

Weir Valves & Controls sets

When it comes to global expansion, few companies can match the drive of Weir Valves & Controls. Having consolidated its world-wide manufacturing footprint, with locations in United States, France, the Middle East, the United Kingdom and China, Weir Valves & Controls is starting to boost sales in new geographical and industrial markets as well. Valve World travelled to the division's newly-opened facility in Elland, the United Kingdom, to learn more from the management team at Weir Valves & Controls.



“In a nutshell, our strength is that we are doing business in a truly global way,” says Mr Phil Clifton, who heads the Weir Valves & Controls division. “In addition to our extensive manufacturing sites located around the globe we have many local sales and application engineering teams who can speak the customer’s language, helping to develop long-term relationships. If you know what’s happening in the country, then you should also know what is happening with the customer’s needs.”



Phil Clifton, Divisional Managing Director.

Giving an example, Mr Clifton notes how butterfly valves, safety valves, gate valves, globe valves and control valves designed for cryogenic use and manufactured under the Batley Valve, Blakeborough, Hopkinsons and Sarasin labels in the UK and France are being supplied to the LNG terminal currently underway in China’s Guangdong province. “We are doing very well in China in terms of sales, thanks I believe to the en-

gineering experts we have stationed locally. I want to steer new development projects elsewhere in a similar fashion, in areas such as the Middle East as well as reaching out to customers in emerging markets such as India, South Korea and South Africa.”

Weir also has an admirable record of successful sales in regions which are sometimes overlooked. Mr Clifton: “Russia and Eastern Europe are booming for the entire Weir group right now. Our mineral division is supplying a lot of equipment for Russian mines, while we also have plenty of activity in the pump division. This is one of the benefits of being part of a big group. The Weir Board is tremendously committed to investing in us and there’s a lot of cross-division collaboration. We’ve been extremely successful in the Ukraine in the last year or so, particularly in picking up EU-funded work to modify existing nuclear reactors. Weir has also been very active in the US and Europe to extend the life of existing power plants.”

Customer-oriented

Listening to Roger Griffin, Divisional Commercial Director, there is little doubt

as to who exactly is the boss in this business – the customer. “We are a strong engineering company and we are there to provide engineering solutions to our clients. We must not forget about that.” This is a lesson that Weir has never forgotten throughout many decades of business, in which attention was given not just to manufacturing valves but also to the provision of total valve and control solutions as well as a complete aftercare service including maintaining a network of service programmes for customers.

“By providing total valve and control solutions and a complete aftercare service, we help customers consolidate their maintenance and service programmes. With local workshop facilities, authorised third party partners and an on-site presence where appropriate, we will tailor our level of service to provide the optimum level of protection for the customer’s operations,”



Roger Griffin, Divisional Commercial Director.

comprehensive global targets



Hopkinsons parallel slide gate valves in assembly.



MEG dosage valve destined for the Ormen Lange project being prepared at the Elland facility



Andrew Will, Divisional Marketing Manager.

comments Mr Andrew Will, Divisional Marketing Manager. Those customers can be very diverse, ranging from power generation through to oil and gas exploration as well as general industrial sectors. Within these sectors, Weir Valves & Controls can easily cover most critical service and isolation applications thanks to the renowned brands it carries: Atwood and Morrill, Batley Valves, Blakeborough Controls, Hopkinsons, MAC Valves, Sarasin-RSBD, Sebim and Tricentric.

Although Weir Valves & Controls can boast quality brands and look back on a distinguished past, the company has also had to overcome its fair share of challenges. Recently, management had to take some hard-hitting decisions which were formulated under the title of "the Phoenix Project". One of the key elements was determining

Modern production

how to resuscitate the fortunes of the Huddersfield factory following two years of stalled progression. Mr Clifton: "We wanted to turn around our Huddersfield operation after we experienced some problems in 2003 and 2004. This had nothing to do with our order books - sales were nicely on target - but our internal systems and processes were simply no longer adequate. By acting promptly we knew we would be better placed to meet changing customer requirements."

As visitors to Huddersfield will testify, the 'old' Weir Valves & Controls facility may have had a nostalgic beauty, but it was by no means suited to house a modern manufacturing set-up. David Latimer, Weir Valves & Controls UK, Managing Director:

"The factory had been designed in a bygone age. To give a facile example, it was built to accept deliveries by horse and cart. As you can imagine, we therefore had great difficulties getting a



David Latimer, Weir Valves & Controls UK, Managing Director.

modern articulated lorry into the factory."

