



PAUL BASSON, SD Employee 1976 – 1982

In conversation with your Editor.

From time to time as Editor of the Newsletter and Hon. Secretary of the SD Enthusiasts' Club I have the delight of being contacted by a former SD employee for the first time. After 18 years I sometimes think that all former employees will have heard about the SD Enthusiasts' Club, but clearly this is not so.

Paul Basson who contacted me in February was with the company at an interesting time in its history. The historical time line shows that in 1976 the Interpak was introduced and the improvements to the network of Service Depots was completed. 1978 saw a range of SPV's at the NEC at Birmingham and the 'P' series went into production. In 1979 the first fire appliances for the London Fire Brigade are delivered and in 1979 Tom Tillson retires as Chief Engineer, a position he'd held since 1959, to be replaced by Frank Dean. In 1980 Fred Hooson is appointed as Managing Director replacing Stan Quin who had been M.D. since 1969. In 1982 significant redundancies are announced.

Paul posted 23 photos on Facebook and reported on his memories of S&D. Later I was in conversation with him by telephone and email.

Paul was initially employed at the St. Neots fabrication factory as a fork lift truck driver he still has his works driving licence shown below.

Having completed an apprenticeship as a motor vehicle mechanic Paul joined S&D as he knew the manager at St. Neots, Geoff Bridge, since they were both retained fire fighters.

Paul then transferred to the main SD works in Icknield Way, Letchworth to work on the chassis line. Paul remembers that the company had received an order for 100 NY Pakamatics for Hong Kong, who were a long standing customer for S&D. A 1965 newspaper cutting reports on a £69,000 repeat order being obtained. This order was for TY Pakamatics one of which is shown below at work in Hong Kong in a photo sent in by William Bear.

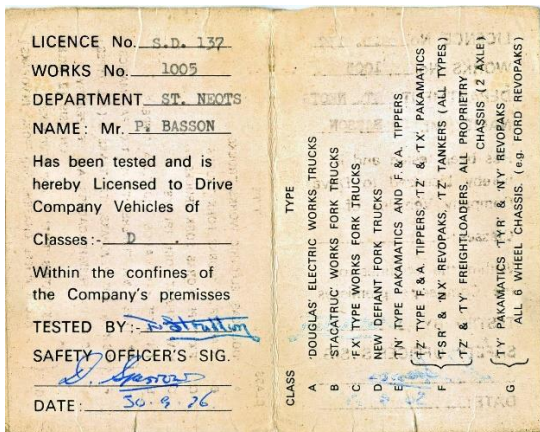
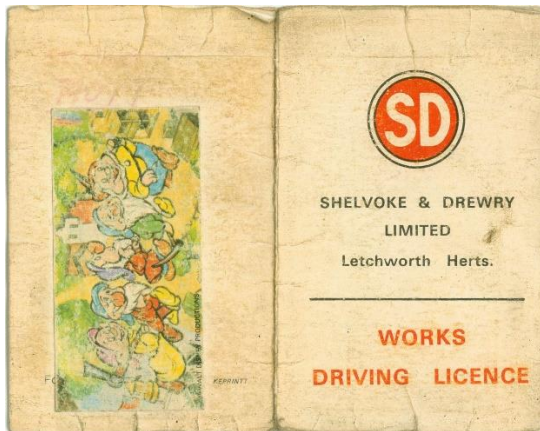


The order that Paul remembers was for NY Pakamatics and included riot shields over their windscreens and air flaps in the roof.

The photo below dates from 1976 and shows Managing Director, Stan Quin, Chief Engineer, Tom Tillson and Export Sales Manager, Tom Hall with a group of NY Revopak destined for Hong Kong.



Paul told me that he heard from a reliable source that Hong Kong would operate the vehicles for 12 months and then sell them on to China at the same purchase price that they had paid. Hence the need of such a large order for vehicles.





Paul then told me he moved on to the Research & Development Department (R&D). Strangely I can not recall anyone previously talking about a R&D Dept. although several have told me of the Experimental Dept. But Paul clearly remembers these two departments as separate entities. Paul sent in three photos taken by a work colleague of one project that he worked on.



These photos show a Fore & Aft tipper body being mounted on a PX chassis, which surprisingly was offered in the 1980 brochure for the 'P' series. The completed vehicle appears to bear the logo of the London Borough of Havering and carries the Reg. No. PBM 720 W denoting Bedfordshire and 1980/81.

