

A SHORT HISTORY OF NEWMAN HENDER & CO

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1 Beginnings

Samuel John Newman, the founder of Newman Hender, was born in the Crimea in 1845 during the time his father, also Samuel, was engaged as an engineer and architect on the creation of the docks there. Brought to England in 1856, he took up residence at Nailsworth after receiving his education at several schools in south east England. He began his business career in engineering at Stroud. He then ran an ironmongery business on the Cross at Nailsworth before establishing a small engineering

company at The Dyehouse, Woodchester in 1879. This was in partnership with a Mr Brice, and they used their family names, Newman and Brice to identify the company.

In early 1875 he had married Miss J.S. Marmont, the daughter of Joseph Marmont, owner of Frogmarsh Pin Mill, now a small trading estate. They had three sons and three daughters and as we shall see, all three sons were involved in the development of the company through the first half of the present century.

The original production unit was housed on the first floor of a five storey mill built on the Dyehouse site by Cockle and Paul in the early 1800s, with a small foundry alongside. It employed six people which soon increased to twenty as business developed. The site of the first foundry later became first a loading dock and after the Second World War, a small office block housing the finance departments. The several floors of the nineteenth century mill later became homes for despatch, staff canteen, drawing and design offices, casting store and a maintenance shop during the same period.

In 1890 Brice left and Samuel was joined by his elder son, C.P. (Percy) and a year later by his second son Jack. Both had been educated at Wycliffe College and both were fifteen years old when joining the Company. For a few years they traded as Newman and Co (Valve Specialists) with a Mr Hopkins as foreman but in 1896 amalgamated with Hender, Stephenson who operated at Day's Mill Nailsworth, later to become Davis's Silk Mill.

Frank Hender senior had been apprenticed at Newman and Co as a brass finisher. This was followed by a spell as a mechanic at Fielding and Platt, Gloucester before starting as a brass founder and finisher on his own. He was subsequently joined by Stephenson who resigned following the 1896 amalgamation. Thus as a private limited liability company, the Newman Hender Company was formed with Samuel Newman as chairman, Percy Newman and Frank Hender as joint Managing Directors and Jack Newman as Company Secretary while Joseph Hender (Frank's father) was also included on the board of Directors.

To accommodate the increasing plant and workforce a new workshop and offices were built opposite the existing building across GiddyKnap Lane. The former later became the toolroom and stores while the office block was eventually rebuilt to house the company's main offices. Shortly after, a new foundry was built on the Nailsworth side of the original mill and other developments quickly followed. Samuel's third son Franz Lindsey became a director responsible for production in 1905. He had served an apprenticeship locally and at Alfred Herbert's of Coventry. Five years later the company joined a combine of other similar businesses which became known as United Brass Founders with sites at Manchester, Birmingham and Halifax as well as Woodchester. The combine then built a new works at Ormskirk, a name which ironically was to figure extensively in

the eventual closure of the Newman Hender Company some seventy years on.

Samuel Newman resigned as Chairman and a period of re-organisation followed. This was intended to meet world competition and develop export trade, but the outbreak of war in 1914 interrupted the largely completed project. This resulted in a rebound effect on its recovery at the war's end. Their updated methods and plant made them highly qualified to meet the requirements of munition production which resulted in the suspension of all peacetime production of normal products for the duration.

Obviously this allowed their competitors to seize the initiative by taking over the combine's old markets and to prepare for new customer demands without any real competition. In 1919 when all war contracts were cancelled, the combine made desperate attempts to regain its pre-war market and status, but this, together with the general financial slump of the time proved beyond them. In the early 1920s they were forced into liquidation and a receiver was appointed.

2 Down But Not Out

This black period continued with, first the retirement of Frank Hender, senior, and then the death of its founder in March 1921 at the age of 73. This robbed the firm of its father figure and also Stroud district of one of its leading citizens. This was followed almost immediately by the sudden death Franz Newman at the age of 39. Left almost isolated in the company, Percy Newman took the first steps of recovery. He realised what a serious state of affairs would ensue to employees, their families and the area generally if the Woodchester factory were to close. So, assisted by friends Percy re-purchased the old family business and, reverting to the old name of Newman Hender, set out to rebuild the family firm.

