





Cover Picture

Cabinetmakers producing aeroplane propellers, c. 1916, in the Hampton & Sons Workshop, Lambeth, London. (Courtesy of English Heritage Archive bl23561/042)

Hampton & Sons was a well-established department store that occupied the corner site of Pall Mall and Whitcomb Street, off Trafalgar Square. Blitzed in 1940 the site is now the National Gallery Extension. The fine architectural photographers, Bedford Lemare, took the photograph.

When war broke out in 1914 it was all supposed to be over by Christmas. However, by 1916, when this photograph was taken, conscription had been introduced and most non war-related industry suspended, furthermore the War showed no signs of ending. Thus, in the Lambeth workshops of Hampton & Sons, little furniture and upholstery was being made. Those skilled cabinetmakers that had not already volunteered for the military had reserved occupations doing war work. All the men in the

photograph are in the 40s or older and the man on the extreme right has lost the top of his index finger. The picture shows men and women involved in the exacting work of shaping propellers for the new-fangled flying machines. In 1916 the science of powered flight was barely 13 years old and here can be seen the whole process of propeller manufacture.

Right at the back, stacked vertically against the wall, are rough blanks made by laminating slightly overlapping blocks of wood with a circular central boss. The blanks were then bolted onto the special 4-legged stands. A spoke-shave was then used to carve-away the excess wood to achieve the correct angle for the propeller. The 'prop' on the left has been discarded as it is delaminating. The tradesman bending over the propeller in the left middle is checking that the angle is correct. Of particular note is the extraordinary quantity of shavings on the floor; possibly as there were few apprentices, none of the tradesmen were prepared to lower themselves by sweeping up. It must, however, have been a considerable fire risk.

Most aircraft of this period used two-bladed propellers but standing upright just to the right centre is a large 4-bladed propeller, possibly from a two-seater BE2c aeroplane. Behind the two suited managers, four women can be seen. It is unclear what they are doing but quite possibly they are varnishing the finished propellers and stamping identification and aircraft type numbers on the central boss.

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