

OBITUARY

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE VISCOUNT WEIR OF EASTWOOD, G.C.B., P.C., D.L.

Appreciation by H. A. J. Silley (Past President)

The Institute of Marine Engineers has had many distinguished men as its Presidents in the past and undoubtedly one of the most outstanding was the late Viscount Weir of Eastwood, who died at his home, Eastwood Park, Renfrewshire, on 2nd July 1959.

Lord Weir was one of the great engineers and industrialists of his day; a man of enterprise, who possessed all the talents to a remarkable degree, together with great strength of character and a dynamic personality. His long and distinguished career both in high public office and in private industry will be well known to many of the older generation in our Institute.

His father, James Weir, was Superintendent Engineer of the Bibby Line at the age of thirty-five and later, with his brother, founded the firm of G. and J. Weir Limited and he, Lord Weir, spent his early apprenticeship in these workshops. After a period in the United States studying American business methods, he returned to become a Director of G. and J. Weir Limited in 1898, at the age of twenty-one, and in 1912 he succeeded his father as Chairman of this important and expanding business, a post he was to hold for the next forty-three years.

The start of the First World War found him, as the young Chairman of a leading engineering firm, with an already established reputation as an original and progressive man of affairs.

In August 1914, Mr. William Douglas Weir, as he then was, set about the task of reorganizing his company's plant for war production with his usual drive and initiative. His success and flair for putting the business on a war footing soon drew the attention of the Government and in consequence of this he was brought into the Ministry of Munitions and in 1915 the Prime Minister—The Right Hon. D. Lloyd George—appointed him Director of Munitions for Scotland.

The First World War saw the dawn of the air age and there was a rapidly expanding demand for the production and development of aircraft in large numbers. The firm of G. and J. Weir was one of the first to enter this new field and was soon turning out aeroplanes complete in every respect. This was a remarkable achievement for a company which had no previous experience with aircraft construction and compared favourably with that of many other firms, also just entering this field, many of whom confined themselves solely to the manufacture of component parts. Lord Weir had, of course, long seen the potentialities of the aeroplane and in 1917 he was called to London to become, in succession, Controller of

Aeronautical Supplies, Director-General of Aircraft Production at the Ministry of Munitions and, finally, Secretary of State, and President of the Air Council. For these outstanding services during the War, he was knighted in 1917 and raised to the peerage in 1918.

With the War over, and the problems of peace facing the country, Lord Weir, never a man to seek the limelight, was anxious to give up public office and devote himself to the problems of post-war industry; it was during this period, in 1919, that he became this Institute's first post-war President.

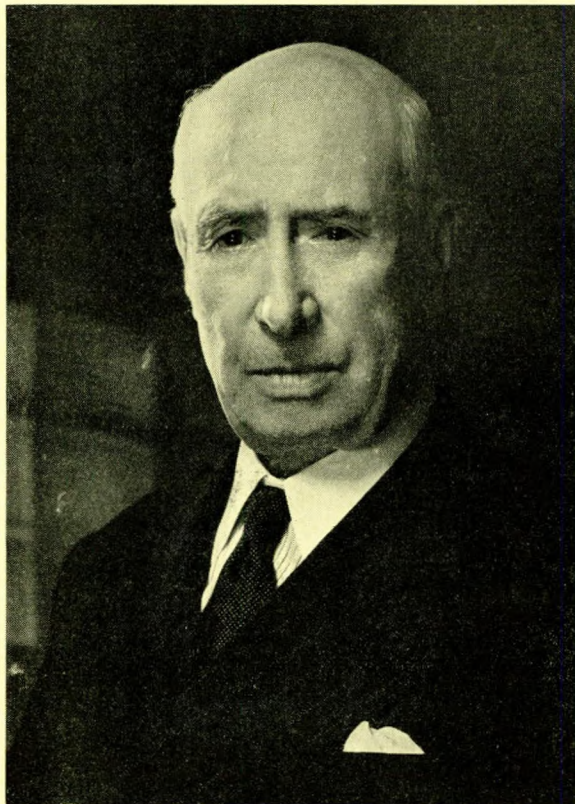
Lord Weir, who, at the end of the First World War, was in his early forties, devoted the next twenty years of his life to many wide and varied interests and these years saw his name connected with many projects, some of which were of an extremely novel and original character. He had great vision and foresight and it has been said that some of his ideas were ahead of the times—it was, perhaps, because of his advanced ideas that some of his more ambitious schemes met with only limited success. Among these was his plan to solve the housing problems in the early twenties by the erection of steel houses; with mass production methods these could have been built quickly and cheaply and might have gone a long way towards easing a problem which is still with us today.

