



SHELVOKE & DREWRY ENTHUSIASTS' CLUB NEWSLETTER

Volume 2. Issue No. 40.

Winter 2020.

From the Editor.

We've another bumper six page issue for you again. The series about SD Freighter for Commercial use continues and Barrie Woods has written the first of a series of articles with his memories of working as a Demonstrator Driver. I felt that SD Enthusiasts deserved a more accurate account of the Welfreighter submersible than that provided by Malcolm Bates in Volume 11 of the Vintage Roadscene Archive series, so I asked Tom Colville to write for us. Tom has spent many years carrying out research into the craft and has been saddened at the amount of false information that is circulating. Plus the usual new items etc.

Brian Carpenter Editor 1st December 2020.



When Malcolm Bates sent this photo to me I contacted Roger Morrisroe who wrote to me:- "By coincidence I have this photo with details on the back. From Left to Right:- Jack Mason, the machine shop foreman, George Hopper, Charlie Cornish, the drilling section foreman, and Arthur Chapman the machine shop general foreman. It's dated 1954. My daughter's partner's grandfather was Jack Mason. The shield is the Inter Dept. Bowls trophy, obviously won by the machine shop." Harry Shelvoke is presenting the shield.

The late Peter Shuttlewood sent me this photo of a bowls match.

As well as SD's Inter-Departmental Bowls Competition there was a flourishing Letchworth Inter-Works Bowls Competition throughout the Summer months.



THE WELFREIGHTER.

By Tom Colville.



SD Staff pose in front of a completed Welfreighter.

The Welfreighter concept was developed by the Special Operations Executive during 1942- 43 and put into full production during 1944. .

A former hotel - The Frythe near Welwyn - had been requisitioned for special purposes. Here within a top secret military exclusion zone - designated Station IX - a complete engineering facility was established. Bright engineers and craftsmen were recruited. Many received orders to report there, straight from university. They worked alongside craftsmen with advanced skills who were conscripted direct from within industry. Perfect workshop and design facilities were put in place in which almost any device for which Special Operation Command identified a need could be created. Products could be designed from scratch. Parts fabricated in any material, run through prototype stages, field testing, modified as required, and then put into full production. The list of top secret products developed at the Frythe, for use by Special Forces over those 5 years, became enormous. A number of these products received the prefix 'Wel'. Within the lists of items, developed at the Frythe, will be found welrod, welgun, welbike, welman and also the welfreighter.

The task of preparing the first prototype Welfreighter was entrusted to ISRB (SOE) station IX in late 1942.

A requirement had been identified for a covert method by which stores for resistance groups, agents and raiding parties could be landed on hostile coasts. There was also a need for any delivery vessel to remain concealed near to a landing area, so it might conduct detailed surveys or return later to recover agents or small sabotage parties and bring them to safety. This task was considered to be something which had become impossible for larger submersibles or surface craft to do. In particular the risk to

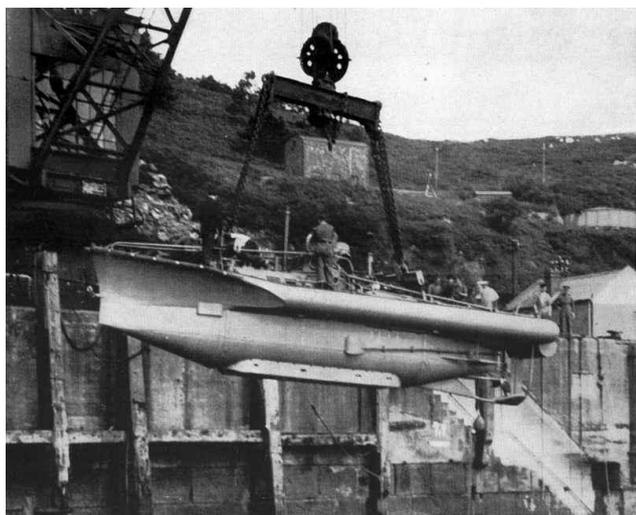
crews of fleet Submarines when near the coast was judged to be too great.

