



SHELVOKE & DREWRY ENTHUSIASTS' CLUB

NEWSLETTER EXTRA No. 2.

THE FIRST EIGHT YEARS SPECIAL ISSUE. February 2020.

SHELVOKE & DREWRY LTD., 1922 to 1929.

From the Editor.

I hadn't expected to be publishing another Newsletter Extra so soon after the first one in October 2019. However over the past few weeks Malcolm Easton has been generously sharing with me some of his grandfather's papers, and it seemed to me that these merited a Newsletter of their own. His grandfather was James Drewry co-founder of the company and the driving force behind the invention of the SD Freighter.

In this special edition I am concentrating on the first eight years of S&D.

Brian Carpenter.

Editor 10th February 2020.



Work on constructing Ebenezer Howard's dream of a 'Garden City' at Letchworth commenced in 1903 and the initial factories were built in Works Road which runs parallel to the south of the Hitchin to Cambridge railway line, and Pixmore Avenue which runs from Baldock Road to Works Road. The new factories included the Lacre Motor Co. who moved from Long Acre in 1909 and the Phoenix Motor Co. who arrived in 1910 from Finchley, whilst Heatley Gresham were early arrivals who made bodies for London taxicabs. Outside the Works Road/Pixmore Avenue area, Spirella Ltd., arrived in 1910 and built an impressive corset factory close to Letchworth station in three phases from 1910 to 1920.

James Drewry and Harry Shelvoke left Lacre Ltd. to form their own company in October 1922. The chosen site for their factory was on the north side of Icknield Way, which runs parallel to the north of the railway line, and adjoining Cromwell Road. Across Cromwell Road were the premises of the British Tabulating Machine Company where building commenced in 1920. S&D's initial premises covered 6,600 sq. ft. and employed 30 people. Harry Shelvoke and James Drewry were joint Managing Directors with T.K. Sibbald ex-Leeds Forge and C.T. Barlow as Chairman. Mr. Barlow came from Accles & Pollock and was a financial backer of the enterprise. An early picture of the premises is shown above and it is noticeable that there is simply a field opposite the works.



This is captioned as photo No. 3 and is one of the first Freighters produced.

An article in Motor Transport of May 21st 1923 illustrates an early problem for the company in that they were unable to show the many possibilities for the Freighter until they received orders, and I now know that a series of six sketches were commissioned to show prospective customers the possible body types that could be provided. An example is shown below.



The same magazine article reveals that the first batch of Freighters was expected to be delivered in early July 1923. It is also stated that Deptford Corporation had ordered two Freighters for refuse collection, an indication of the eventual main use that Freighters were to fulfil in future.



It's November 1925 and just three years after S&D was formed Freighter No. 200 has been completed. By comparing with a 1929 photo shown later I have surmised the following names with job titles as in November 1929.

Front row l to r. :- ?, Len Gostling – Machine Shop Foreman, Percy Tomkins – Works Manager, George Shelbourne – Service Manager, ?, Mr. Plowman – Chief Cost Clerk, Mr. Huskisson – Chief Viewer.

Middle row l to r:- ?, ?, Mr. Pratt – Time Keeper, Mr. Tristram – Chief Stores Keeper, ?

Back row l to r:- Mr. Boundy – Sales Manager, James Drewry – Joint M.D., Harry Shelvoke – Joint M.D., ?, ?, ?

It's just four years later – November 1929 and the 1925 photo has been replicated to celebrate Freighter No. 1,000. i.e. an average of 200 per year or roughly 4 per week between 1926 and 1929.

It is recorded that by 1932 the workforce had increased to 350 and the factory had expanded to 40,500 sq. ft. The land available had been increased when the neighbouring Speedwell Press was purchased in 1927.

It is worth noting that the two joint Managing Directors are no longer standing shoulder to shoulder. The people shown as noted by James Drewry are :-



Front row L to R :- Mr. Bloxham – Chief Tester, Mr. Cliff Hackett – Buyer, Mr. Geoffrey Rackham – Director Mr. James Drewry - Managing Director, Mr. Wilkins – Assistant Sales Manager, Mr. Bale – Secretary, Mr. George Shelbourne – Service Manager, Mr. Turner – Sales, Mr. Gaskin – Chief Draughtsman, Mr. Huskinson - Chief viewer [Inspectors were called viewers.]