Following careful negotiations with all stakeholders, Weir Valves & Controls decided to invest in purpose-built premises located in Elland, just three miles away. Still an important source of employment for the area, the new factory was formally opened in January 2006. Mr Latimer: "Firstly, let me say the team who organised the move did an exceptional job, getting us up and running in the new factory in under twelve months. What was also very encouraging was the way in which all our employees welcomed the move. Let's be honest, the old building was a bit dark and depressing, and certainly the Elland factory is a spacious, state of the art facility. In fact, thanks to the new layout we are already seeing productivity go up in many departments."

The move also keys in to Weir Valves & Controls' strategy to develop an alternative manufacturing process. Mr Clifton: "Gone are the days when valvemakers needed to have their own foundries. The Weir Valves & Controls engineering excellence is supplemented by a global purchasing network, which enables us to analyse, test and source standard components from



A comprehensive testing area underpins Weir Valves & Controls design and engineering activities.



The valve kitting area.

quality-assured third party suppliers. This allows us to engineer the total product and focus on manufacturing only those essential, core components that add real value to customer processes.”

In that light, Mr Clifton touches on the recent signing of a unique three year ‘Strategic Alliance Partnership Agreement’ with subcontractor Valvetek Machining Ltd. “This venture was one of several moves by Weir Valves & Controls aimed at supporting the company’s transformation project

announced in February 2005,” notes Mr Clifton.

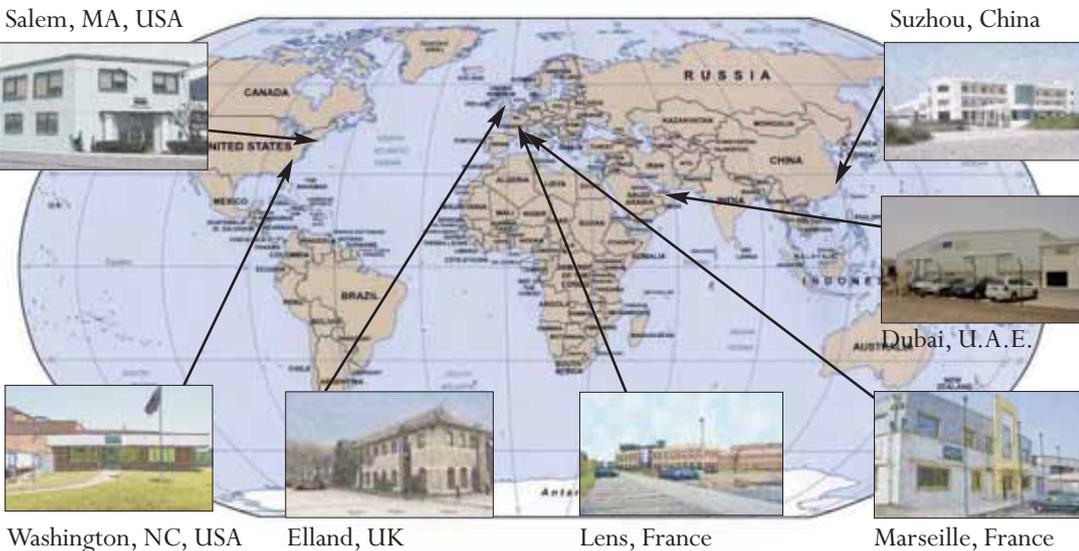
As part and parcel of the Phoenix Project, Weir Valves & Controls also addressed the way it makes valves on a divisional basis. Mr Clifton: “With so many products being made in different locations there was inevitably some duplication in product ownership. We therefore spent some time looking at how we could rationalise our product ownership, to provide the best possible service in terms of product price

and delivery. For example, all our safety valves are now engineered and developed in France, whilst check valves are owned in the USA, by people who understand the engineering and are passionate about these products. The idea overall was to bring operations in various countries closer together and to work as a family.”