The initial prototype Welfreighter was a very strange "beast" indeed. Shaped more like a giant fish or whale it could carry a crew of 4, and transport up to 1 ton of stores. However the first trials at Staines proved it was a poor design. It lacked the specified performance. The problem of how to unload the stores in the dark off a hostile shore was never resolved. Further work took place. An altogether new design was drawn up by the teams under Lt Col (WS) John Dolphin at the Frythe. The second prototype more closely resembled a fast motor boat, 37 ft long. It had a diesel main engine and could be driven by electric motors when submerged. It could dive to over 60 feet. A permanent crew of two could transport 2 agents. The rear deck was open, and within it 6 cylindrical containers with up to one ton of stores could be carried. These containers were filled so as to have neutral buoyancy. The deck had a "tailgate" so the loaded containers could be rolled free. A swimmer or the collapsible dinghy or folbot canoe could then tow them ashore.

This second prototype was put through extensive testing. After further development and the addition of specialised secret equipment it gained official sanction. A number were authorised to be built for wider evaluation. Gearing up for full scale production of a vessel this size was beyond the remit of the workshops at the Frythe. The nearby firm of Shelvoke and Drewry in Letchworth were approached. Within a sealed off section of the factory this highly classified vessel was to be produced, under technical oversight of special service Naval Officers from the Frythe nearby. Workers engaged in war work within the larger factory would need to have no knowledge of the purpose of any unusual component they were asked to fabricate. Only a select team at S&D would ever have full knowledge.

It is not necessary here to go into greater detail concerning the exact specification or nature of the craft or its appearance. Many "battles" were fought with Royal Naval designers at the Admiralty who considered that Civilian engineers, even those working for SOE (which they also disapproved of) had no business "meddling" in areas of naval capability! It took many months of proving trials, additional modification, fresh training and testing at a new facility at Fishguard before grudging acceptance was awarded to the project. The concession from SOE was that operational command of the craft would always involve fully trained naval Officers. Many were reassigned for evaluation and special training for this hazardous new role. Not many who were deployed to Fishguard for evaluation were considered suitable for special "Commando" trained employment of this sort.

that operational area in time to be put to work. The Atomic bombs were dropped just a few days later in August while the WF teams were sailing north to the Halmaheras. The bombs, of course, led to the unexpected and complete Japanese surrender.



Lifting a Welfreighter at Fishguard.

The factory at Letchworth continued to produce and build in improvements required on each craft. Eventually a build rate of 3 a month was being achieved, right through 1944 into 1945. An order for 40 craft had been placed. Meanwhile in Europe Allies were on the advance. Things were moving so fast, use of the Welfreighter behind enemy lines in any theatre was no longer likely. The number of ordered WF was reduced.

Two teams of operational and maintenance personnel and Two Welfreighters - numbers 3 and 4 - were sent to Australia in late 1944 for testing and training in tropical conditions. On arrival in Freemantle in January 1945 they were taken to Garden Island just offshore, where a covert Services Reconnaissance Department (SRD) commando training base had been established. Special Operations Australia had a role to conduct coastwatch, intelligence gathering, and agent resupply missions throughout the Dutch East Indies and SW Pacific region north of Australia.

The Welfreighter might have proved very valuable. Fresh trials took place - a long distance evaluation was conducted in sub tropical waters using WF 4. A 10 day voyage took place under escort of an SRD covert pearling lugger between Broome and Darwin. This highlighted many equipment and camouflage shortcomings which were being resolved. In the final days of July '45 the WF teams were to move north to Morotai nearer the Japanese mainland. A mothership had been requisitioned - an Italian trawler - specially deployed to the Far East. This had been fitted out as a covert forward base workshop for the craft.

