

# Fibrelite: flying a new flag

## Shaping the future of composite solutions

Fibrelite covers have been a familiar sight on English forecourts and worldwide for many years. This summer, Fibrelite announced branding to represent their new global brand positioning. In light of this, it seemed a great time to look back on Fibrelite's journey, from the simple idea of a few bright Yorkshiremen, to become the worldwide industry standard. Here they tell their own story.



### Humble beginnings: the first composite access cover

Mike Jennings and Trevor Pardoe formed Fibresec in 1980, to manufacture and market FRP sumps for gasoline tanks. During site visits, they noticed operators lugging heavy metal access covers over fill sumps whenever inspection or refuelling was required, and thought there should be a safer, easier solution, particularly with more and more women in the business.



Above: Heavy metal covers on forecourts

Left: An early Fibrelite ad!

However, none existed. So Fibresec came up with a successful model, in 1984, which they pitched to Esso. After stringent testing of the covers' suitability to remedy deficiencies with delivery problems and associated health and safety requirements, in 1985 Esso awarded Fibresec sole supplier status for manhole covers on tanks (which still in stands today). In 1988 Fibrelite Composites Ltd was formed to enable in-house production and enhance facilities for manhole covers. One year later, turnover reached £1.68 Million!

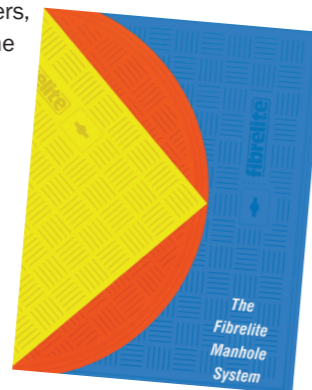


Fibrelite founders Mike Jennings (in the hole) and Trevor Pardoe

### The Journey: diversification, specialisation and growth

Following the success of their manhole covers, the team branched out into development of composite railway car seats, winning a contract from British rail in 1990 and beginning production in 1991. From 1991 - 1995 the factory made rail seats virtually 24/7 (approximately 1200 units per week). Meanwhile, a sales team was formed in 1992 to market and service the American and Canadian retail fuelling industry.

In 1994, the current 25,000 ft.<sup>2</sup> factory was built in Skipton for production of manhole covers, followed by the development of composite truck cabs. Production of rail seats stopped in 1995, following the privatisation of British Rail.



Some great 90's advertising!

In 1996 truck cabs went into production for Foden (a PACCAR company as is Peterbilt).

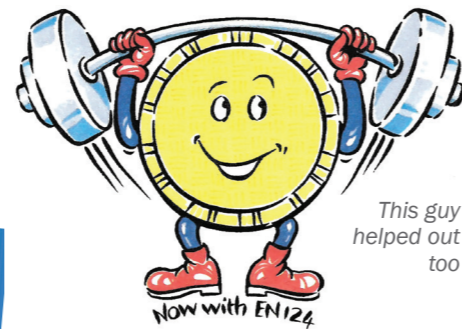
In 1997, the present MD Ian Thompson moved into the Managing Director role. After review, he decided to focus solely on products for petrol station forecourts (covers, sumps, pipekits), which had lost some momentum. He cites this as 'The best decision I ever made'.



Ian Thompson, Fibrelite MD 1997-current

Trevor Pardoe then began the development of a VAC testing system to enable factory and site testing of sump systems, ensuring an airtight seal was achieved.

In Fibrelite's strive for quality and product excellence, they became first composite cover manufacturer to attain BSI ISO 9001 accreditation for their primary range of cover, then in 1998 they were awarded the BSI Kitemark, (another first). With this trusted stamp of quality, and their unrivalled strength to weight ratio, it was simple to explain to promote the uniqueness of the product.



2000-2004 was a challenging time. Ian, David Holmes, and Martin Heath spent every day building and maintaining strong customer relationships. However, installation was sometimes an issue 'We realised that if we assisted in installations, we could to ensure the best possible product performance over its lifetime' said Martin Heath.

