

RECOLLECTIONS OF ELIAS PEAK

the first Chief Chemist of the Company by Dr. B.S. Jackson and Mr. C.V. Lawton

Elias Peak joined the Company at Glover Street on the 15th March 1948. He graduated as a Chemist from Manchester University and his first job was overseas with the Burmah Oil Company with whom he worked for a number of years. He returned to England in the early 1930's and worked for short periods with a number of companies. Eventually he set himself up as a Consultant Chemist until about 1940. He did quite well as a Consultant and ran a Wolseley 14hp motor car which was quite a car in its day. He was married and had two children and was having a house built at Lytham St. Annes which was brought to a halt by the outbreak of war.

In the 1940's he had gained some expertise in Metallurgy as a Consultant and he joined the De Havilland Aircraft Corporation as a Metallurgist and remained with them during the war years. At the cessation of hostilities he left De Havilland and joined the British Intelligence Overseas Services with the Army Rank of Captain. The B.I.O.S. personnel were responsible for the interrogation of German Scientists and Industrialists and followed behind the advancing armies. The interrogations were carried out to learn whatever industrial secrets or knowledge could be of use to United Kingdom Industry. If any person would not talk to BIOS Officers, he was handed over to a section in the Army known as "Operation Dustbin" and remained there for a fortnight. Elias would never say what happened whilst they were being subject to "Operation Dustbin" but when they returned they were ready to answer any Questions. The results of these interrogations were published and became available to manufactures and indeed Evode purchased a number of BIOS reports covering the German Paints and Chemicals Industries.

He returned to England after completing his contract and went back to working as a Consultant. It is probable that late in 1947 Dr. Simon advertised in the Chemical Journals for a Chief Chemist and having joined the Company commenced to organize the setting up the manufacture of Adhesives. All he had, was a file full of correspondence and formulations from Angiers together with a 2 gallon pilot churn in which Mr. Lawton had produced some Adhesives with limited success. After studying the drawings of the churn Mr. Peak reported to Dr. Simon that there was a problem with the design of same. In order that two 250 gallon churns could be fabricated Dr. Simon sent Elias to America to sort out the design problem with Angiers. This he did and in early 1949 production of Adhesives commenced. From Evode's point of view we were lucky to have Elias as the Chief Chemist, for he was an Innovator in the sort of make do and mend sense, and in those early years of Adhesives Production he had to contend with such problems as - employing labour, organizing production, making decisions on formulations etc. It should be remembered, that the original Angiers formulations utilised American raw materials and required Elias and Ken Wood to carry out considerable re-formulation work to use those available in England. The anglicising of the American formulations did not proceed smoothly and when I joined the Company (Barry Jackson) Dr. Simon immediately involved me in sorting out a major disaster with the early version of Household Adhesive (528). Due to a chemical reaction,

taking place in the container, all production was turning black and whilst I was carrying out a laboratory investigation Elias was busy trying to minimise the financial loss by recycling the black adhesive. He was therefore now spending more and more time in the factory and leaving the laboratory work to me and Ken Wood. Elias was not without his faults and his main one was, that he failed to think things through properly and although he dealt with the emergency of the moment perfectly well, in dealing with it he could easily create one or two others or ignore the basic cause of that emergency. One has to remember that in the early days, because of financial considerations, every ounce of raw material had to be converted into a saleable product. Elias had the ability to take decisions often when considerable financial risks were involved to get products out through the factory gates. I (Barry Jackson) can remember him in the factory at Glover Street being told by the foreman that a batch of adhesive was slightly out of specification for one reason or another. Elias said: "give me the orders" and he went through them and sorted 10 or 12 out and said: " fill it out and send it to those customers, because they never test it". The failure here is, that Elias was not bothering to find out why it went wrong in the first place and trying to get it put right. It was unfortunate, that for one reason or another Dr. Simon seemed to have an instinctive intuition when Elias had been involved in anything which was a risk to the company. Barry Jackson recalls that we used to send the Hycar Rubber (used to manufacture household adhesive) to Universal Grinding Wheel Co. and they would soften the rubber by storing it in one of their furnaces for a short time. Unfortunately one night they overcooked the Hycar and next morning phoned Elias to explain what had happened. He told them not to worry, he would use it and to send it. When the Universal lorry arrived in our yard Elias looked out of the laboratory window and saw a faintly smouldering mass of charred rubber and said: "My god, I hope the old man does not see this". At that precise moment, by some unknown instinct, the window of the Doctors office shot open, his head appeared through it and a voice bellowed: "Mr. Peak - come to my office now". Elias seemed to weather these storms without outwardly showing much concern and continued to perform what were near miracles of innovation. In the case of mastics he found, that machinery which had its origins in the Food Industry and handled sticky, gooey products like jams and sausaged etc., could be adapted by ourselves to filling out mastics. Elias was always prepared to have a-go with whatever was available and usually very successfully.

To end these recollections Barry Jackson has given below the Elias Peak involvement in how we sort of organized our first disastrous, but profitable fire in 1952 at Glover Street and for which Elias was blamed.

Apparently in order to fuel all our requirements for gas we needed a 4" main which we hadn't got and putting a 4" main meant that we needed a new gas meter that was compatible with a 4" main. In those days it cost a lot of money - I think it was some-thing like £400 that was involved - and Dr. Simon wouldn't give the go-ahead for this, it was too much money. But once, when he was away on holiday, Elias told the gas

people to go ahead so when Dr. Simon came back it was a fait accompli, we had actually got our 4" main and the new gas meter. It is then said that what actually happened was that some of the polish kettles were heated with open electric elements underneath, and the cats used to sleep underneath (we used to keep a lot of cats) these nice warm kettles, and one night a kettle boiled over, it doused a cat with liquid polish, the cat caught fire because of the proximity of the red-hot element, dashed

into what was Laurie Powell's office (we had the gas meter up the corner) and promptly set fire to the gas meter. There was this tremendous fire, most hands were called out, I mean John Forman came down and Reg Moseley came down, and everybody was running around in the dark and the firelight (more or less like bonfire night I suppose) and Dr. Simon had arrived by then, no doubt in a very worried state. I remember Reg Moseley telling me that some-body had left a wheelbarrow parked between the Laboratory and the polish factory, and John Forman dashing around in the dark in all his enthusiasm ran himself straight onto the end of one of the handles of this wheelbarrow and gasping said " you'll have to carry on your own, Moseley:"

Well the next morning of course Glover Street was scattered with broken glass, tiles off the roof and the whole thing burned out. Elias at around that time was trying to wangle a company car for himself (nobody had a Company Car in those days) so in order to evoke pity from Dr. Simon he bought himself this bicycle which had flat tyres and he solemnly pushed it from where he was lodging up the Eccleshall Road down to Glover Street. At about the usual time in the morning, I suppose 8.30, Elias appeared over the horizon pushing this dilapidated bike amongst all this broken glass and Dr. Simon of course was still there and so was John Forman, all blackened, and the Dr. turned to Elias and said "where were you when the fire was on Mr. Peak?" and Elias said "what fire?" - that apparently was more or less the end of his bonus for that year not knowing there had been a fire and not helping to fight it.

On moving to Common Road Elias continued as Works Manager and now became totally involved with all aspects of production. He was always willing to talk to, and help his workforce and is still remembered today with respect by those who new him. He retired from the Company in 1967 with ill health and died in 1969.

If we have been able to give just a glimpse of Elias in these recollections then we have ensured he will not be forgotten.