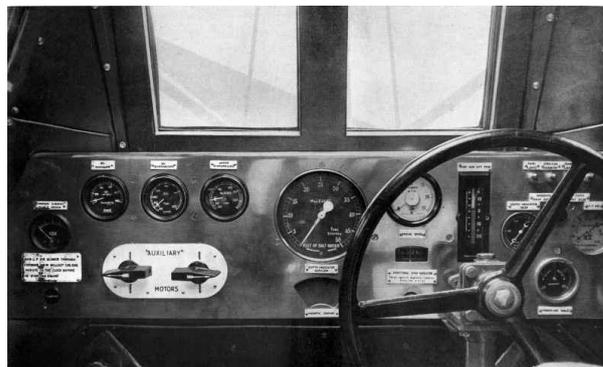
In late July 1945, 6 more Welfreighters were being transported to East for use in that final campaign. They were to operate, perhaps, from the forward SRD base at Morotai. None reached



A Welfreighter at sea off the Australian coast.

It is claimed, today, that US Naval commanders would never have approved use of these covert British craft anywhere in the SWPAC region. But the historical record cannot presume that with any certainty. The campaign against Japan might have taken years had the A bombs not been created.

It remains unclear what became of the remaining craft so skilfully constructed by teams at S&D. The mystery surrounding the fate of them remains to taunt researchers. The one final craft which remained at the factory was displayed in Letchworth that November. Another 19 craft, said to have been complete in storage in west London, vanished. Then a cloak of secrecy descended again. Any Admiralty papers that relate to dispersal and disposal have still not emerged from known archives anywhere. Today several navies around the world have an extraordinary SEAL capability that is recognisable from the proposal for the designs of this first prototype - the Welfreighter - built by the highly skilled wartime workforce at S&D.



In the conning tower.

Copyright Tom Colville. August 2020.

We are greatly indebted to Tom Colville for this comprehensive account of the Welfreighter which he has written for our benefit. All too often inaccurate statements have been made about the craft and the part played by Shelvoke & Drewry in its manufacture. Tom's father was involved in the trials based at Garden Island and over many years Tom has carried out detailed research into the Welfreighter.

SD FREIGHTERS FOR COMMERCIAL WORK.

Part 7. Cable Drum Equipment.

This part of the series based on a photo copy of a brochure, believed to be from around 1926, features the chassis adapted as a cable drum carrier and as previously there are additions to the text which are shown in italics. The photos is also an addition although a similar photo appears later in the brochure.



Standard cable drum lorry. Complete with winches and drum chocks. 12 ft. X 6 ft. X 2ft. Load 3 tons
Price ; £690 4s. 0d. *Photo similar to brochure.*

The low loading level is of peculiar advantage when carrying a heavy cable drum of large diameter, and, with a view to increasing still further the stability of the load, we use our standard wide rear axle, which has a track of 5ft. 2ins.

For this model a four-ton frame load chassis is used, and the body is especially designed for this service. The rear end of the chassis frame slopes downwards, and permits the body being built so that the tailboard forms a direct extension of it, making a convenient ramp. This tailboard can be lifted by one man.

Two winches are fitted at the front end of the body, and these are fitted with friction clutches which prevent the drum from taking charge when it is on the ramp. These winches, which are of our own manufacture, are quite easy to operate, only about 20 lbs. pressure being required at each handle to wind in a three ton drum.

Drum chocks are supplied. These are of special design which allow of fixing the cable drum in position very quickly. In actual practice, five minutes is found sufficient time between the arrival of a Freighter and its departure with drum loaded.

Jacks are also supplied. These are placed under the rear end of the frame when loading to prevent the weight of the drum falling directly on the rear end of the springs.

The winches take up very little room in the body, so that the vehicle, which has a large body space, can also be used for carrying transformers or other electrical plant.

Many of this type of Freighter are in service with the General Post Office, and also numerous electrical companies and municipalities.

Wide Rear Axle. The standard wide rear axle already mentioned is also fitted whenever a high load renders its use advisable to give greater stability. It is also available for special bodies, or special conditions of loading.

The next part (No 8) is the final article in this series.

S&D MEMORIES by BARRIE WOODS PART 1.