Apart from his main task in private industry, he also acted as chairman of various government committees on numerous occasions, one of these resulting in the setting up of the Central Electricity Board and the passing of the Electricity Supply Act of 1926. He played a leading part in the negotiations which led to the merging of the Cunard and White Star Lines and, more than any other man, he influenced the Government in restarting the work

on the Liner *Queen Mary* in the dark days of the 1930's.

When rearmament was resumed in 1936, his unique experience with the aircraft industry during the First World War made him the logical choice for Advisor to the Air Minister, then Lord Swinton. As a result of this collaboration, which lasted until 1938, the vast scheme of shadow factories for the construction of aircraft and aero engines was begun.

During this period, Lord Weir, who was created a Viscount in 1938, was still an active member of the Committee of Imperial Defence, and was largely responsible for the improvement in the armament supply organization, which led to the appointment of Engineer Vice-Admiral Sir Harold Brown (who had just retired from the post of Engineer-in-Chief of



Obituary

the Fleet) as Director-General of Munitions Production.

During the Second World War Lord Weir was again called into government service and served as Director-General of Explosives, and Chairman of the Tank Board.

The Institute of Marine Engineers has particular reason to be grateful for his generosity. During the days of the credit squeeze, when the Memorial Building was under construction, and we were having considerable difficulty in raising funds, he gave wonderful encouragement and great support. It was during this period, when I was having lunch with him one day and telling him our tale of woe, that he casually mentioned he would contribute a sum to the Building Fund. The sum he offered, in his quiet, unassuming manner, was a very large

one; I will not say how much it was as I am sure he would have preferred me not to, but it went a very long way to helping us out of our difficulties.

Despite his great achievements, and a life spent working and planning at the top level of government and industry, Lord Weir remained at heart a Scottish engineer; a kindly man of simple tastes, with little liking for the political arena, he preferred to devote his energies to industrial development and was always ready to give his personal encouragement and a helping hand to young men of enterprise. He had a warm heart and a generous nature, exemplified by his many gifts to good causes. He was, in every sense, a great engineer and a great man.

ROBERT ALLAN (Associate 7332) was killed on 22nd October 1958 in the terrible accident which occurred when a Viscount air liner collided with an Italian jet fighter over Italy. He was forty-nine years of age.

He was apprenticed first to the Middlesbrough Corporation and then to the Sunderland Forge and Engineering Co., Ltd. He then joined the General Electric Co., Ltd., at Witton, and after two years' training he was employed as a draughtsman in the engineering drawing office and later in the estimating department. In 1935 he joined the company's Indian organization as manager of the contracts department at Madras. In 1945 he was appointed Madras branch engineer and held this position, except for a break of six months' service in 1951 as a special representative in Uganda, until the latter half of 1957. He was transferred as G.E.C. representative with the company's agents in Iraq but after ten months there returned to London to take up another appointment with the company. He was on holiday with his fiancée before assuming his new responsibilities when they both died so tragically.

Mr. Allan was elected a Student of the Institute in 1933 and was transferred to Associateship in 1934. He was a Member of the Institution of Electrical Engineers and served on their local committee in Madras.

JAMES EDWARD BARRETT (Member 12957) died, aged sixty-eight, on 18th July 1959. He was apprenticed to the North London Rail Company at the Bow Road Works, London, from 1907/12 and then started a career as a ship's engineer which lasted, except for a brief period ashore, until a few months before his death. He sailed with many companies, obtained a First Class Board of Trade Steam Certificate, was appointed chief engineer in 1936, and was at sea throughout the first world war and the greater part of the second. He joined the Institute as a Member in 1950.