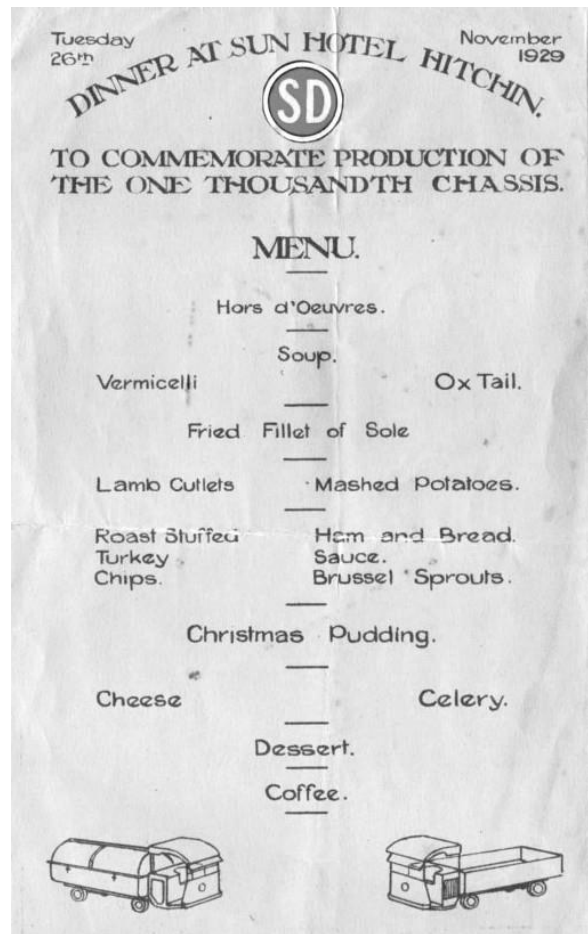
Second row L to R :- Mr. Boundy – Sales Manager, Mr. T.G. Rooker – Midlands Sales, Mr. Doherty – Production Manager, Mr. Hall – Cashier, Mr. Len Gostling - Machine Shop Foreman, Mr. Tristam – Chief Stores Keeper.

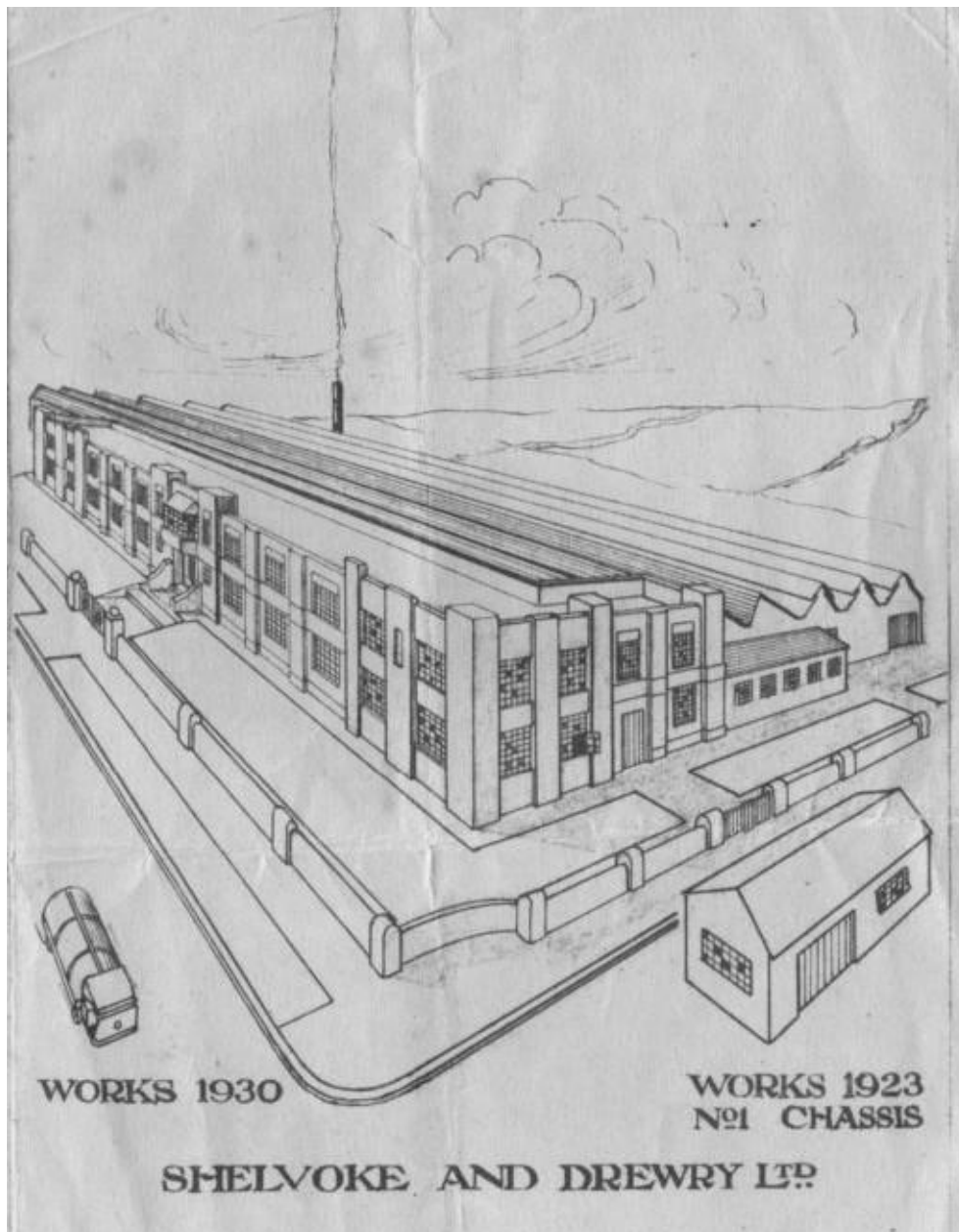
Back row L to R :- Mr. Harry Shelvoke - Managing Director, Mr. Hart – Southern Sales, Mr. Pratt – Time keeper, Mr. List – Works & Buildings, Mr. Plowman – Chief Cost Clerk, Mr. Freeman – Fitting Shop Foreman.