Strategy-centred

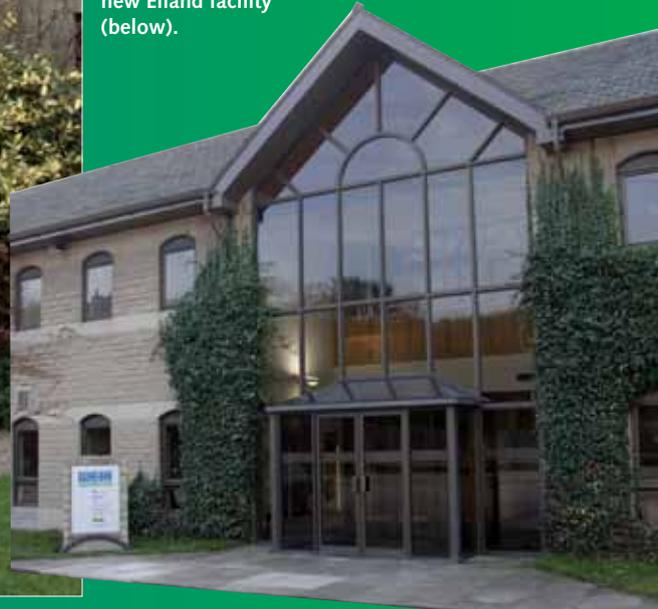
Building on its robust manufacturing capabilities and engineering skills, Weir Valves & Controls is easily adapting to increasing global competition “If you look at the basic strategy that we have, it is fair to say that our focus is moving away from commodity valves,” comments Mr Griffin. “We see ourselves as being specialists in critical service and safety related valves. That’s where our strengths lie. That’s where we want to be in the future so we are looking at these applications. This means we are well established in power generation and nuclear operations as well as specialist oil and gas appli-

Weir Valves & Controls current global production facilities





Members of the Weir Valves & Controls Management Team during their recent Conference at the new Elland facility (below).



cations.” According to Mr Griffin, Weir already produces “some of the best valves in the nuclear industry”. This is no idle boast, with their valves being used on all American, United Kingdom, French and Chinese operational nuclear plants plus those in many other countries around the world.

Weir Valve and Controls’ design and engineering departments are currently working on the valves of the future, according to Mr Griffin. “If we look at power stations, we see the owners want to run them at ever-higher pressure and temperatures to increase plant efficiency. That inevitably has a knock-on effect on our equipment, which needs to be robust and also offer diagnostics capabilities or built-in intelligence to help reduce downtimes. So we are looking to push back the engineering window all the time. Teamwork is what counts here, and we see that our customers really appreciate working with a valve manufacturer with a proven track record.”

Weir Valves & Controls engineers are also reviewing how flow control products are used in the oil and gas sector Mr Griffin: “Here, industry needs superior valves to help them develop more remote, margin-

al fields as well as recover the increasingly sour oil and gas from mature wells. We are therefore looking at the potential benefits of higher alloys, for example.” Whilst discussing alloys, Mr Clifton touches on a very topical issue. “As everyone knows, some materials are in short supply right now and becoming more and more expensive. As part of the Weir Group, we have been able to identify good quality sources of supply and also leverage our buying power to ensure favourable prices and on-time deliveries.”

In conclusion, Mr Clifton makes a bold prediction of sustained growth when asked about Weir Valves & Controls’ future. “We are absolutely committed to serving our customers in the long-term.

If you come back in a few years’ time therefore you will see a bigger organisation with a presence in more areas of the world. We have identified some significant gaps where we feel clients would benefit from our specialisation and focus so we will continue to extend our sales and engineering operations. There are also some exciting opportunities in our key markets, such as the renaissance in nuclear power. I have every confidence we can successfully develop the niche products required in this and other areas. What will not have changed, though, will be our dedication to engineering excellence and the commitment our people world-wide have to support all our customers locally.” ■

FACTS & FIGURES

Company:	Weir Valves & Controls
Brands:	Atwood and Morrill, Batley Valves, Blakeborough Controls, Hopkinsons, MAC Valves, Sarasin-RSBD, Sebim, Tricentric
Headquarters:	Huddersfield, UK
Key products:	Critical service valves for isolation and control
Main markets:	Power generation, oil & gas, chemical industry, general industry
The Weir Group is made up of:	Weir Minerals, Weir Clear Liquid, Weir Valves & Controls, Weir Services, and Weir Defence, Nuclear & Gas.