

Recession of the 1930s.

By 1930, said Mr Hilditch, the country was feeling the effects of a world recession but it was exaggerated in different parts of the country. Whilst the south east remained fairly prosperous, areas in the north with old industries collapsed, sending unemployment to unimaginable levels. Firms that survived tended to be those which had embraced new technology. At the Foden factory, where Mr Wakefield worked in the drawing office, views were divided between sticking with steam powered vehicles or moving to diesel.

There were calls for cuts in public sector services which the Labour government were not keen to implement and the diary records the fall of the Labour administration and the election of a National government – made up mainly of Conservatives – in October 1931. Ernest recorded that he was lucky to be in work and describes going out to buy a birthday present for his wife – a china cabinet.

Christmas 1931 was “very quiet” – apart from carol singing around the streets followed by supper. There was not much money around but he describes the giving of presents and having duck for Christmas Day lunch. He ends the diary entries for the year by saying that 1931 was not a year to celebrate.

In the New Year Ernest writes that he is working on a new design: the Type R wagon. He also attends a lecture in Manchester on diesel engines.

Activities at the Hope Street Chapel, where Ernest has various duties including that of organist, include references to the Amateur Dramatic Society performance and a presentation to the Minister and his wife who were moving on.

At Fodens he reports that the Recession has resulted in a lack of orders and with spending on research and development for a new light diesel engine, the company lost £50,000 in the previous year. But the band did well, winning the Crystal Palace Trophy.

A massive fire in Bradwall Road results in the loss of a garage and several other premises. The main electricity supply was cut off and only those public buildings and businesses which had retained gas lighting were able to function.

According to the diaries, Fodens now entered a difficult phase. Ernest says that new directors were brought in to run the company who had no experience in the truck industry. He finds himself demoted – after 32 years’ service – to make way for someone else.

The Hope Street Amateur Dramatic Society stage "Rob Roy McGregor" which was apparently "very successful". And then it was Christmas with the usual carol singing and family celebrations.

For his thoughts on 1932 Ernest mentions the huge number of people out of work; the changes in communication brought about by the wireless; and the accidents and deaths caused by the increased number of cars on the roads.

February 1933 sees very heavy snow – 5 feet deep in Vicarage Lane, Elworth – and disruption to transport services.

Ernest records what appears to be a family feud developing between William Foden and Edwin Richard (ER) Foden on the future of the company. ER was to go on to resign from the Board of Directors and a new company – ERF – was set up.

The Anniversary Services at the chapel always get special mention in the diaries and for this one he said there was a splendid congregation, a good preacher and a collection totalling £39. A little later in the year, in September, the temperature reached 87 degrees F.

At the works, Fodens was getting orders and trade was looking up. The company wanted to expand. Ernest explains that whilst ERF tend to buy in the vehicle parts and assemble them, Fodens produced all their own parts.

In 1934 Ernest is reinstated to his previous position as chief draughtsman. He also notes that the company receive an order for 11 diesel vehicles from the County Council.

In the news it is problems in Germany which pre-occupy his thoughts, particularly Hitler's rise to power and the killing-off of his opponents. At home he describes how he lays some new linoleum.

In July 1934 the diary has an entry about the opening of the Mersey Tunnel by King George V; taking three years to build and costing £8M it is an engineering marvel. At this time his son is engaged as an apprentice with Nantwich District Council with a salary of £30 per year. Earlier diary entries show that his father was against him joining Fodens. At a Fodens shareholders' meeting, sometime later, a profit is reported: things are looking up.

In May 1935 the Royal Silver Jubilee was greeted by lots of local celebrations and special church services and Ernest describes these in some detail, all of them attracting large numbers of people.

At Fodens he reports that there is a complete reorganisation of the company by William Foden and Ernest is made Head of the Drawing Office.

In the summer the family go to Prestatyn for their holiday, staying, as they have done previously, in a terraced house near the centre. In Sandbach the big news is the official opening of a new Woolworth store which attracts large numbers of people. Mr Hilditch said that Sandbach people would be able to say, with some confidence, that they now lived in a town not a village!

The year ends with descriptions of the family Christmas – another quiet one – with the usual carol singing and Christmas Day traditions. Looking back at 1935 Ernest writes that things haven't been too bad and the economic recovery seems to be gathering pace. On the world stage, however, the activities of the Fascists in Germany and Italy are a cause of foreboding.

Ernest Wakefield continued to keep a diary until he died in 1963. Mr Hilditch said that there were other instalments to share in the future.