He appointed W(Bill) Howarth as joint Managing Director with himself. Jack Newman became financial Director and Secretary and was greatly assisted during these troubled times by the support (both financial and practical) of Mr Alfred Holland and Sir Bernard Greenwell, Bart. His vision, faith and effort began to be rewarded with the development of the Milliken valve which had been manufactured under license at Woodchester. During the 1930s this product provided the company with the equipment to gain initial entry into the oil market with the first supply of bolted-up Christmas Trees. (A combination of several valves and pipe lengths bolted together.) This period also saw expansion in the foundry area with the installation of an iron casting production unit.

In 1932 Percy Newman was joined by his nephew F.R. (Ray) Newman (Franz's son) as a technical engineer in which role he later

played a significant part in the development of the Newman McEvoy oilfield equipment. Mr Percy's son N.P. (Noel) Newman had joined the company in 1929. After completing his education, he had spent his early years becoming familiar with the various parts of the factory before joining his father on the administrative side. His appointment as Managing Director in 1938 confirmed the arrival of the new generation of the family in the company and enabled his father to concentrate on the job as Chairman and father figure which he so much enjoyed.

In between however, another of the older generation had been lost when in 1935 Jack Newman died suddenly in his 58th year. This robbed the firm of its financial expertise. He was replaced by the appointment of Arnold Trow as Secretary. Further appointments saw the arrival of Sir John Langman on the production side and Geoffrey Bass as Technical engineer to support Ray Newman in the years prior to the outbreak of war in 1939.

This again saw the company involved in munition production which included some forty million fuse caps and primers for the Admiralty and the Ministry of Defence. These were produced in two specially created units. The former was on the second floor of a corrugated building at the GiddyKnap side of the machine shop, which later housed a variety of production and technical departments. The latter was in the ground floor of the old cloth Mill alongside the sports field at the Inchbrook end of the site which later became the Sports and Social Clubhouse.

Another wartime product made in considerable quantity was a circular brass flange or tray used in the manufacture of parachutes, which had three holes through which the cords were fed. The foundries also played their part in the war effort producing many tons of castings included many parts for the engines of Bedford trucks manufactured by Vauxhall Motors, the forces main workhorse on land.

However, despite its considerable war involvement and the restriction on exports, the company or N.H. as they were usually referred to, still managed to maintain a reasonable level of its peacetime products. In wartime probably as a form of publicity, all shop floor personnel wore an enamel lapel badge bearing their own check number, the Company name and the words "National Service, we also served". One other development at the end of the war was the use of private coaches to transport many of the 800 or so employees from their homes in the Tetbury, Sherston and Cirencester areas. It was an arrangement the company made with Ives Coaches of Tetbury which was to play an important part in the post-war years.

3 Re-building /Expansion

The end of hostilities saw the return of many of the company's employees from war service. This was also the quiet period when N.H began to look for new markets as well as attempting to regain those they had lost to the export restrictions previously mentioned. Targeted were many parts of the British Empire and agencies were quickly set-up in Australia, New Zealand, India, and South Africa and among the products which benefited were bronze wheel and gate valves and bronze and iron air cocks. The late 1940s saw the company purchase the former G.N. Haden plant at Trowbridge which became known as N.H. Engineering Ltd. This produced forged steel valves and fittings for the petroleum industry as well as egg grading equipment and circulating pumps.

In 1948 the company went public, trading on the London Stock Exchange. This was necessary because of the widening interests and growth of its products, and because its financial interests were exceeding the financial ability of the family and its supporters. Looking back it seems ironical that the periods immediately following both wars saw the company involved in widely contrasting activities. Both helped to shape their immediate future although in completely different ways, one involving liquidation, the use of private money and one man's beliefs, the other seeing growth and development requiring public funding.

The expansion of N.H. in the late 1940s was featured in the local press, the reports mentioning the use of Joint Production Committees and leaflets to inform the employees of happenings in the company. Facts such as one stating that every 150 1" valve exported could purchase the equivalent of 10 cwt of butter or the rations for nearly 6000 persons, 14 cwt of cheese the same for 12,500 or 10 cwt of bacon for 2000, created considerable interest and publicity for both firm and employees. The reports also quoted a cost breakdown which showed 37% of its earnings spent on materials, 40% on wages and employee costs, 13% on plant and running costs, and the remainder on expansion, taxation and dividends.

