Transport for London

TfL Corporate Archives Research Guides: World War II 75th Anniversary Edition

Halifax Plane Production by LPTB during WWII

Did you know we built planes? In this story we use original material from the Transport for London collections to tell the story of how we helped build the Halifax plane...



Staff from London Aircraft Production workshops where sections of new Handley-Page "Halifax" bombers are made are visiting an airfield to see the completed aircraft, 1945. Archive ref num: LT000846/003

Despite the need to maintain vital transport services during World War II in the face of air raids, wartime shortages and restrictions, the London Passenger Transport Board (LPTB) also played a part in direct war production.

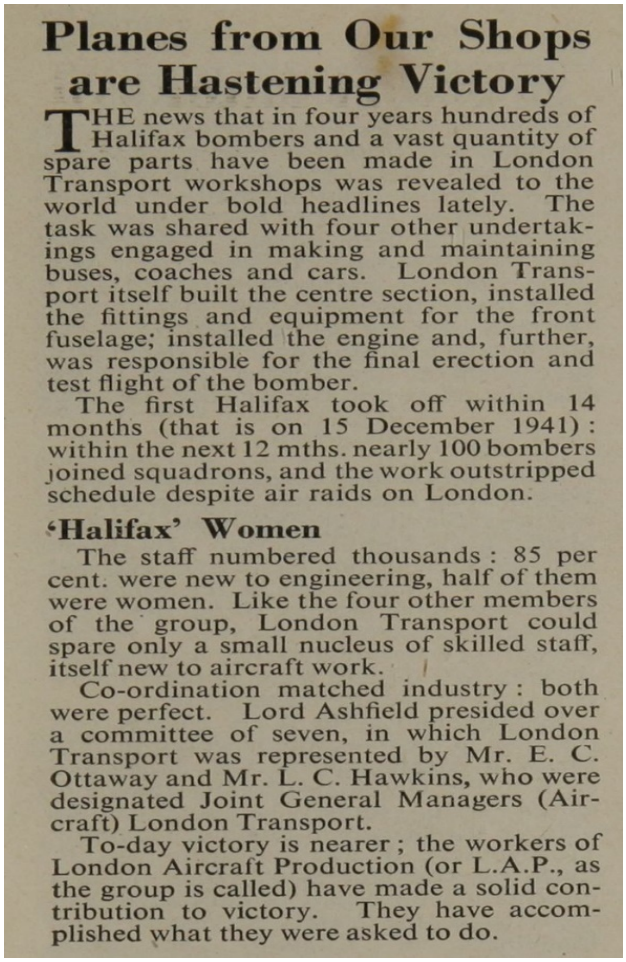
The London Aircraft Production Group (LAPG) was formed in the summer of 1940 by the Ministry of Aircraft Production (MAP). It was headed by the LPTB, and comprised Chrysler Motors, Duple Bodies and Motors, Express Motor and Body Works, and Park Royal Coachworks.

Together they were to produce the Handley Page Halifax bomber. Each company was tasked with making a section, or components for the plane. It had been designed so that individual parts could then be quickly assembled.

The LPTB Works at Chiswick, Aldenham and White City, usually occupied with the manufacture of trains and buses, were turned over to the LAPG. They were responsible for building the centre section, the front fuselage, engines, engine cowlings, stores and spares.



Women working on a component for a Handley Page "Halifax" bomber, one of several hundred built by London Aircraft Production, 1945. Archive ref num: LT000846/003



Planes from Our Shops are Hastening Victory

THE news that in four years hundreds of Halifax bombers and a vast quantity of spare parts have been made in London Transport workshops was revealed to the world under bold headlines lately. The task was shared with four other undertakings engaged in making and maintaining buses, coaches and cars. London Transport itself built the centre section, installed the fittings and equipment for the front fuselage; installed the engine and, further, was responsible for the final erection and test flight of the bomber.

The first Halifax took off within 14 months (that is on 15 December 1941): within the next 12 mths. nearly 100 bombers joined squadrons, and the work outstripped schedule despite air raids on London.

'Halifax' Women

The staff numbered thousands: 85 per cent. were new to engineering, half of them were women. Like the four other members of the group, London Transport could spare only a small nucleus of skilled staff, itself new to aircraft work.

Co-ordination matched industry: both were perfect. Lord Ashfield presided over a committee of seven, in which London Transport was represented by Mr. E. C. Ottaway and Mr. L. C. Hawkins, who were designated Joint General Managers (Aircraft) London Transport.

To-day victory is nearer; the workers of London Aircraft Production (or L.A.P., as the group is called) have made a solid contribution to victory. They have accomplished what they were asked to do.