Also to mark this significant event in the company history a dinner was held at the Sun Hotel in Hitchin. On the right we show the menu for Tuesday 26th November 1929.



The Sun hotel today, an impressive 16th century coaching inn, located in Sun Street, Hitchin.





The menu also included this sketch of the Works including a representation of the 1923 factory. Some of the framework to the right in the sketch was re-used from the British Empire Exhibition, a colonial exhibition held at Wembley Park, Wembley, from 23 April 1924 to 31 October 1925. At that exhibition two SD freighter buses were in use ferrying visitors round the large exhibition grounds.

Director T.K. Sibbald died in 1929.

As Directors and employees gathered in celebration they would be totally unaware that the 1930's would bring the great world-wide depression and orders would be hard to come by. It is said that Harry Shelvoke would send Freighters past the Midland Bank in Letchworth one day, re-paint them and send them again, to impress the company's bank how well S&D was doing!

Only a few would have been aware how sour the relationship between the joint Managing Directors had become and in 1935 James Drewry left the company to join Hands Trailers, whose factory was in the former green field opposite the SD factory.

Nor would they suspect that just ten years later Britain would be engaged in a World War once again.



The above aerial view of the Icknield Way works is taken from a 1977 advertisement. Major changes from the 1929 sketch are the extensive West Works in the upper part of the picture and the 1969 new office block to the left of the main offices.

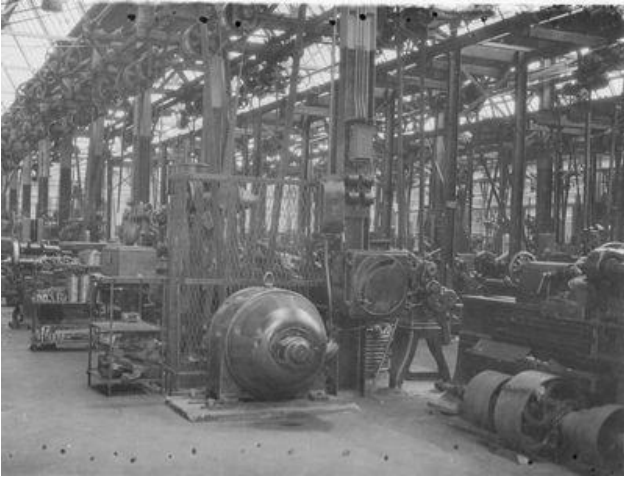
And a final six interior photos from the early days of the works..



The Finish Off Section



The Machine Shop. Note:-
The machines are belt driven from a shared motor.



Another view of the Machine Shop.



A clocking in station is nearest the camera in this view.



On the left of the photo completed axles assembled on the right hand benches



Another view of the sub-assembly benches.

I am indebted to Malcolm Easton for the majority of the information here and also most of the photos. But thanks are also due to Kaleidoscope of Shelvoke & Drewry 1980 by Nick Baldwin & William Negus published by Marshall, Harris and Baldwin Ltd. and Letchworth – The First Garden City By Mervyn Miller 2nd edition published by Phillimore & Co. Ltd. Richard Tomkins supplied information about his great grandfather Percy Tomkins and Tony Drewry, Chris Phillips and Richard Tomkins each supplied a photograph used here.