However, 1949 was possibly the most important individual year in the company's post war development. As a result of the higher requirements being demanded by the Oil Companies, Ray Newman became involved in long negotiations for a licence to produce the McEvoy valve and other oilfield equipment. The McEvoy valve range was the largest selling valve not being produced in the UK at that time. Yet, it was required to replace the Milliken which had become unacceptable to the oil producers. This was another ironic twist in N.H. history when one realizes the only N.H. trade marked product still produced at Lewis and Hole for Ormskirk is the Milliken! It later became much used in the production of North Sea gas, as well as such differing substances as chocolate and electricity.

Thanks almost entirely to Ray Newman's efforts a manufacturing licence for McEvoy valves was obtained and production commenced in 1950. Due to the shortage of dollars in Europe at this time many European based oil companies (primarily Shell and BP) sought to make their worldwide purchases in sterling wherever possible. This was a significant factor in giving the Woodchester company an increased market share that might not otherwise have been available to them.

The original licence was initially used only for valve manufacture with the Christmas tree consuming all the available capacity which could not be increased due to labour shortages in the production areas. Also N.H felt (quite correctly) that the wellhead equipment was then less profitable and more competitive than the valve business.

The company lost its figurehead in 1951 with the death of Percy Newman shortly before his 76th birthday. Unfortunately his death was during the period of increased sales and profitability which must have given him immense satisfaction after his struggles in the 1920s. He had been associated with the family firm for over 60 years and his great qualities of leadership and devotion to it had served them with great fortitude and ability. The words of the late Sir John Langman at the funeral service are a fitting epitaph to him. "A strong disciplinarian who would never accept any standard but the best, business was his life. From an early age he gave himself unstintingly to building up the family business. It was his hobby and his enthralling interest."

Noel Newman was appointed Chairman and Managing Director and, supported by his cousin Ray, Sir John Langman and their fellow directors, he led the company into a period of expansion over the next couple of decades. This saw them become one of the leaders in world valve trade.

4 Expansion: The Boom Years

After a few years of stability the next stage of development occurred at the end of 1954 when the company acquired Shipham and Company and their subsidiary George Clark, both of Hull. These manufactured non-ferrous valves, fittings and castings particularly for use in the ship building industry, adding considerably to the product range of the fast growing group.

It was now that the company moved into the North American market to broaden its business interests there. So, in 1955 N.H. Canada was incorporated, providing a sales organisation supported by local stocks, to service the Canadian oil and natural gas industries. Over a quarter of a million pounds were invested in the new company which through its offices in Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver had become very prosperous by the mid 1960s. In addition Noel Newman had given

details of an agreement with the Velan valve company of Montreal whose products suited the specific requirements of the petroleum industry. This agreement of 1959 gave N.H. sole sales concessions both in the UK, and the several other markets outside the American Continent.

A period of constant production had now been achieved as these new overseas markets built up. In 1955 the first stages of manufacturing well-head equipment began as the company looked to improve this side of the oil market. They thus began quoting for and eventually securing orders in this field which gave them a wider interest in this area.

In the early 1960s a number of further acquisitions added considerably to its product lines and business competitiveness at home. First came the purchase of Sydney Smith (Nottingham) with whom N.H. had previously been linked through Percy Newman. They had manufactured the world's first steam pressure gauge in 1847 of which George Stephenson had written "a most important invention has been submitted to me for my approval." This acquisition added a further range of valves for the marine and petroleum industry as well as the pressure gauges for which Smith's had become world famous. The total workforce of the group had now reached 2000, a far cry from the small numbers involved in its early years.

The group now also added an international sales unit at Zug in Switzerland whose main purpose was to handle all the export business which had increased so rapidly in the last decade. Although the range of products was now very large indeed, the company's long held family tradition of small or one off specialised valve orders was never forgotten and these were still regarded just as important for the firm's image. In the mid 1960s the Trowbridge production plant and facilities were re-housed in the former premises of Vickers Aircraft. (The growth of their products had outgrown the space available.) Government and company money was well spent on putting the new site into good order. An area of 95,000 square feet was created, just double that of the old site. The new site housed a new company, Ben Nevis, which had been formed to deal with the increased demand, particularly from the Egg Marketing Board, for the egg production machinery and packing equipment.

