

Ever Ready Co (Great Britain)

By Bill Bayliss (bill.bayliss@ntlworld.com)

In 1933, *The Ever Ready Company* began business in a shop in Charing Cross Road, which, with a handful of workpeople, also served as a factory. By 1963, the company has no less than 28 factories. Altogether the factories covered a space of one and a third million square feet, and employed over 12,000 people.



The Walthamstow Factory

The illustration above, shows the factory at Walthamstow in 1933. It was built for the manufacture of radio high tension batteries and dry cells for electric torches. It had floor area of 175,000 square feet and gave employment to

2,000 people. It was specially designed to permit the manufacture of dry batteries.



The Factory Layout & Manufacturing Process

The ground floor was devoted partly to a mill which crushed the raw manganese dioxide, and partly to production lines on which finished cells were made up in battery form sealed and packed for market. Work on the dry cell, whether intended for torches or radio batteries, started on the top (third) floor, to which the powdered manganese dioxide was forced under pressure from the ground floor mill.



Twelve cup soldering machines produced the complete cups which formed the casing for the dry cell. The cups were made from strip zinc, which was fed into the machine from a roll. The zinc was folded into cylindrical form, a base inserted, and then passed on to the spokes of a rimless wheel, where the base is firmly soldered into position. The finished cups were fed automatically under nozzles and machines which inserted the requisite amount of electrolyte and also inserted the insulating washer at the bottom of the cup. Conveyors then took the

cell through a hot water bath to set the electrolyte. The final stage in this machine was the fitting of a brass cap to the electrode and the sealing of the cell.

A Quality Product

Every torch cell was subjected to a voltage test by means of a photo-electric cell which automatically rejected any cell which fell below a definite voltage.

A striking example of the high class quality of the torches made by the company was provided by the experience of the 1962 Mount Everest Expedition. A member of this Expedition found an Ever Ready torch that had been dropped nearly ten years previously by an earlier expedition. It was still in perfect working order.

Diversification

The company's productions were not limited to batteries for radio. They made batteries for many other purposes, such as radios, hand torches and for use on motor cars and cycles..



Many of their products were designed for use in mines, submarines, inflammable fuel tanks and other dangerous places, where a single fault would mean the difference between life and death.

How It Began

The company was founded by Akiba Horowitz who was a 35 year old Russian Jewish emigrant to the USA in 1891. He changed his name to Conrad Hubert and started a number of different small businesses. One of these was a Novelty shop where he found that an electric necktie was a big selling

item. As his business grew, he purchased a patent for an electrical bicycle light, and later, the patent for the first tubular flashlight and in 1898 Hubert founded the American Electrical Novelty and Manufacturing Company. He started making bicycle and Flash Lights that were sold to the American police and the company became a huge success.



In 1901 the first British company was formed, called the **American Electrical Novelty and Manufacturing Company Limited**, to market his products that were sold under the brand name of *Ever Ready*.

From about 1904 there weren't any connections between the two companies, which developed independently. (Today, the American 'Eveready' company is part of Union Carbide Corporation). In 1906 the company's name was changed to the **British Ever Ready Electrical Company Limited** and in 1913 It was registered as a public company named the **New British Ever Ready Company Limited**. In 1920 the **Ever Ready** became a public company.

British Market Dominance

At the end of the Sixties, British Ever Ready stood in a position that was, to say the least, comfortable. It had about 90 per cent of the home market, and large shares of other important markets, notably South Africa. It did not advertise much, but looked after the newsagents and other small shops that sold its products with a huge fleet of blue and red vans. It also spent heavily on research and development: 250 people worked in a vast laboratory in Tottenham, north London .

Backing The Wrong Horse

The company continued to grow and expand its range of products through the Seventies. It produced zinc-carbon batteries, the traditional formula, and sent most of them abroad. A new kind of long-life battery, based on alkaline manganese, was making inroads in the US, but the British management chose to ignore it: too expensive, they said, it would never catch on. Ever Ready's research laboratories had made an alkaline battery in 1973, but it was not produced.



A technician who applied for a sales job in the early Seventies was told it was his job to contradict anyone who praised alkaline, even though its merits were clear. Motorised products, such as portable tape players, would hardly work without them. 'They should have been able to see the shift to alkaline by 1972 or 1973,' Chuck Parietti, European operations director, says. 'But they didn't want to believe it.' With a huge investment in zinc-carbon production, the reluctance was understandable.

The End Of The Line

In 1977 the Monopolies & Mergers Commission forced British Ever Ready to sell its stake in Mallory, which made Duracell alkaline batteries. *Duracell* homed in immediately on supermarkets,

which the British had ignored. *Ever Ready* would not put batteries in blister packs, and did not like the tough terms the supermarkets demanded. *Duracell* could not afford to be so proud.

As most of us will remember, sales of *Ever Ready* batteries were trounced by the *Duracell* brand. This victory was reinforced by clever advertising as personified by the *Duracell* bunnies that went 'on and on and on'. It wasn't too long before *Ever Ready* sales were completely eclipsed by those of its competitors. Ultimately, the wheel turned full circle and the company was sold to the American owned *Union Carbide Company*. The company that had swallowed up the original American *Ever Ready Company*. They still sell *Ever Ready* batteries and they've got their own advertising bunny, but they are not made in Walthamstow.

Bill Bayliss,
November 2011