

WOLSELEY STATIONARY ENGINES

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FOREWORD by David W Edgington

Wolseley Webb Limited are today one of Britain's leading manufacturers of Garden and Horticultural machinery, marketing on a worldwide basis domestic lawnmowers, rotary grasscutters and motorised cultivators for the private and commercial grower. The company is also actively engaged with the production of equipment for the farming community with its well established range of Electric Fencing Equipment, Pasture Topping and Land Clearance machines, Horse and Cattle Clipping Equipment and Electronic Vermin Control Units.

A comparatively new company in the true legal sense of the word, only being formed in 1973 by the amalgamation of two member companies of the Wolseley-Hughes Group, Webb Lawnmowers Limited, formerly H.C. Webb and Co. and Wolseley Engineering Limited, formerly Wolseley Sheep Shearing Machine Co. H.C. Webb were first formed in 1848 by Mr. Harry Webb, a former circus acrobat, for the sole purpose of manufacturing Weavers' Mials, a device used for linking threads together during the weaving process. The Wolseley Sheep Shearing Machine Co. was founded some forty years later in 1887 by Mr. Frederick York Wolseley, who invented and proved the first mechanised sheep shear in Australia and returned to Britain to produce these machines in quantity for exportation to the wool producing colonies of Australia and New Zealand.

Birmingham has been the home of both companies since their formation, and from 1929 the two companies lived next door to one another in Witton, Birmingham. Whilst like good neighbours they spoke often to one another, and on occasions carried out work for one another, they both went their separate ways developing separate lines, never in competition with each other. Webb being basically more inclined towards consumer products, such as lawn mowers, clothes wringers, roller skates, bicycle components and spring forks for the motor cycle industry. It is interesting to note that the majority of the winning machines in the Isle of Man Tourist Trophy races prior to and immediately after the 1939-45 World War were riding machines fitted with forks made by Webb. From the production point of view, Webb were also supplying nearly all the major manufacturers with forks for production machines, such famous names from the past as Norton, Velocette, Matchless, New Imperial, NSU and Husqvarna featured regularly on the Webb order book.

Wolseley, by contrast, concentrated their efforts on the production of Agricultural Equipment and over the years have made many lines for the farmer, such as Cream Separators and other Dairy Equipment, Lighting Plant and Generators, Sheep Shearing and Horse and Cattle Clipping Machines, Electric Fencing Equipment, Water Pumps, Spraying Equipment, and many agricultural sundries. In the early years of Wolseley's existence components for the bicycle industry were produced and even machine tools were made and sold in competition with such famous names as Alfred Herbert and Holroyds.

The first record of the development of stationary engines appears in board meeting minutes of

COVER PHOTOGRAPH. A 1948 factory photograph showing a grey painted Wolseley WD 11. It is interesting to note that this actual photograph came from 'Petters' files and was used as a guide for the Petter W1H, the latter being the unusual Petter 'A1' fitted with the finned water hopper!

November 1909 when the Works Manager of that time was instructed by the directors to make 50 3 h.p stationary engines. Apparently he was expected to carry out this task without the benefit of drawings, virtually starting from scratch, indeed a formidable task for anyone even in this day and age. Undoubtedly the gentleman concerned must have performed his task well, as from that time Wolseley became a force to be reckoned with in the field of small stationary engines.

Possibly the most famous person who was ever employed by either company was Herbert Austin, who later became Lord Austin, who started work with Wolseley on 9th March 1892 as Chief Inspector, later becoming Works Manager and eventually Chairman of the Board, a position he held for 22 years, leaving in 1933 to concentrate his efforts upon his work at the Austin Motor Company. It is interesting to note that Herbert Austin made his first motor car in 1897 whilst working for Wolseley at their works in Alma Street in Birmingham. The first production models were sold by Wolseley in 1899 and cost £120, the available records show that at least 100 units were made and sold, some going as far afield as Australia, which was of course a traditional market for the company. In 1901, however, Wolseley's interest in the Horseless Carriage were sold to Messrs. Vickers Sons and Maxim for £10,000 as the Wolseley Board of Directors considered there was little future for the company in the Horseless Carriage business.

One may say, how on earth did two such companies as Wolseley and Webb with their widely differing backgrounds, ever come together to form one company as they are today. The answer is a simple one, Wolseley were and are, like any good company, looking for new products, and in 1957 they launched the Merry Tiller, a domestic garden cultivator, this brought Wolseley into the garden trade alongside Webb with their lawnmowers. In 1958 Wolseley amalgamated with another old Birmingham company, Geo. H. Hughes, and formed the Wolseley-Hughes Group for primarily financial reasons. The Wolseley-Hughes Group grew and other companies were invited to join and H.C. Webb became members of the Group in 1963. Wolseley's interest in domestic and professional gardening developed at a rapid rate, both at home and overseas, as did those of Webb, and because of this and the fact that they were neighbours in Witton they naturally grew closer to one another and eventually became one unit within the Group in November 1973.

During the 225 years of commercial history enjoyed jointly by the Wolseley and Webb organisation's products, people and places have changed, but the maxim on which both companies have always based their business has not changed and will not change in years to come either. We always aim to give value for money and a product which is reliable and of the highest possible quality.

Wolseley Stationary Engines bear out this maxim to the full, and we as a company would like to express our gratitude to Mr. David Edgington for the work he has undertaken in recording the history of engines for generations to come. We believe that Mr. Edgington lives by the same maxim as we do.

M.C. Turner,
Sales Promotion Manager,
Wolseley Webb Limited.
(1981).