I understand that by this time a few F&A's were built but usually as export orders. Paul says that the mechanical interlocking linkages for the subframe and body were replaced by pneumatically operated hydraulic valves on this vehicle.

In 1978 the 'P' series was introduced with the all steel Ogle designed tilt cab. Paul had photos of the prototype Maxipak, an intermittent loader to replace the troublesome Interpak.





He also has a photo of the first short wheelbase narrow PN chassis in semi-finished state.



Naturally having been a retained fire fighter Paul wanted some photos of SD's SPV fire appliances. The appearance of these was considerably improved when a modified 'P' series cab was fitted and the bodywork provided by Cheshire Fire Equipment (CFE) instead of the earlier version of the water tender produced by Carmichael.



And the later version for the London Fire Brigade.



Paul also worked on all the special purpose vehicles (SPV's) for the 1980 Commercial Motor Show at the NEC Birmingham.

In 1974 SD's designs of the Defiant fork lift trucks were sold to Rubery Owen whose range of fork trucks were marketed under

the Conveyancer name. In a letter to me dated 16<sup>th</sup> December 2003 former Managing Director Stan Quin stated that the profit margins on fork lift truck sales were slim, and with the proceeds of the sale and royalties for five years, the cessation of fork truck manufacturing was a sound decision. My personal opinion is that it seems a very strange decision to create a Defiant range of thirteen different sizes and capacities to replace the three models of the Freightlifter. It also seems strange to then create a SPV Division to utilise the resources released by the sale.

I make no claim to be a historian and unfortunately I have little information to assist me in assessing how some interesting decisions were made by the Directors of the Company. I do however have the benefits of hindsight and I have to wonder how much market research was carried out to determine the volume of orders to be obtained for special purpose vehicles such as fire fighting vehicles, military vehicles, four wheel drive vehicles, aircraft loaders, specialised buses etc. which eventually emerged from the company.

In eighteen years of receiving people's memories of working at S&D I have not gained an indication of whether the formation of the SPV Division was greeted with great enthusiasm or was the sadness of losing the fork truck side of the business the overriding feeling at the works? In the letter mentioned above Stan Quin claimed that the production of SPV's was far more profitable than producing fork trucks. Sadly, I think, we'll never know.

But it must have been interesting work producing the vehicles for the 1980 Show. There was a rich variety.



This scissor lift aircraft loader is pictured alongside Concorde. And below a 26 ton GVW 6x6 with Motor Bodies tilt cab.





The next three photos gave me some difficulty in identifying the subject, but I hope I'm about right.



It is obvious from the stepped chassis that this is the chassis for the City truck often referred to as the Brewery truck. The aim was to produce a low loading entry body on a narrow chassis similar to the PNL and later bodywork was fitted by Boalloy. The chassis was first shown at the 1978 Commercial Vehicle Show and this photo may date from that time.



This is the low entry cab chassis for the aircraft loader shown at the 1980 Show.



The third photo may also date from 1978 showing the CR 4x4 rear engine crash tender chassis which later was fitted with bodywork by Chubb Fire.



Far easier to identify is this completed PN Revopak pictured outside the Icknield Way offices whose chassis/cab is shown on Page 3.



Life becomes even easier here. This is Norwich Airport. The photo shows a pair of aircraft crash tenders with bodywork and equipment by Merryweather. They carried Reg. Nos. MPW 220 V and MPW221 V which denotes 1980. MPW 220 V was seconded to the Royal Aerospace Establishment site at Farnborough during the 1992 Farnborough Airshow. By 1997 it was based at Cranfield Airport whilst the other one went to Derry airport.



In action at Norwich Airport.



Here is one of the crash tenders before it left Letchworth.



Paul also recalls a crash tender which went to an airport in Wales. On arrival the fire fighters tested the machine and when brand new managed to roll it over. Paul's brother is a fire fighter at Liverpool airport and when he heard of this incident explained that on airfields the turn from the taxi ways onto the runway is very acute and if taken at speed will cause the water in the tank to rush to one side as the vehicle turns. Baffles are fitted in the water tanks to minimise the effects of the force. His opinion was that the correct baffles had not been fitted to this crash tender

Many of the photos supplied by Paul were taken using an inexpensive camera but give a good indication of the variety of work in which Paul was engaged.

On 1<sup>st</sup> November 1980 Commercial Motor magazine reported that on 14<sup>th</sup> October S&D had made 33 workers redundant. It was a long way from Paul's days on the chassis line when almost unlimited overtime was on offer during production of the Hong Kong contract.