Article describing the contribution of London Transport to the production of Halifax bombers, January 1945. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

Thousands of LPTB staff, most new to engineering, had to learn how to manufacture aircraft parts quickly and precisely. 50% of this new workforce were women.



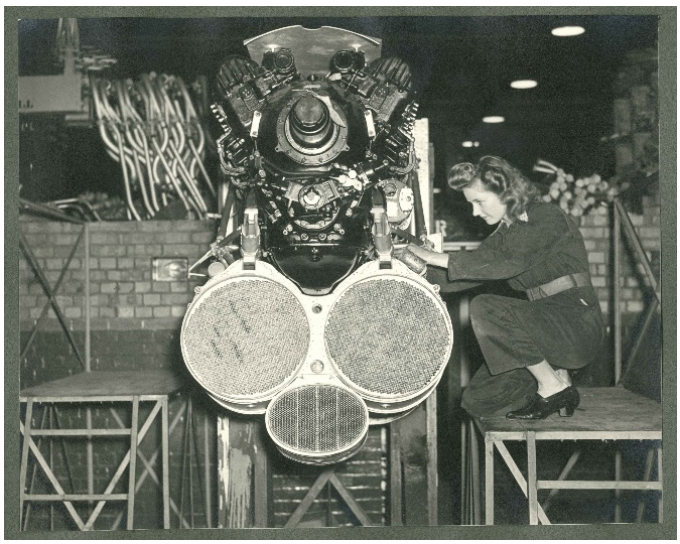
An engineer works in the bomb-aimer's position, 1945. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

Women worked on aileron (a hinged flight control surface usually forming part of the trailing edge of each wing) and rudder assemblies among other things.

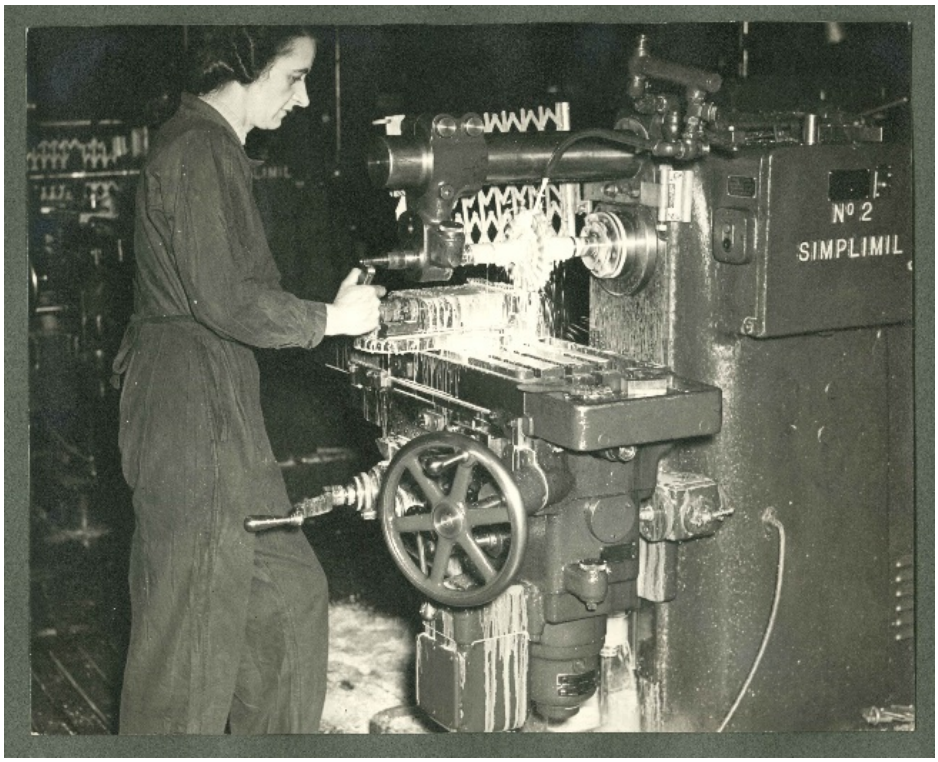


Women work on aileron and rudder assemblies for Handley Page "Halifax" bombers, several hundred of which were built by London Aircraft Production, 1945. Archive ref num: LT000846/006

The assembly of the complete centre section, the engine units and the installation of the front fuselage were carried out at the railway depot at Aldenham.



