After a great deal of work at Canley, which also included dabbling with the Dubonnet system later adapted by Vauxhall, Standard settled on a system identical in concept, and very similar in detail.

Alford & Alder supplied all the components of this new front suspension, which was not only good business for it, but also cemented a relationship with Standard that would – many years hence – result in it becoming a wholly-owned subsidiary of the company!

Amazingly, at this time Standard also found time to upgrade its Flying Ten/Flying Twelve models, giving them new conventional chassis frames (instead of the early-type wasp-waisted layout), and transverse-leaf spring independent suspensions, though the old-type beam-axle chassis’ version was listed for a time [I suspect to help move old stock, both of cars in dealerships, and in the factory itself].

All cars, from the Flying Eight to the Flying Twenty, now came with a modified ‘Touring’ notchback type of rear end body style as standard (and with six side windows on the four-door cars). No major mechanical changes were made to the Nine, Fourteen and Twenty models. We now know that Standard was already planning a new-generation Flying Nine, and was considering dropping the Twenty completely (for sales were very restricted).

Even so, and in spite of the major expense incurred in launching the Flying Eight, at the end of 1938 the company was able to announce post-tax profits of £167,154.

**Enterprise**

It was at about this time, in 1938, that a young man called David Eley came to work with Lewis Dawtrey in Standard’s Technical Office, and his later reminiscences tell us a lot about the company’s enterprise at this time and during the War years:

“He was really very bright, and a nice man, too. He was a very good mentor, who taught us a lot ... He was a gentleman ...”

In later years, when technical director Ted Grinham retired, there were those who thought that Dawtrey should have got that job – but as he was much more at home as an engineer, a ‘boffin’ even, than in running a department, Harry Webster was preferred instead. It was under Harry that the last Standards, and many of Triumph’s most famous cars were designed in the 1950s and 1960s, though Lewis Dawtrey remained as his valued ‘behind the scenes’ advisor and friend for many years.

“There were no computers,” Eley recalls, “or adding
little warning of the move, but it seems that the government was closely involved, and since Standard was already hoping to work on the Mosquito project, there seemed to be little point in complaining.

Even so, since ‘elephants’ (and John Black) never seemed to forget, some rancour would be stored away, and used in the early 1950s. Incidentally, when Ted Grinham returned to Standard in October 1945, to be re-appointed as Technical Director, the Board meeting noted that he was: ‘... entering into the undertaking that he will immediately resign from this office if called upon to do so ...’ This gives an idea of how ‘Stalinist’ the company became when Sir John Black was at the height of his powers.

Meantime, the Bristol Beaufighter aircraft assembly contract was finally secured, and would come to dominate the halls at Canley. Standard would eventually build 3000 fuselages (of the total global production of 5928), along with the making of much of the rest of the aircraft, before the kits were sent off to Ansty airfield for final assembly, flight-test and delivery. This aeroplane was a formidable piece of engineering. Designed in Bristol in 1938, effectively as a lineal descendant of the Beaufort, and the even earlier Blenheim, this twin-Hercules-engined craft first flew in July 1939.

First as a night fighter, then as a rugged, multi-purpose, fighter-bomber, then as a torpedo carrier and a ground attack machine, and with some Marks produced with Merlin engines, this 320mph craft proved to be utterly vital to Allied operations in Africa, Italy and the Far East. Built to conventional (by current aircraft technology, that is) design standards, it featured an all-monocoque fuselage, and a smooth light-alloy skin, with large amounts of tubing used in mounting and supporting the under-carriage and engine assemblies.

Standard, need I point out, revelled in making the most of this new technology, and would use both the expertise, and the tooling acquired, when designing the original postwar Triumphs which followed (see chapter 7). The very first Standard-built Beaufighter was built even before the Oxford contract came to end, but as the trainer programme ended, Beaufighter assembly built up smoothly and would continue until 1945. At its peak, at least 20 fuselages were being completed every working week.

Then came the excitement of participation in the Mosquito programme. Every aviation enthusiast, I am sure, knows that this was technically a very different machine from almost everything else in the world at the time, for its structure, and much of the skin surfaces, was mainly built

Although the Beaufighter was a totally different type of product from family cars, Standard coped admirably, and produced hundreds for the war effort.

MOSQUITO AIRCRAFT

Although Standard had no influence on the actual design of the world-famous De Havilland Mosquito aircraft, during World War Two it assembled no fewer than 800 examples at Canley (and Ansty, an airfield near to Coventry), and 266 at a factory in Luton nominally owned by Percival Aircraft.