HISTORY. The patent for sheering sheep by machinery was granted to F.Y. Wolseley in 1877, and since then the name of Wolseley has been synonymous with sheering equipment.

Frederick York Wolseley, son of a clergyman was born in Kingstown, in the County of Dublin. His family already having achieved fame through the efforts of his brother Field Marshall Viscount Wolseley. During the late 1860's, Fredrick Wolseley was managing Caldwell's sheep sheering station in Victoria, Australia, and it was here that the idea of sheering sheep by mechanical means occurred to him. Although numerous experiments took place during this period, Wolseley was constantly dogged by the lack of local engineers capable of putting his ideas into practice. For this reason, he was forced to return to England in the early 1870's to seek assistance, however he was back in Australia by 1874, and once again continued with his experiments, but working from a room in Bourke Street West, Melbourne. After a further two years, the machining was ready for the final stage of development — practical testing, so a large sheep sheering station near Walgett, New South Wales, was purchased.

In 1887, the Wolseley Sheep Sheering Machine Company was founded, and it was about that time when Mr. Wolseley was joined by Herbert Austin. Austin was born in Buckinghamshire in 1866 and like Wolseley, had a keen interest for mechanical things right from his boyhood days. When he was 17 years of age, Austin was persuaded by his family to seek his fortune overseas, and to join his mother's brother — Walter Simpson who was manager of an Australian engineering firm. He worked for Simpson as an apprentice for two years before moving to another engineering firm called Cowans. This was about 1884 and Cowans had an agency for Crossley Brothers at that time, and maintained the local slide valve Otto gas engines which were so popular during that period.

From Cowans, Austin moved to Longlands Foundry Company of Melbourne and then to Wolseley S.S. Co. Ltd., he was 21 years old and still an apprentice, but he was soon to become works manager. His first job was to re-design the sheering equipment because already three types of cutter had been tried and resulted in failure due to excessive friction and difficult alignment. Also many cutters had been returned due to the efforts once again of the local engineers.

At around 1890, Wolseley decided to transfer his business to London. In 1893, Austin became General Manager and soon after, it was decided to once again move the business, this time to Birmingham 'the workshop of the world', the Works at Alma Street was opened.

In 1901, the Company sold its motor business to Vickers Sons and Maxim — who in turn sold it to Morris. Austin was made a director of Vickers, but in 1905 founded his own firm, however he remained chairman of Wolseley S.S.Co. Ltd., until 1933.

THE WORKS. The earliest address shown on any relevant literature is Sydney Works, Alma Street, Birmingham (England), so why Witton?

During the 1900-1910 period, one of the most important small machines in the dairy industry was the cream separator, the majority of which were imported. Early in 1905, extensive experiments began in separator design at the Alma Street Works, and later that year, the first machines were on the market. The Wolseley-Pederson separators were an instant success, and so great were the orders, that

the original manufacturing facilities could not cope. In 1906 or 1907, the Company decided to build a new works at Witton in order to build separators with the very latest equipment. Four acres of land were purchased and by 1908 the new factory was operating. All departments were under one roof except for the Smithy, Hardening Shop and the Dairy, and 170 workers were employed. The motive power for actuating the machines did not come from Tangye or Forward as one might expect, but directly from Birmingham's Corporation electric mains and distributed through the works by a number of motors aggregating 125 h.p.

The types of separator manufactured in 1908 included, hand machines to bolt direct to a table, hand machines to stand on the floor, machines for driving by hand or powered, also belt, turbine and electrically powered machines. Capacities ranged from 16 to 660 gallons per hour. It is worth a mention that these machines were not only sent to almost every country in Europe, but even to Sweden which was the home of the separator business.

THE ENGINES. No details are available at the moment as to 'when' the first Wolseley Petrol Engine was manufactured, but the catalogues and adverts all give the Sydney Works, Alma Street, address, so one could guess perhaps, that the petrol engines filled the manufacturing gap in the factory when the separator business moved to Witton in 1908. Also the appearance of other makes of vertical engine in the 1906-10 period, such as the first Lister (5 h.p.), Bristol Carriage & Wagon Works — Victoria 3 & 5 h.p., plus several from the U.S.A., may well have played a part in the decision made by Messrs Wolseley S.S. Company Ltd., to introduce a vertical engine. The other obvious reason for such an engine was the need to offer a prime mover with their equipment as an 'all in' package.

The earliest illustration to hand, dated February 1912 is an advert for 'The Economical Petrol—Runs well under all conditions'. So from this, we can deduce that the engines were available before 1912, also no mention is made about the engine being new. The actual introduction date so far remains a mystery but it certainly would appear to be in the 1909 to 1911 period.

The engines must be dealt with in various stages in order to include certain important changes which took place during production stages. In order to simplify the description, the writer has divided the type of engine into 'Styles 1 to 4, this will also give a quick reference to the illustrations.

STYLE 1. The most prominent feature of the early Wolseley engine is the long 'U' shaped injection pipe, of which one end is open and situated close enough to the exhaust stub to collect a warm air flow, the other half of the 'U' pipe contains the carburettor (Wolseley's own design). Looking beyond the injection pipe, we see a very heavy vertical engine with solid flywheels, a nicely cast trolley base which projects up to the crankcase, a ball type governor mounted on a horizontal axis, and an oscillating magneto. Sight feed lubricators are fitted to the main bearings and arranged in a manner which allows the oil to pass into the crank chamber for re-use.

The hit & miss governor mounted on the horizontal axis is known as the 'D' type governor and operates on the 'inlet' valve. The end of the stem carries a pivoted weight which engages with the cam follower during normal running, but is swung outwards to miss the follower when governing is required.