A fitter works on an engine for a Handley Page "Halifax" bomber, 1941-1945. Archive ref num: LT000846/003



A machine tool operator, 1945. Archive ref num: LT000846/003

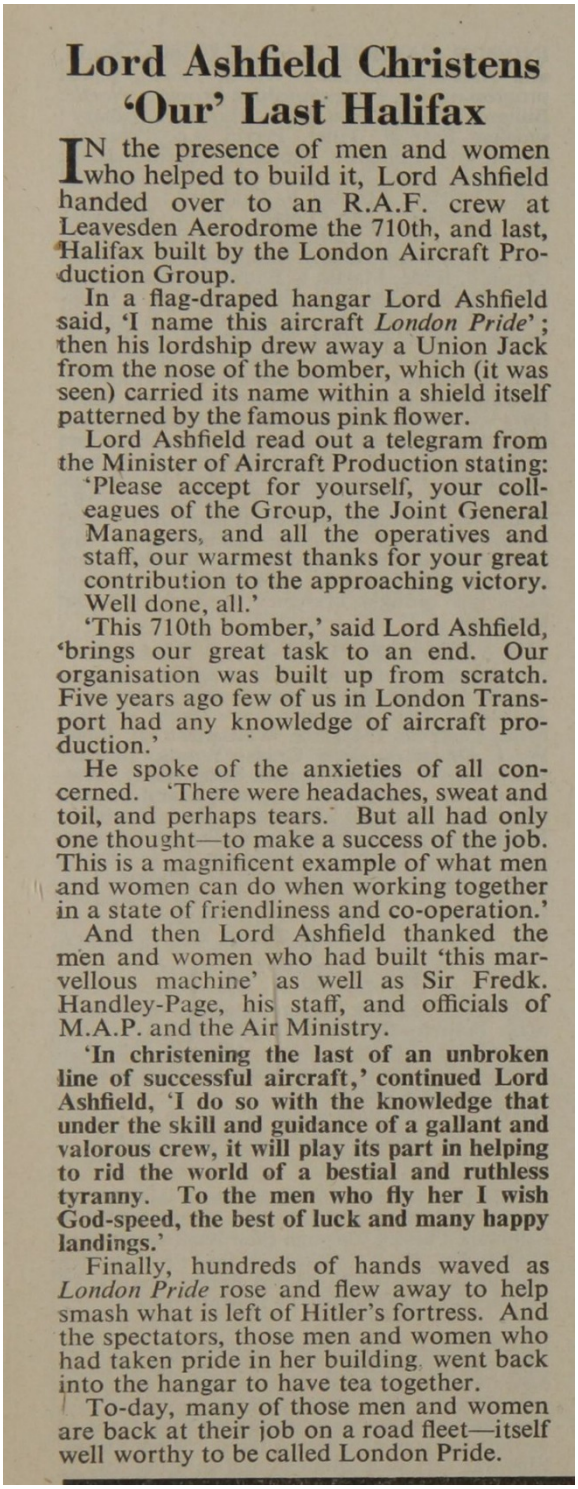
Components were delivered to Leavesden airfield for assembly and flight tests before being handing over to the RAF.



Staff from London Aircraft Production workshops visiting an airfield to see the completed aircraft, 1945. Archive ref num: LT000846/003.

The first aircraft was successfully flown on 8 December 1941.

At the peak of production 4,600 staff were directly employed by the LPTB. on work for the Halifax plane.



Lord Ashfield Christens 'Our' Last Halifax

IN the presence of men and women who helped to build it, Lord Ashfield handed over to an R.A.F. crew at Leavesden Aerodrome the 710th, and last, Halifax built by the London Aircraft Production Group.

In a flag-draped hangar Lord Ashfield said, 'I name this aircraft *London Pride*'; then his lordship drew away a Union Jack from the nose of the bomber, which (it was seen) carried its name within a shield itself patterned by the famous pink flower.

Lord Ashfield read out a telegram from the Minister of Aircraft Production stating:

'Please accept for yourself, your colleagues of the Group, the Joint General Managers, and all the operatives and staff, our warmest thanks for your great contribution to the approaching victory. Well done, all.'

'This 710th bomber,' said Lord Ashfield, 'brings our great task to an end. Our organisation was built up from scratch. Five years ago few of us in London Transport had any knowledge of aircraft production.'

He spoke of the anxieties of all concerned. 'There were headaches, sweat and toil, and perhaps tears. But all had only one thought—to make a success of the job. This is a magnificent example of what men and women can do when working together in a state of friendliness and co-operation.'

And then Lord Ashfield thanked the men and women who had built 'this marvellous machine' as well as Sir Fredk. Handley-Page, his staff, and officials of M.A.P. and the Air Ministry.

'In christening the last of an unbroken line of successful aircraft,' continued Lord Ashfield, 'I do so with the knowledge that under the skill and guidance of a gallant and valorous crew, it will play its part in helping to rid the world of a bestial and ruthless tyranny. To the men who fly her I wish God-speed, the best of luck and many happy landings.'

