

1966 to 1991[[edit](#)]

At the end of April 1965 the recently elected [Labour government](#) published a [White Paper](#) proposing the nationalisation of 90 per cent, by output, of Britain's steel industry.^[20] GKN Steel was transferred to public ownership at the end of July 1967.^[21]

Driveline[[edit](#)]

Beginning a programme of diversification into the automotive field in 1966 GKN bought BRD's much larger competitor, Birfield Ltd,^{[22][23]} which held the great bulk of the British market for CVJs, constant velocity joints, and was a company that since 1938 had incorporated both the [Sheffield](#) based [Laycock Engineering](#) later best known as a postwar [overdrive](#) manufacturer, and [Hardy Spicer](#) Limited of [Birmingham](#), England, also a manufacturer of [constant-velocity joints](#).^[16] Historically, such joints had few applications, even following the improved design proposed by [Alfred H. Rzeppa](#) in 1936. However, in 1959, [Alec Issigonis](#) had developed the revolutionary [Mini](#) motor car that relied on the Hardy Spicer joints for its [front wheel drive](#) technology. The massive expansion in the exploitation of front wheel drive in the 1970s and 1980s led to the acquisition of other similar businesses and a 43% share of the world market by 2002.^[7]

On the death of founder Tony Vandervell in 1967, GKN acquired the lucrative [Maidenhead](#)-based [Vandervell](#) bearing manufacturer that was at the time already exporting more than 50% of its output to overseas vehicle manufacturers.^[16] This was part of a larger trend for GKN that during this period, under its Managing Director [Raymond Brookes](#), was working to reduce its dependence on UK auto-maker customers at a time when the domestic industry was seen to be stumbling, in response to bewildering "Government interference and fiscal short-sightedness", with British new car registrations in the first four months of 1969 a massive 33% down on the corresponding period of the previous year.^[16]

As a result of the large number of mergers, [Abram Games](#) was commissioned to develop a new [corporate identity](#) in 1969 when the distinctive angular GKN symbol was created and the new company colours of blue and white introduced.^[24] In 1974, GKN acquired [Kirkstall Forge Engineering](#), a manufacturer of truck axles in [Leeds](#).^[25]

GKN Steel[[edit](#)]

By 1968, GKN Steel had recreated its downline business, and then started to build its upline business through aggressive building of a steel stockholding business. In 1972 it acquired Firth Cleveland, a hot and cold rolled strip business with a downline in sintered products, reinforcement steels, wire fasteners and garage equipment. In 1973 it exchanged the remaining assets at Dowlais along with £30 million in cash to the nationalised [British Steel Corporation](#),^[26] in return for the previously nationalised [Brymbo Steelworks](#).^[27] After acquiring steel stockholding competitor Miles Druce and Co, by 1974 the company had created a full integrated steel production and manufacturing business.^[28]

However, by the late 1980s, with extensive Japanese competition in both the axle and constant velocity joint business, the company started selling off its steel and fasteners businesses. By 1991, it had disposed of all of the assets within these two business lines. This included the closure of its [Bilston](#) factory in the [West Midlands](#) in 1989. The factory buildings were demolished soon after, but the offices (built in the late 1950s) were not demolished until 1995.^[29]

1991-present[[edit](#)]

Having disposed of its steel production asset, in 1986 the company renamed itself GKN, focused then solely on military vehicles, [aerospace](#) and industrial services.^[30] In 1994 it acquired the [helicopter](#) manufacturing business of [Westland Aircraft](#).^[7] In 1998 the armoured vehicle business was sold to [Alvis plc](#),^[7] and subsequently incorporated into [Alvis Vickers Ltd](#). In July 2000 [Finmeccanica](#) and GKN agreed to merge their respective helicopter subsidiaries to form [AgustaWestland](#).^[7] In 2004 GKN completed the sale of its 50% shareholding in [AgustaWestland](#) to [Finmeccanica](#).^[7]

In November 1995 associate [Dana Corporation](#) bought GKN's axle group. At that time GKN held 34 per cent of the world market for constant velocity joints.^[31] At the same time GKN took larger shares of its other driveline joint ventures with Dana in Brazil, Argentina and Colombia.^[32] From the late 1990s, the company built a major global business in [powder metallurgy](#), which operates as the GKN Powdered Metallurgy group.^[7]

In 2002 GKN acquired a significant stake in - and by 2004 took over the whole concern of - the Japanese manufacturer of differentials and driveline torque systems Tochigi Fuji Sangyo K.K, based in Tochigi-shi, prefecture Tochigi.^[33] GKN went on to acquire Monitor Aerospace Corp in [Amityville, New York](#) and Precision Machining in [Wellington, Kansas](#) in 2006,^[34] part of the [Airbus](#) plant at [Filton](#) near [Bristol](#) for £150 million in 2008^[35] and all of [Getrag](#)'s axle business and axle manufacturing facilities in 2011.^[36]

In 2011 GKN Aerospace Engineering services division was acquired by QuestGlobal.^[37] In July 2012 GKN agreed to acquire the Swedish aerospace components manufacturer [Volvo Aero](#) from [AB Volvo](#) for £633 million (US\$986 million).^{[38][39]} Following [Kevin Smith](#)'s retirement at the end of 2011, [Nigel Stein](#) took over as Chief Executive on 1 January 2012.^[40] In 2015 GKN acquired Dutch aerospace company [Fokker Technologies](#), headquartered in [Papendrecht](#), the Netherlands.^[41]

In January 2018 [Melrose Industries](#) made a [hostile bid](#) for the company valuing it at £8 billion;^[42] the bid was accepted by the shareholders of GKN on 29 March 2018.^[43] The bid however was not welcomed by GKN workers and unions who expressed concern over long term projects which could be affected, fearing new owners may only look at short term projects and the possibility of asset stripping.^[44] In support of this thinking, UK business secretary [Greg Clark](#) said he would review Melrose's possible acquisition of GKN on public interest grounds, as he strongly defended the UK government's approach to the takeover bid.^[44]