

## Northamptonshire Record Office

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Records of Charles Wicksteed & Co. Ltd.,  
Engineers, of  
Stamford Works, Digby Street, Kettering.

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Charles Wicksteed started work at the age of 16, in 1863, as an apprentice to Kitson and Hewetson of Leeds, manufacturers of locomotive engines as well as steam engines and ploughs for a neighbouring firm, John Fowler & Co. At the age of 21, Charles Wicksteed ventured into business on his own, buying his own ploughing tackle and engines with £1,250 borrowed from friends. With these he worked for a few years as a contract plougher on farms and estates in Norfolk before moving to Kettering in 1871.

In 1876 he bought 1½ acres of land by Stamford Road, Kettering and built a small workshop in which to repair his ploughing machines. He also manufactured self-feeding tube expanders and tube benders for his own repairs and for sale. The manufacture of bicycles was another sideline.

The business became a Limited Company in 1907 and the works were extended by the construction of a new workshop especially for the manufacture of Charles Wicksteed's patent invention, a change speed gearbox for motor cars. However, this invention was not a success because it necessitated a major alteration of the car pattern to suit the gearbox. Charles Wicksteed then turned to the manufacture of other things, notably a new power hacksaw and with Wallis Bros. of Kettering, wooden toys and cameras. During the First World War the toyshop was used for the manufacture of shells, employing girls who slept in a special dormitory built beneath the present office block.

In January 1914, Charles Wicksteed purchased the first part of the land upon which Wicksteed Park was later sited, erecting the first set of swings for a Sunday School treat, using heating pipes from the engineering workshop. The Company then began the manufacture of the children's playground equipment for which they are famous today, to become the largest manufacturers of this equipment in Europe. The Park was connected with the Wicksteed family until the death of Charles Wicksteed in 1931, when it came under the control of the local village trust. The engineering business passed into the hands of Charles Wicksteed's sons upon his death.

During World War II, Wicksteed and Co. Ltd. manufactured sawing machines, boiler tools, machine vice and a machine for slicing and buttering bread. The production of these items was continued after the War, along with the playground equipment.

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Records of Charles Wicksteed & Co. Ltd.

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In 1960 the Company became part of the Group of Dorada Holdings Ltd. and many of the manufacturing methods of the Company were then updated and new products were produced, for example, parts for the Taylor Stoker, used in power stations before oil fired stokers were used. The acquisition by the Company of the Sound Engineering Co. of Rushden brought in new sub-contract work and the manufacture of aircraft rudder bars.

Today half of the Company's output is in playground equipment and the other half in machine tools.

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Charles Wicksteed & Co. Ltd.

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|---|---|------|
| 1 | *Pattern Book:<br>Designs, measurements, costs and materials of machines and machine parts designed or manufactured by Charles Wicksteed.<br>(donated by Mr. R. Wicksteed of Spiro Engineering Ltd. of Kettering) | 1894 |
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| 2  | Attendance Book of Directors Meetings.   | 1937-1963        |
| 3  | Minute Books of Directors Meetings.  | 1938-current     |
| 4  | *Article on the building of Charles Wicksteed's foundry at Stamford Road, Kettering from W.T. Pike & Co., 1912 Edition of KETTERING.<br>(xerox copy obtained for the Record Office)                                      | 1912             |
| 5  | *Advertisement for bicycle made by Charles Wicksteed & Co. Ltd. from Evening Telegraph.<br>(xerox copy obtained for the Record Office)   | April 13th. 1899 |
| 6  | *Letter from W.B. Rodger, Poole to M. Downham of Charles Wicksteed & Co. Ltd. re the loan of a camera, manufactured by Charles Wicksteed & Co. Ltd. before 1914-1918 war.<br>(xerox copy obtained for the Record Office) | 3rd. Feb 1976    |
| 7  | *A history of Charles Wicksteed & Co. Ltd.<br>"The First 100 Years 1876-1976", by M. Downham.<br>(xerox copy obtained for the Record Office)   | 1876-1976        |
| 8  | Book: "Charles Wicksteed, The Man", by Hilda Wicksteed.  | -                |
| 9  | Photograph of the manufacture of wooden toy trains in the workshop of Charles Wicksteed and Wallis Bros.<br>(2 copies)   | c.1912           |
| 10 | Photograph of wooden toy trains manufactured by Charles Wicksteed Ltd. and Wallis Bros.<br>(2 copies)  | c.1912           |
| 11 | The workshop of Charles Wicksteed Ltd. and Wallis Bros., Stamford Road, Kettering.<br>(2 copies)   | c.1912           |