Finally, hundreds of hands waved as *London Pride* rose and flew away to help smash what is left of Hitler's fortress. And the spectators, those men and women who had taken pride in her building, went back into the hangar to have tea together.

To-day, many of those men and women are back at their job on a road fleet—itself well worthy to be called London Pride.

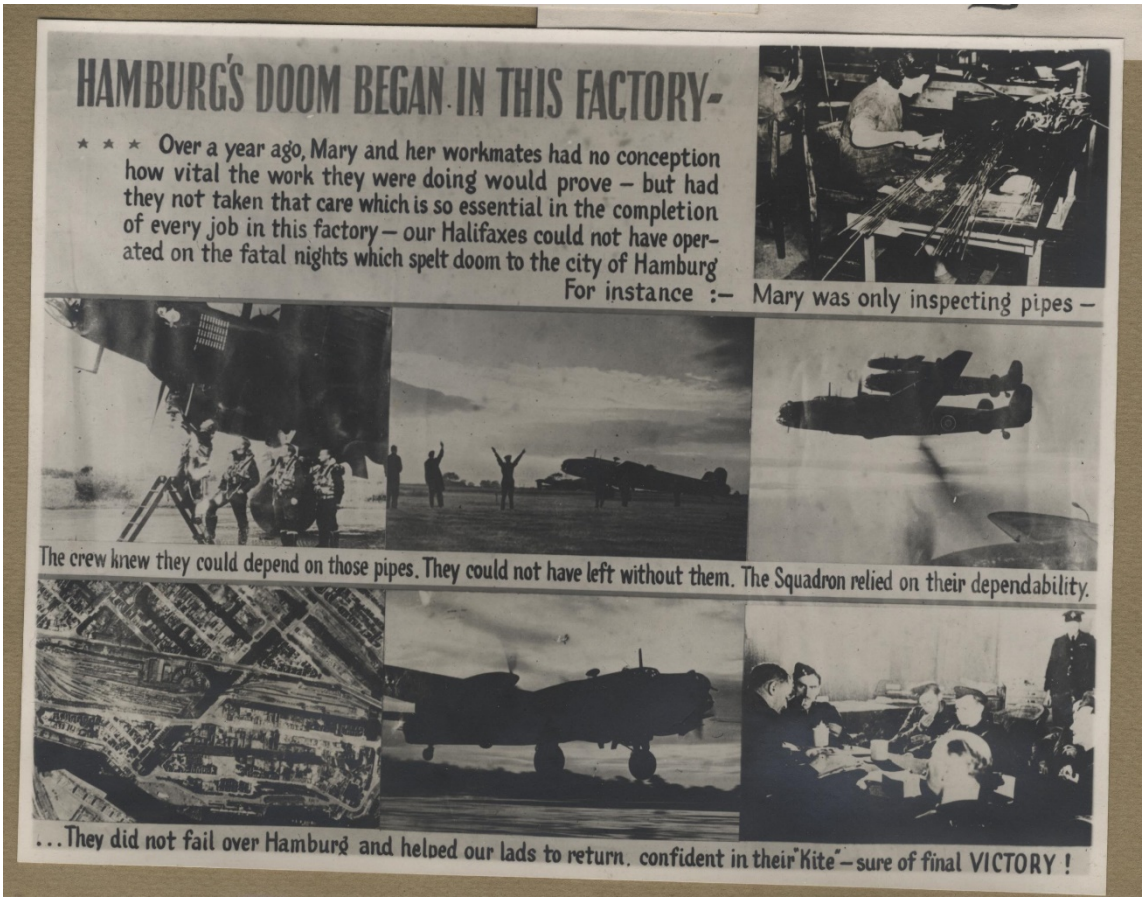
Article describing the naming by Lord Ashfield of the 710th and last Halifax aircraft, May 1945. Archive ref num: LT000030/078

A total of 710 Halifax planes were built by the LAPG between 1942 and 1945.

The final plane, delivered to the R.A.F on 16 April 1945 was named the *London Pride*.

The work of aircraft production was seen as vital and the London Passenger Transport Board staff received a telegram from the Minister of Aircraft Production congratulating them on their achievement.

"Over a year ago, Mary and her workmates had no conception how vital the work they were doing would prove"



Poster explaining the importance to the war effort of the work of each member of London Aircraft Production staff, 1945. Archive ref num: LT000350/025/001

This story has been compiled using information in records at the Transport for London Corporate Archives. The Corporate Archives seeks to preserve and make accessible records, not to interpret them. A wider range of material is available for physical consultation.

Email: CorporateArchives@tfl.gov.uk