Having trained to be a Chef, and held that position in several hotels for a few years, I decided to return to my parent's home in Letchworth and seek more local work. I soon had the job of Second Chef offered me at the Celebrities Health Spa at Henlow Grange a few miles away. Whilst considering this I kept looking longingly outside when every few days a brand new Shelvoke & Drewry refuse vehicle would turn up. My neighbour Martin Atchison was a delivery Driver at S & D and would collect his vehicle from the works, then return home to pick up an overnight bag before proceeding with the delivery which could be anywhere in the country. Martin was a wonderfully affable chap who always had a welcome word in his flowing Welsh accent. We often chatted just before he left for his journey.



'T' type F&A Tipper

In 1969, I was 22 at the time, I expressed a view that I'd always fancied driving heavy goods vehicles. Martin had a few words where it mattered and soon after that I had an interview with Gilbert Finch who ran the Demonstration fleet at S & D. I must have impressed him as he soon took me up to No.2 Factory in Blackhorse Lane in my Triumph Herald, which at the time was the largest vehicle I'd ever driven. At the rear of the factory there were a dozen or so refuse vehicles lined up in herringbone fashion. These were in various states of completion, some ready for delivery, with a couple of Demonstrators among them. Gilbert led me over to one of the demonstrator's, (I later found out it was a TY Pakamatic). Gilbert opened the driver's door and invited me to climb in. As you can imagine compared to a Triumph Herald this was quite some beast, not only that but it was facing the railway line which was some considerable way immediately below me in a cutting. All that separated me from the drop was a chain link fence! Gilbert showed me the controls and said he'd see me back. So there I was in this very noisy refuse vehicle, seemingly perched at the top of an embankment, with my only option being to reverse out! Now where is reverse gear?

We drove around Letchworth for half an hour or so, completing some more reversing around corners, then returned the vehicle to its spot above the railway line. Back in the quietude and sanctity of my Herald, I returned Gilbert to West Works, whereupon he offered me the job!

I reported to him upstairs in the office some days later. Here I was then introduced to Alan Mountney, one of the Demo Drivers, who escorted me down to one of the air-raid shelters located between the works and a high wall which bounded Icknield Way, to meet some of the other drivers. The shelter, as I've mentioned before, was a low flat roofed building about 20 x 10ft with a door at one end and no windows, I immediately noticed the general air of dampness, B.O and stale cigarette smoke - I used to smoke as well in those days - I think there was a desk or two in there and some lockers but not much else other than the general detritus that drivers accumulate during their work, old overalls, wellies, boots, donkey jackets and gloves, as well as some paperwork, I believe there may have been a record book, we never clocked in just filled that in when we were about.

Because of our work schedules it was rare for all drivers to be in the shelter, the exception was on Saturday mornings when most of us would be there for a bit of overtime, come 12 noon it was then off to the local pub. I soon met all the others, I can recall: Billy Cook, Eric Tooley, Jack Hubbard, who was the Chief Demonstrator, Dennis Nelson, Vic Breed. Ernie Harnes, who drove the Artic unit for Fork Truck deliveries in the main, but used to act as company Chauffeur when needs be, Pete Smith,

Mick Edwards and Des Walsh. Plus Gilbert of course, who joined us a few months later, when George Dawson took over from him in the office. Gilbert spent most of his demo work on the Gully Emptier.

Gilbert had instructed Alan Mountney to accompany me on a delivery, (My first!) it was a new Fore & Aft tipper in all over green livery for Helston rural district Council. Helston? I'd never heard of it. Imagine my shock on discovering it was way down in Cornwall just over 300 miles from Letchworth! The following morning I reported to the shelter to find Alan in there, we both had our overnight bags, Alan had procured the necessary paperwork, delivery note, maintenance manual and so on, for the receiving Council and our all-important rail Warrants to return home. We took a van up to No.2 Factory and soon found this gleaming all green vehicle, with the words 'Helston Rural District Council' artistically written on the cab doors, all sign-written by hand of course in those days. After collecting the tool kit which accompanied every new vehicle, a final check over: - fuel, water, oil, lights, wipers, etc. I gingerly started up the engine, a very noisy, vibrating Perkins 4-cylinder, the cab soon smelt of burning paint as the exhaust manifold heated up.

