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SULZER BROS. (LONDON) LTD.



A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE SULZER WORKS AT OBERWINTERTHUR

The Swiss firm of Sulzer Brothers Limited, which recently celebrated its 125th anniversary, is an outstanding example of Swiss achievement and expansion in the field of heavy engineering. The International character of the Swiss organisation, with its sister companies, branches and agencies in all parts of the World, has played no small part in this success. Thus, the contribution made by the English Companies since the opening of the first office in London in 1905 with a staff of five, will doubtless be of interest to our readers.

The first recorded delivery of Sulzer machinery to England was in 1876. At that time the Sulzer Steam Engine, with its balanced drop valves and low steam consumption was attracting attention from engineers all over the World, and firms in Great Britain were not slow to recognise the advantages of these prime movers. As a consequence, many substantial orders were received from such well-known concerns as:—

The Charing Cross, West End & City Supply Co. Ltd.

Metropolitan Electric Supply Co. Ltd.
Harland & Wolff Ltd., Belfast
Singer Manufacturing Co. Ltd., Glasgow
D. Davis & Sons, Cardiff (Ferndale Collieries)
etc. etc.

To negotiate this business and give clients the necessary technical assistance, engineers from Switzerland paid periodical visits to Great Britain, but the business grew so rapidly that it became necessary to appoint agents in Glasgow, Newcastle and Swansea.

At the turn of the Century a considerable number of orders was obtained for mine drainage and sinking pumps, and in 1903 the first Sulzer Diesel Engine was installed in this Country.

It then became obvious that an English organisation would have to be established, and in 1905 an office was opened at 30, Norfolk Street, Strand, under the management of Mr. Peter Albertini, who had visited this Country many times in connection with the machinery previously mentioned, and was well known to, and liked by, the clients.

This event can be recorded as marking the commencement of the highly successful business now known as Sulzer Bros. (London) Ltd., although it was not until July 1932 that the Company was incorporated under this title.

Progress was maintained, particularly for Diesel engines, pumps and Uniflow steam engines, which latter were introduced in 1910, having drop valves with flexible seats. These engines had a remarkably low steam consumption and were supplied to Tinplate Works, Textile Mills, Power Stations, Collieries, etc. in considerable numbers.

About this time also the Borehole Pump was developed, the Sulzer shaft protection design contributing largely to its success. Today the longest shaft driven borehole pumps in the World are Sulzer machines; these pumps, each about 600ft. long are installed in Poland and South Wales.

Mr. Albertini died in 1910 and was succeeded by Mr. F. Schubeler, with a staff of four Swiss engineers.

When war broke out in 1914 the London office Swiss staff — then the only technical employees — joined up, but all were released by November, 1915.

In 1914, however, Mr. W. T. Batho, an Englishman and formerly Managing Director of Consolidated Diesel Engine Manufacturers Ltd., joined the Organisation and remained with it until his death in 1934 whilst in South America on business.

In 1919 larger premises in London became necessary. These were obtained at 31, Bedford Square, London, W.C.1, when the lease of this building was purchased from Sir Edwin Lutyens, and remain today the head office of the Company.

September 1931 marked a turning point in the history of the Company. The British Government de-valued Sterling and simultaneously imposed an Import Duty of 20% on machines of the type sold by the firm.

Up to this date all Sulzer machinery had been imported from Switzerland, and the effect of these measures was almost to double prices, making it impossible to sell in competition with British manufacturers.

Faced with this situation, an agreement was entered into, in 1932, with Sir W. G. Armstrong Whitworth & Co. Ltd., of Newcastle, to manufacture Sulzer diesel engines and pumps until suitable Works could be found. This collaboration continued until 1936, when the old-established Works of Hathorn, Davey & Co. Ltd., of Leeds was purchased and modernised, enabling the manufacture of pumps to be undertaken within the Company's own organisation.

