

The British Thomson Houston company was formed in 1896, though its roots date back some ten years earlier. Manufacturing in the UK started in Rugby in March 1902 with a factory of 206,000 sq. ft. The plant produced its first turbo-alternator in 1905 and in 1907 BTH engaged in a joint venture with Wolseley Motors to construct petrol-electric buses. 1909 saw the Company involved in providing electrical equipment for the first trolley buses in London.

From day one, the company was connected with the manufacture of incandescent lamps. In 1911 they obtained all the GE patents for drawn-wire tungsten filaments and the Mazda trade mark. Leading up to the Second World War, BTH was heavily involved in jet engine design and when the war began it manufactured magnetos, compressors, switchgear and was involved in the development of radar. On the 1st January 1960 BTH and Metropolitan Vickers were merged into AEI (Associated Electrical Industries Limited) and the BTH and MV names were lost forever in the world of electrical engineering.

The American-owned firm British Westinghouse was responsible for the formation of Metropolitan-Vickers. MV was established in 1899 and located in Trafford Park, Manchester. This was an industrial area that became the focal point of many of MV's activities. Metrovick was particularly successful in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand and, in 1922 alone, provided £1 million worth of railway traction equipment to South Africa.

The 1920s was a period of considerable development for Metrovick with technical advances in the manufacture of turbines, generators, switchgear and industrial motors. MV merged with British Thomson Houston (BTH) in 1928 but shortly afterwards the new company was amalgamated into AEI and this resulted in a long history of rivalry between the two firms.

The rivalry between MV and BTH continued until January 1st, 1960 when both names were discontinued in favour of the sole name of AEI. This was a move that was resented by many employees who persisted in using the MV name.

AEI was formed in 1929 and was initially a financial holding company for a number of leading electrical manufacturing and trading companies in the United Kingdom. These included British Thomson-Houston, Metropolitan-Vickers, Edison Swann and Ferguson Pailin. As the diversity and extent of AEI's products expanded, the Company was joined by Sunvic Controls (1949), Birlec (1954), Siemens Brothers (1955), W.T. Henley (1958) and London Electric Wire Company & Smiths (1958). In 1959 AEI became a trading company and the AEI symbol began to replace most of the brand names and trademarks of companies within the group.

The loss of the MV, BTH, Ediswan and Siemens names caused the business to suffer. In 1967, the General Electric Company's Arnold Weinstock and the Chairman of the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation, Ronnie Grierson, proposed an instant solution to the company's problems. This was to culminate in the historic £120 million bid by GEC for AEI, resulting in a merger in November 1967.

GEC originated from G Binswanger and Company, an electrical goods wholesaler established in London during the 1880s though the roots of GEC's subsequent acquisitions go back much further - the earliest known originating before 1670. In 1886 the company changed its name to The General Electric Apparatus Company and this date is regarded as the real start of GEC.

In 1967, GEC acquired AEI and in 1968 merged with English Electric, incorporating Elliott Bros., The Marconi Company, Ruston and Hornsby, Stephenson, Hawthorn & Vulcan Foundry, Willans and Robinson and Dick Kerr.