

It also allowed for the introduction of manufacturing systems that took advantage of these components. In 1803, collaboration between Marc Isambard Brunel and Maudslay led to the principles of modern mass production being introduced at Portsmouth dockyard. The use of block making machinery replaced the craft of custom made pulley blocks, an essential component in the rigging of Naval ships. A total of 45 machines enabled a magnitude of order increase in productivity with highly standardised outputs. This system of manufacture helped changed ship making itself. The practices subsequently spread throughout industries leading to what became known as the Armory Method and later the American System of manufacturing.

Things not only evolved from novel to commonplace enabling new things to appear but they also allowed for new forms of practice and organisation. Throughout our history, it has always been standardisation of components that has enabled creations of greater complexity. We are always standing on the shoulders of past giants, of past innovations, of past wonders that have become commonplace units. Without such well-defined mechanical or electrical components then our world would be a less technologically rich place — no Internet, no generators, no TV, no computers, no light bulbs and no toasters.

Why toasters?

In 2009, the designer Thomas Thwaites exhibited his attempt to build a common household toaster from scratch at the Royal College of Arts. Beginning with mining the raw materials he aimed to create a product