This is where the VAC testing system came into its own, allowing each sump system to be tested for an airtight seal. A procedure was established (still in place today) of VAC testing every sump before it leaves the factory, and again once installed on site - a huge selling point, which proved successful.



VAC testing in progress

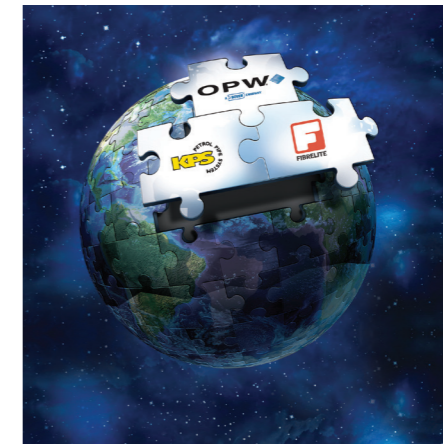
Four growth years culminated in the winning of a huge Shell contract, shipping out three 40 foot containers to the US every week! This led to the forming of Fibrelite U.S in 2005.

Fibrelite continued to grow, adhering to its key values of quality, innovation and great customer service. David Holmes remembers from that time, asking his customer what the M&H stood for in "M&H builders". He explained: 'me and 'im!'

In 2010 Fibrelite reached a landmark, when their underground enclosures received KIWA certification, the first manufacturer of its kind to be accredited!

In 2011 both the UK and US facilities were flourishing, with revenue up to £12.5 million. Success in Asia led to the opening of a new 15,000 ft.<sup>2</sup> facility in Kuala Lumpur, opening the door to a four year contract with Malaysia national oil company Petronas (2012).

It was now time to apply their expertise to new industries, and they launched A15 load rated (pedestrian) composite trench covers in 2012, which proved very popular, considering the spate of metal theft at the time. Over the next two years, the internal architecture of the trench covers was refined and developed, ultimately creating F900 (90 tonne) load rated composite access covers - light enough to be safely manually lifted.



Jo Stott, Marketing Director says: 'We're as excited about the future as when we first began back in the early 80's, as we see composites becoming a preferred material in an ever widening number of industries around the world.'

### Fit and Forget

Designed as a 'fit-and-forget' product, Glass Reinforced Plastic (GRP) composite covers are maintenance-free, durable and very strong.

### Health and Safety

With recent statistics attributing over half of injuries resulting in absence from work to manual handling, reducing hazards in this area is a priority on a global scale. The design of these lightweight covers incorporates up to two lifting points for specially designed lifting handles. These allow the operator to remove the cover without trapping fingers or bending over, thus maximising the safety of the lifting technique. Even covers requiring a 90 tonne load rating can still be safely lifted by two people, where steel would require special equipment.

An anti-slip finish is an additional safety benefit. Independent wet and dry tests carried out by Devon CC Materials Laboratory found anti-slip properties equivalent to a modern high grade road surface. This far exceeds health and safety advisory limits, making Fibrelite covers a safer alternative to concrete or metal in public areas, whatever the weather conditions.

To see how Fibrelite covers are used in a wide range of industries, visit:

[www.fibrelite.com/i-case-study-industries](http://www.fibrelite.com/i-case-study-industries)

Contact Aaron McConkey: [aaron@fibrelite.com](mailto:aaron@fibrelite.com) • Tel: 01756 799 773

### Acquisition by OPW

Fibrelite, along with KPS, was acquired by OPW, a Dover company, in 2013.

'The combination of three of the most respected brands in the industry creates an unprecedented portfolio of complementary best-in-class products' David Crouse, OPW President.

OPW is a perfect fit for Fibrelite: a global leader in fully integrated fuel handling and control solutions, with revenues of over \$8 billion. They share Fibrelite's value of innovation, having earned more patents than any other equipment manufacturer, and commitment to providing customer specific solutions.

Being part of OPW and Dover has enabled Fibrelite to accelerate growth, streamline processes and offer a complete forecourt solution to its customers: a 'forecourt in a box', plus open up new markets worldwide.

### Flying a New Flag

To reflect their new global market position, it was time to innovate their branding; maintaining commitment to innovation and growing into new industries. A new website will follow soon.

