr Wickstead took over the managerial post.

From this point onwards the growth of production and the extension of the building accommodation has been phenomenal. Model after model from the Bell and Howell range was tooled up and commenced; each had its teething troubles, but these were overcome and production continued. The year 1951 also saw the start of another production—the microfilm equipment for Burroughs Ltd. This became a highly successful undertaking which continued for some years.

### THREE BAYS

It was clear that all this progress was satisfactory for new buildings were authorised and 1949/50 saw the addition of three bays for the manufacture of wooden cases. This was followed in 1953/54 by an addition to this building to house the Press Shop and automatic machine shop: 1953 also saw Mr Wickstead become General Manager.



The Plating Shop badly needed new accommodation and this too was granted, so that 1955/56 saw the erection of a magnificent building for plating.

The building of the case shop had been necessary to cope with case manufacture which formerly had been subcontracted to another firm and the auto and press shop moves dealt with machine shop expansion as well as creating room for the new plating shop; but the need to house the assembly shop activities in a new efficient building was paramount. This coincided with the time when management decided to create separate Divisions. The Mitcheldean factory then became the home of the Cine and Photographic Division of the Rank Organisation. Mr F. Wickstead became the Chief Executive of this Division in 1958, and the decision was taken to amalgamate the selling and manufacturing activities.

This imposing building which meets the eye when one approaches the Eastern Avenue entrance was then built to accommodate both these activities. This handsome building certainly demonstrates the Company's wish to combine utility with a pleasant appearance.

### LEAPING

From this stage in the development, production progressed with leaps and bounds but, almost unobserved by many, the end of the second phase of the Mitcheldean story was coming into view. The Microfilm order was reaching completion and the very severe competition in the "home-movie" market from the Japanese and other countries was beginning to take its toll. The Company Management must have appreciated the trend very early for the third phase of our history opened late in 1960, a full two years before the severe curtailment of 8 m.m. cine manufacture.

This, of course, was the advent of Xerographic manufacture. An arrangement was established again with an American company to make Xerox copying machines at Mitcheldean; these machines are sold by Rank-XeroX which is owned 50 per cent. by Rank and 50 per cent. XeroX Corporation, U.S.A.

### THE FIRST

A further addition to the factory, especially for this production, was authorised and built. In November 1960, the first line-production XeroX Machine was despatched. The details of the growth and success of this enterprise read like a fairy story: one finds it difficult to appreciate that this complicated set up, originally planned to produce five machines per week, recently produced 100 machines in a week.

### HUGE SUM

And so to today: the Xerox production continues in the building mentioned above which has already been extended, and to cope with future production, the huge sum of over £1 million is to be spent on further extension and increased production. This will mean that the labour force which has on occasions hovered around the 1,200 mark will swell considerably during the next three years.

This is truly a healthy state of affairs in this Productivity Year and merits full co-operation from all quarters to ensure its success.