The group had also obtained a controlling interest in Inchbrook Printers of Wotton under Edge, giving them their own printing facilities. In the export market further developments included the purchase of McEvoy (Canada) with licence to sell and manufacture their products outside the USA. Nearer home a new French Company, Newman and McEvoy S.A. was set up in Paris to control the manufacture and sale of N.H. specialities in France and French possessions.

This period also saw the advance of exploration for oil and gas in the North Sea which immediately led to rapid growth of

wellhead and Christmas tree production at Woodchester. This resulted in the building of a new production centre known as the South Machine shop which also included a new training centre as well as assembly and test facilities. It added a further 28000 square feet of production space. At the same time the pond in the foundry yard which had provided the water for power in the firm's early days, was filled in to provide space for a extension to the foundry. It was to house a new mechanised moulding plant and provide a storage area for castings and material now being transported by road. Access was through a newly created entrance at the bottom of St Mary's Hill on the A46, instead of by the Nailsworth-Stonehouse Railway at the rear of the foundry.

All these various developments had created an apparently healthy future for the group which had now welcomed a new generation of the Newman family in the shape of Anthony, son of Noel Newman, and Ray Newman's son John. The former had completed a long period of accountancy training and the latter had spent two years in the Navy, having previously been with Dewrance, the London valve makers.

Their arrival maintained the family name and tradition in the group. No-one knew that this generation hand-on would not continue in the future as the group had experienced a long and consistent period of success. It had risen from a small family concern into a large group consisting of ten UK production plants employing 2,500 employees, including 900 at Woodchester. There were also four overseas subsidiaries in Canada, South Africa, France and Switzerland as well as several other outlets in various other parts of the world. All this had been achieved in less than a century and everything pointed to the continuation of this apparently healthy future for many more years.

Completely without warning however in early 1969 came the announcement that a takeover bid had been made by the Serck Group. The news came as a bombshell to the whole of the workforce throughout all the sites, all of whom appeared completely bemused by the suddenness of it all, certainly at Woodchester we were all greatly shocked by the announcement. It was extremely difficult for any of us to understand how the situation had come about, although there was some speculation as to whether the Woodchester based group had become too financially committed and therefore was considered as easy picking.

One never knows, but I remember someone quoting Percy Newman's alleged comments that if the old pond was ever filled in he would bring down his wrath on those responsible! Whatever the facts were the bubble had well and truly burst, leaving a great deal of confusion and concern for what the future would hold.

5 Merger and Rationalisation

After long and protracted negotiations during the first part of 1969 the Board announced they had agreed a merger with another competitor, Pegler Hattersley based on Doncaster. This was stated to be to the apparent satisfaction of both Directors and shareholders, perhaps a case of better the devil you know than the one you don't. Almost immediately afterwards came the news that a new company was to be formed within the Pegler Group which would be known as Hattersley Newman Hender. It had its headquarters at Ormskirk and manufacturing sites there, and at Woodchester, Trowbridge, Nottingham and Hull. Noel Newman was appointed to the Pegler Board and Ray Newman became chairman of a co-ordinating committee to decide future policies.

Very few of the Woodchester workforce had any real knowledge of the wheeling and dealing going on and there followed a period of considerable anxiety and uncertainty during which rumours and vague statements did nothing to ease their concern. Eventually in March 1970 came the announcement that all bronze valve production at Woodchester would be transferred to other sites in the group. The bronze foundry at Woodchester was to be closed and other sections concerned would be reduced in personnel accordingly with some 110 redundancies resulting. Some personnel were transferred to other parts of the site to deal with new product ranges which were introduced from other parts of the group.

This was followed by the transfer of all Milliken and other products sales and relevant administration to Ormskirk. Although Woodchester staff involved were given the chance to transfer few did. As a result these products became just another part of the Ormskirk scene and sales soon suffered. This was because the specialist knowledge previously available to customers had disappeared with the staff who were now either redundant or occupied with new products.