Often nicknamed, affectionately, as ‘The Wooden Wonder,’ the structure of the Mosquito was built mainly from wood, which made it very light. Power was by two Rolls-Royce Merlin V12 engines, originally of 1460hp, but later models had up to 1635hp.

Mosquitos were produced on several sites from 1941, and a grand total of 7781 were completed before assembly closed down in 1950. At Standard, Mosquito assembly covered 1943 to 1945 and covered the Mk VI fighter-bomber variety, which eventually proved to be the most numerous Mosquito of all.
new-generation Flying Ten had been cancelled and scrapped during the War.

None of those ‘missing’ models would ever re-appear. Even as early as 1941, in fact, the company had decided that it would re-enter the civil market with just two of its existing cars – the Eight and the Twelve. A year later, in the summer of 1942, engineers had visited Fisher & Ludlow and Pressed Steel to survey the state of the existing body tooling for these cars (which had been put into ‘safe storage’ for the duration. There had been ‘certain losses due to enemy action’ at F&L, a report concluded, while Twelve tooling was in satisfactory condition – which was encouraging. This meant that production of postwar cars could re-start as soon as supplies were available. Not only that, but such a postwar range could make do with a mere two chassis, two side-valve engine families – and would share a single gearbox.

With a huge pent-up demand for new cars, Standard could not be labelled complacent about this limited range, as it seemed that it really could sell just as many cars as it

Before the end of 1945, Standard had put the Flying Twelve/Fourteen models back into production, though without the ‘Flying’ title – this one being a Fourteen.
This, though, was not the end of Standard’s involvement, for when the time came for the BRM’s design to be settled, and a shape prepared to wrap over the complex machinery, Raymond Mays persuaded Sir John Black to have his Chief Body Engineer, Walter Belgrove, do that job. Belgrove, the rather ‘chippy’ artist/engineer who had been with Triumph in the 1930s, enjoyed this task. And so he should, because his previous major task had been to style the first of the Standard Vanguards, and his next would be to shape the unhappy Triumph TRX sports car, and a stillborn proposal for a ‘Vanguard Phase II,’ which bore a resemblance to it.

The original BRM style, first featured in a small-scale model used in publicity pictures in 1948, looked gorgeous, but there was one major deficiency, which had to be rectified as soon as a car took to the racetrack. Through no fault of Belgrove’s – after all, he had never before worked on a powerful single-seater race car – there was no provision for channelling hot air out of the engine bay, and no cooling vents in the bonnet. These duly appeared, on the car, in the first year ...

In the traumatic years that followed, Standard was an active supporter of the BRM project, not only financially, but by loaning the company several Standard Vanguard cars for various transport purposes. Even as late as 1952, new engine castings were still being machined at Standard, but this was almost the end.

Although Standard donated a further £10,000 to BRM in January 1952, at the same time it warned that no new machining work would be carried out when the current engine ‘sets’ had been completed.

Other suppliers and sponsors obviously felt the same, for shortly the project came close to financial and sporting collapse. At the end of that year, the entire BRM project was sold off to Rubery Owen, and Standard’s involvement came to an end.
The SC engine started life with 30bhp at 803cc, but eventually produced up to 109bhp from 1147cc for racing purposes. This was Bill Bradley’s Works-maintained Spitfire of 1965.

1953. It was only after this, that testing of the up-market derivative, the Ten could begin.

Incidentally, when the new SC was originally, and officially, mentioned at Board level in May 1953, the point was made that they were to be marketed without ‘Standard’ badges – as the ‘Beaver Eight’ and ‘Beaver Ten’ – but this rather bizarre suggestion was speedily abandoned.

The new car would have an entirely new four-door platform – though for cost-saving reasons there would be no separate boot-lid access on the Eight – running on an 84in wheelbase. Two-door types were considered but not produced, while vans and estate cars were held over until the saloons had made their mark. Mechanically, everything, but everything, in the running gear, was new – new engine, new gearbox, new axle, and new suspension.

It was the trim and fittings of the Eight – or, rather, the lack of them, which caused most discussion, and dissension, at first. Because Sir John was determined to put the car on the market at a price undercutting its major rivals, the trim was skeletal, features such as wind-up windows were absent, and equipment was stark, to say the least. Sliding door window panes (as later seen in Minis) were standard, the rear seats had to be somersaulted forward to gain access to

This was the original, very basically equipped, Standard Eight of 1953, with an 803cc engine, but with no separate boot access, no wheel covers, and with sliding window glass to save money. Sir John Black nicknamed it the ‘Belsen Line,’ which was in poor taste, but everyone could see why ...