We were away! Maps had been checked, although Alan knew the route pretty well anyway. We headed south and eventually picked up the A 303 west. After an hour or so I was quite enjoying myself and beginning to feel at ease, although the noise was still quite incredible compared to a Triumph Herald! Speed was generally between 25 -30 mph, any faster would stress the new engine and become even noisier! Alan was quietly dozing allowing me to get on with things, however he did wake up with a start when I ran the vehicle on to a grass verge, fortunately I quickly rectified the situation, so no harm done. With a fuel tank which held only 15 Gallons it wasn't too long before replenishment was needed, I think we filled up three times on the journey. The day wore on and we arrived at Wincanton to stay there overnight at The Red Lion in the town centre, having done 145 miles so far. We were up early next morning and back into the vehicle where we continued along the A303. There was no M4 in those days of course. Through Exeter and on to the A30, then after another 165 miles eventually arriving at our destination late that afternoon. Amazingly there were no dents or scratches on the vehicle, so I had done my job.

I believe one of the Council staff took us back to Truro that evening, where we stayed over as it was too late to get back to Letchworth. So we had an enjoyable train journey back to Paddington and onwards to King's Cross and Letchworth. It was quite a steep learning curve, considering I was expecting a short delivery of maybe 30-40 miles as my first trial!

THE EDITOR'S PAGE.

OF SPECIAL INTEREST TO FORMER SD EMPLOYEES.

MIKE PARISH.

We were saddened to learn of the death of Mike Parish on 17th September. Mike came to S&D in 1961 to work as a Records' Clerk in the Drawing Office. At lunchtimes your Editor shared a table with Mike in the Staff Canteen.

Steve Woodward has written:- "Mike started was promoted to be in charge of the technical records department before transferring to the Sales Department and becoming very successful regional salesman covering London and East Anglia.

A well respected gentleman who will be sadly missed by the very many people he was associated with."

Mike was an SD salesman for thirteen years and after 24 years at SD he moved to Glover, Webb & Liversidge and then to Norba before being tasked with setting up the British end for SEMAT.

In 2012 I was delighted to meet up with Mike again along with another SD colleague.

BARNSTAPLE MEMORIES.

The photo of Barrie Woods in our Autumn issue led Colin Humble, former SD Sales Manager for the South Western Region to tell me :- "Barnstaple bought a TN Pakamatic following the demonstration. This replaced a pre-war SD Freighter. The narrow roads had meant that Barnstaple couldn't find anything to beat the Freighter in terms of width until the TN came along."

A MYSTERY PHOTO.



This skip lorry appears to be based on an SD PT chassis. The Registration Number denotes Birmingham 1981/82. It is noticeable that the cab has a low roof as used on fire appliances and not the high roof used on refuse collection vehicles. Roy Rudge posted this photo on Facebook.

HELD OVER MATERIAL.

I had three articles ready to include in this issue that have had to be held over for future use.

Derek Coulson wrote about the years he spent servicing SD vehicles for Stockton Council.

Michael Waldock has written about working for Marshalls of Cambridge in the 1990's preparing vehicles for export to St. Lucia.

And Roger Morrisroe has told us about his experience of SD Freightlifters whilst doing his National Service with the R.A.F.

My apologies to these three correspondents and I'm sure you'll enjoy their memories in future issues of the Newsletter.

SD 100

I hope you've noted Gaydon Saturday 11th June 2022 and Sunday 12th June 2022 for a Grand Display of SD Vehicles to celebrate SD's Centenary.

Details of a celebration in Letchworth will follow in 2021.



To My Readers

With my best wishes

for Christmas

and the New Year



The Shelvoke & Drewry Enthusiasts' Club Newsletter is published four times a year on 1st March, 1st June, 1st September and 1st December. Items for inclusion may be e-mailed to me at: [pinnerboy\[at\]btinternet.com](mailto:pinnerboy[at]btinternet.com)

Next Issue :- 1st March 2021 Spring Issue.