The Heating and Ventilating Branch of the firm's activities, which had been so successful on the Continent, commenced operations here in 1921, and in that year an office was opened at No. 7 Bedford Square to deal with this class of work. Several changes of address have been made in the meantime but the Department is now housed in spacious accommodation adjoining New Oxford Street, in keeping with the scale of its present activities.

The success of this Department has been considerable; many important public buildings, in addition to works, offices, theatres, etc. have been heated and ventilated by the firm.

At the end of 1937 Mr. Schubeler retired, and Mr. R. M. Atkinson, who had served for 30 years with Vickers Limited, was appointed Managing Director.

By this time the war clouds, which were to break so disastrously over the World 21 months later, were beginning to form, and it became apparent that industry — in particular the engineering works of Great Britain — would be required to give an all-out effort.

That Sulzer Bros. (London) Ltd., played a full part in the defence of the Country will be obvious from the fact that in addition to their standard products, which were manufactured in numbers never previously envisaged, they made Machine Tools, Bailey and "V" Trestle Bridges, Radar and Artillery Observation Towers, F.I.D.O. equipment, Oil Pipe Lines, Portable Forges, etc. in very large quantities.

Much of this equipment was made at Nottingham where the Company had purchased a small factory better to co-ordinate the activities of this branch. During this period the Leeds factory was working to capacity, and in particular manufactured some thousands of large fire pump units for dealing with fires resulting from air raids. Some of these units were placed on London Bridges to draw water directly from the Thames.

By no means the least important of the firm's activities was the servicing of Sulzer and other makes of heavy oil engines for war and merchant vessels. After the fall of France ships of the Allied Navies had to be speedily serviced and, as many were equipped with Sulzer engines, the Company was able to provide most valuable help. They numbered many hundreds and totalled some 1,500,000 HP.

At the end of the war Sulzer Bros. (London) Ltd., were confronted with the common problem of re-establishment on a peace-time basis. Government contracts ceased, some from other sources were cancelled, and it was some time before industry got back into its stride.

Sulzer decided, therefore, that the time was opportune to develop overseas markets and since 1949, when the Sales Director undertook the first series of visits to Ceylon and Australasia, other members of the Board, in addition to senior technical personnel, have visited overseas territories, and interesting as well as valuable business has resulted. Noteworthy orders are Hydraulic Penstocks for Tully Falls Hydro Electric Scheme (Queensland), 13 Diesel-electric Locomotives — for which Sulzer engines were supplied — 6 large Diesel driven Alternator Sets for the State Electricity Commission of Victoria, and a considerable number of boiler feed pumps.

In recent years the Company has achieved notable successes in several of its branches. Well over 400 locomotives for British Railways are being equipped with Sulzer Diesel engines made in England by Vickers-Armstrongs (Engineers) Ltd., to the Company's order, giving evidence of the important part played by Sulzer in the Railway modernisation programme.

In the field of hydro-electric power generation the Company has been favoured with an order, through the English Electric Company, for the largest turbine driven pump in the World (110,000 HP), for installa-

tion at Ffestiniog in Wales, while through the Central Electricity Generating Board instructions have been received to supply a section of the penstocks and tunnel linings for the same project.

The Steel Company of Wales, at their Works in Port Talbot, has installed two of the Company's blast furnace, turbine driven, axial blowers, having a capacity in excess of any other similar machinery anywhere in Gt. Britain.

In any assessment of the benefits resulting from expansion abroad the contribution made by the British Sulzer Licensees should not be overlooked. These licensees now include many of the principal Shipbuilders in the Country (as well as some engine builders) and many valuable orders have been placed with them for large Sulzer Marine Engines. Of particular interest is the type 12RD76 engine ordered by the Ellerman Line from Alexander Stephen & Son Ltd., which is one of the most powerful marine Diesel engines in existence, developing 18,000 HP on the testbed.

Much has happened since those early days in 1905 when the foundation was laid and the high standard of technical skill, coupled with the unexcelled quality of Sulzer products, will undoubtedly ensure a continuance of progress on an expanding basis in the future.



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