In September 1941 Mr. Barrett was chief engineer of the s.s. *Empire Moat* when she was torpedoed, and he and the donkey man were in the engine room, unaware of the seriousness of the situation, when the rest of the ship's company took to the boats. By the time they realized what had happened the ship was listing so badly that they just walked over the sloping side of the deck into the water, each with his life jacket, and a life belt between them. When they were picked up some hours later Mr. Barrett was unconscious, his hands frozen to the life belt. Within three months he was chief engineer of the Alexandria Navigation Company's *Star of Suez* which was sunk by torpedo a year later, in December 1942; on this occasion, when the company took to the boats the German U-boat commander gave them their bearings and wished them luck. They were in the boats for ten days, the last four without

drinking water, though they were sitting in sea water, and they came ashore somewhere on the coast of Brazil at noon on Christmas Day. They were kindly treated by the natives of this jungle country, who took them to their huts, helping those who were unable to walk. After a few days of rest they were taken to the nearest village and later flown to New York.

Mr. Barrett returned to England with every intention of going to sea again but he had a breakdown in health and was discharged from the Merchant Navy Service in December 1943. During the next eighteen months he had two shore appointments, first as engineer surveyor with the Eagle Star Insurance Co., Ltd., and then as power station engineer with the Air Ministry Works Department. However, he returned to sea as chief engineer in July 1945 and served in various ships, including two years with the Pakistani company, the Mohammedi Steamship Company, until his retirement in February 1959.

ALFRED REGINALD BENSON (Associate Member 6848) was apprenticed to Pearson, Garforth, Ltd. He was seagoing from 1927/35 and obtained a Second Class Board of Trade Steam Certificate. He joined the Institute as an Associate Member in 1931. He was chief engineer with Libby, McNeill and Libby, Ltd., for some years. He died in 1958, aged fifty-three.

BERTRAM ROBERT GREY (Member 10513) was apprenticed to Messrs. Donkin and Company of Newcastle on Tyne and went to sea in 1902 as fourth to second engineer in ships owned by the Prince Line. He obtained a First Class Board of Trade Steam Certificate and in 1911 he was appointed manager of the Glasgow firm, British Antivibration Co., Ltd. In 1914 he became managing director of the London firm of engineers, W. Christie and Grey, Ltd. He died on 26th March 1958, aged seventy-seven.

Mr. Grey was an Associate Member of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, a Fellow of the Institute of Petroleum and of the Royal Society of Arts; he was elected a Member of the Institute of Marine Engineers in 1945.

JOHN R. GRUBB (Member 2127) died on 16th April 1944, aged sixty-eight. He was an apprentice with Messrs. W. Balfour and Son of Fifeshire and at the time of his election to Membership of the Institute in 1909 he had been ten years at sea, part of the time with the Ocean Steamship Co., Ltd., and had obtained a First Class Board of Trade Steam Certificate. Later he sailed for many years as chief engineer in the Blue Funnel Line, retiring in 1932.

THOMAS HOPES (Member 7051) was born in Ayrshire in

Obituary

1901 and served an apprenticeship with the Dalmellington Iron Co., Ltd. He joined the British India Steam Navigation Co., Ltd., in 1923 and sailed in their ships for twelve years, obtaining a First Class Board of Trade Steam Certificate. He was elected an Associate Member of the Institute in 1932 and transferred to full Membership in the following year. Mr. Hopes was appointed works manager with the Thornycroft (Singapore) Company in 1935 and was in Singapore when war broke out. He returned to England in 1942, and in June of that year he was transferred to the Thornycroft repair department at Southampton; he was appointed senior assistant engineer manager in 1956. Following an illness lasting six months he died on 20th August 1959.

WILLIAM MACGILLIVRAY (Companion 14804) died on 1st July 1959; he was taken ill during the last two weeks of an intensive two months' Far Eastern tour and on his return in early June had to enter hospital. He was a director of Furness, Withy and Co., Ltd., managing director of the Prince Line, Ltd., and a director of a number of other shipping companies.