One vehicle that Paul worked on which didn't make his batch of photos was the chassis for the airport bus shown at the 1980 Commercial Vehicle Show. This became the bus shown below.



Sadly in 1982 further redundancies were announced and Paul was one of those to find himself un-employed ending nearly seven years of interesting and enjoyable employment.

I am most grateful to Paul Basson for his interesting account of his employment with S&D.

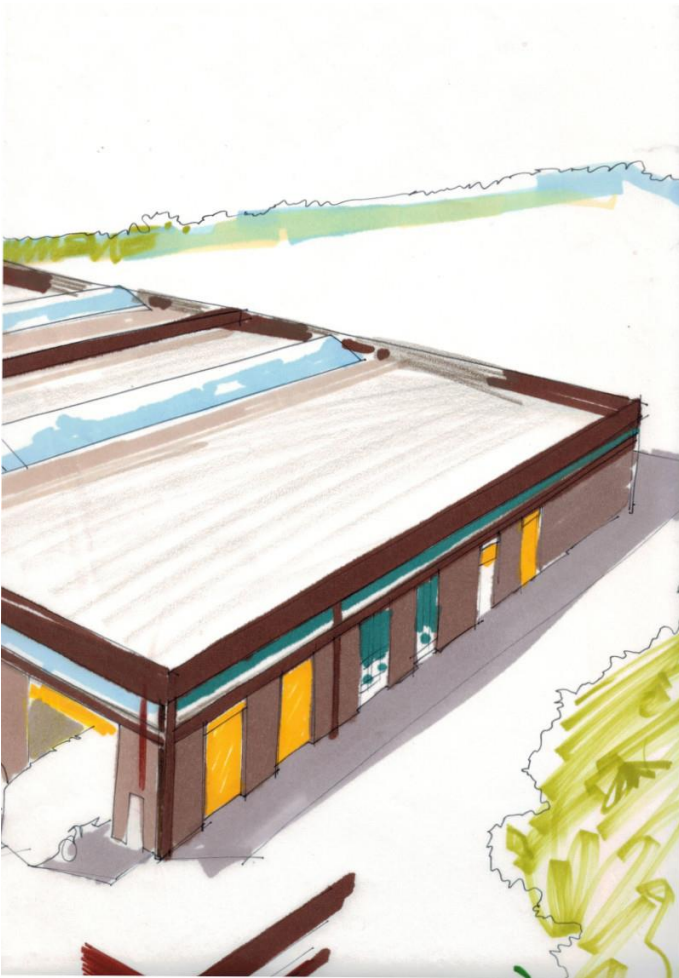
Brian Carpenter – Editor.

## FOOTNOTE.

I thought this photo rather sums up the products of the SPV Division that Paul helped to create.



## THE ST. NEOTS' FACTORY.



Malcolm Bates sent me the two sketches shown above of the St. Neots' Factory that he produced for a corporate brochure that never saw the light of day. Plans were drawn up to double the size of the factory but this didn't materialise.

As indicated above in Paul's account of his time with the Company as early as October 1980 there was signs that all was not well at Letchworth. This was a common experience amongst the U.K. engineering industry at the time and despite the

company coming under American ownership with its purchase by Krug International's Dempster Division in 1983 the company's decline continue until in 1991 the company ceased trading, bringing to an end nearly seventy years of producing high quality vehicles which included the Special Purpose Vehicles remembered in this article.

Brian Carpenter April 2021.

## SECOND FOOTNOTE.



**The SD Vertipak.** I don't know the date for when SD introduced a stationary compactor for compressing refuse at industrial premises or perhaps at blocks of flats. A 7 ½ hp electric motor powered the hydraulic press. A range of bin lifters was introduced at the same time to empty the containers.

An unusual application was to fit a pair of Vertipaks inside the basement of a newly built block of offices or flats in Covent Garden. After the compactors had been built and tested at Letchworth, Paul was one of those chosen to install the Vertipaks. Unfortunately when the installation team arrived in central London they found that the doorway they expected to use had been bricked up, and only a narrow entrance remained. As a result the Vertipaks had to be cut into two parts and welded together on site. A two day job became a fortnight's work! Andy Graves recalls that he worked on the Covent Garden one at Long Acre, and also one in the basement of the Cafe Royal! The hydraulic pump was submerged in the tank, so a rather messy job to change the pump! Dave Thompson, a very accomplished welder from the St. Neots' factory, carried out the welding.