Mr. MacGillivray joined the Prince Line in 1909 and on his return to the company after service during the 1914/18 war in France, Mesopotamia and India, he was appointed staff manager; in 1928 he became freight manager. He was appointed managing director in 1936, a position he continued to hold up to the time of his death.

He was a member of the Baltic Exchange from 1932, a member of the Executive Council of the Chamber of Shipping, a member of the Committee of Management of the *Worcester*, and a member of the committee of the Shipping Federation. He was a governor of the City of London College, a Member of the Worshipful Company of Shipwrights, and a Freeman of the City of London. In 1952 he received the Royal Swedish Order of Vasa (Chevalier First Class) in recognition of services rendered by him to Swedish shipping interests. He was elected a Companion of the Institute of Marine Engineers in 1954.

LESLIE JOSEPH MANNING (Member 14002) was born in 1906 and spent the greater part of his life in the Royal Navy. From 1924/38 he served in various ratings up to first class mechanic and for the next four years as warrant mechanic in H.M. Ships *York* and *Warspite*. He was promoted Lieutenant(E) in 1942 and saw service in the *Quorn*, *Uganda*, *Majestic* and *Birmingham*. He was administrative officer in the Stokers Training Establishment, H.M.S. *Raleigh*, in 1948/49. Then for two years he was Commanding Officer Mechanical Training Establishment, Karachi; after which, until his retirement in 1953, he was engineer officer in charge of destroyers in the Reserve Fleet. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his services during the second world war in action off Crete. He joined the Institute as a Member in 1952.

After his retirement from the Navy Mr. Manning was

employed for three years as an engineer on the dam project at Kuala Lumpur and since 1956 he had been working for Babcock and Wilcox, Ltd., in London. For the last twelve months before his death on 19th August 1959 he had been in very poor health.

JOHN AMBROSE MATTHEWS (Member 4218), chief engineer of the Eagle Star Insurance Co., Ltd., died suddenly on 22nd July 1959, aged fifty-eight. He was an apprentice with the General Steam Navigation Co., Ltd., from 1917/21, and then served as a seagoing engineer for eight years with the British India Steam Navigation Co., Ltd., obtaining a First Class Board of Trade Steam Certificate in 1926. He joined the Eagle Star Insurance Co., Ltd., in 1929, and was appointed chief engineer in July 1946.

Mr. Matthews first joined the Institute as a Graduate in 1921 and rose through the grades of Associate and Associate Member to become a full Member in 1926. He was also a Member of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, of the Institutes of Fuel, Welding, and Metals, of the Iron and Steel Institute, and of the American Welding Society; he was an Associate of the Chartered Insurance Institute. He was a Freeman of the City of London and a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Farriers.

WILLIAM JOHN PROWSE (Member 10911) was educated at Clifton College and then attended the Royal Naval Engineering College, Keyham, from 1943/46. He served as an engineer officer with the rank of Lieutenant(E) in H.M. Ships *Sussex*, *Savage* and *Devonshire* and from 1949/51 as engineer officer of the *Cygnets*. For the next year he was engaged on administrative work at the Royal Naval Barracks, Devonport, and then returned to sea as senior engineer, first of the *Ranpura* and then of *Tyne*. In 1954 he was Port Repair Officer at Devonport. Lieutenant Prowse died, aged thirty-four, on 10th July 1958.

He was elected a Graduate of the Institute in 1946 and was transferred to Membership in 1954. He was also a Graduate of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers

FOLKERT ALBERT WILLEM ROORDA (Member 9661) received his engineering training in various workshops and engineering shops in the Netherlands from 1905/09 and for the next two years at the Werkspoor Engineering Works in Amsterdam. He joined the Royal Netherlands Steamship Company as an assistant engineer in 1911 and served as a seagoing engineer with them until his retirement in December 1951; he was a chief engineer from 1920. He died on 24th August 1959.

Mr. Roorda was elected to Membership of the Institute in 1943 and he was a Member of the Institution of Naval Architects.