In the midst of all these changes and re-organisation came news of the sudden death of N.P. Newman in August 1970 at the age of 60. He had been involved with the company for 40 years. Although he had resigned his new position on the Pegler board a month earlier, because of ill health, it was still a considerable shock. Many who knew him well felt that the loss of his family firm had a traumatic effect and indeed may have been the cause of his death.

Sir John Langman took over the reins at Woodchester. Obviously, he was never fully at ease with the new company structure. In effect it made him another Ormskirk employee and it was no real surprise when he announced his resignation after a relatively uneasy period of a year or so. He was replaced by Anthony Newman (NP's son) who had hardly warmed his seat before the long rumoured separation of the McEvoy valve production became a fact.

The new H.N.H. Company and McEvoy Houston reached agreement on a joint venture which led to the formation of a new company in 1974. It was called McEvoy Oilfield Equipment. This was quickly followed by a transfer of personnel and equipment involved in manufacturing McEvoy products. As many of the former had considerable job knowledge of other Newman Hender products it was inevitable that the old firm was left very thin on the ground in product experience.

Products were transferred from other group sites in an attempt to replace the loss of McEvoy production. However, the lack of product knowledge among Woodchester employees plus a lack of readily available information made it extremely difficult to surmount the teething troubles which inevitably occurred. In addition Group's insistence on making Ormskirk casting production top priority in the Woodchester foundry made it almost impossible to maintain the requirements of the Out casting customers production schedules. It was not long before major customers, such as Vauxhall, took their work to other firms.

Attempts to replace this with limited other work were partially successful. Plans to enlarge the Ormskirk foundry in the late 1970s meant that almost all the non N.H. casting work was transferred there. In 1982 the Woodchester foundry closed completely with the loss of over 150 jobs including that of the writer. This left a small production unit based on the Stroud side of the Giddyknep Lane struggling to cope with the demands of the new products and feeling very isolated. However, the belated return of the administrative side of the N.H. products such as the Milliken improved the situation considerably. Led by a new management structure, the site began to revive its fortunes. In a couple of years it gradually became a reasonably viable unit, once again under its revived name of N.H Engineering.

However once again a twist of fortune occurred just as everyone was beginning to feel there was real hope for the future. It had been rumoured for sometime that the Ormskirk site workload had been falling gradually. They were the headquarters site, so it was decided that all the Woodchester work would be transferred to them during late 1984 and 1985. Thus the remaining workforce were informed that the site would close in the summer of 1985 and that they would become redundant, except for a few who were to be transferred to Ormskirk.

It was a sad end for them and also to the company's long history of valve production under the Newman family name and finally a great blow to the Stroud District employment situation. Ironically, castings for the old family firms more successful products, Millikens are still made locally at Lewis and Hole at Dudbridge. They are sent to Ormskirk for machining and assembly.

The site was purchased by a development company and converted into industrial units. The exterior of the buildings were largely undisturbed and remain today as a reminder of the Newman family, its company and its many employees. Perhaps it was fitting that one of the last acts of some of them was the raising of a black flag made from a dustbin liner on the flag pole which had so proudly borne symbols of the firms achievements as well as the national flag.

6 McEvoy, Cameron, Cooper

The separation of McEvoy production in 1974 obviously came at the ideal time for the newly formed company. A year earlier a further 10,000 square feet had been added to the southern end of the 1966 machine shop building. In 1975 this was followed by the further addition of 18 bays to provide much needed production space and capacity to cope with the increasing demand for its products.

For sometime the subsea market had expanded to become a business of its own. So, in 1977 a marine assembly building was created on the old sports field to support this expansion. There also developed an increasing market for large compact blocks as an addition to the single valve market. Certainly the 1974 decision to channel all the hard earned oilfield business equipment production into one unit had begun to pay off. The new company became a leading supplier to the oil companies throughout the world. Obviously the development of the North Sea Oil had been a significant factor as the quality of the McEvoy equipment became apparent to the Oil producing world. Companies such as B.P. and Shell in the former, plus such as Texaco, Conaco world wide, as well as the OPEC producers in the Middle East were now almost queuing to become customers as the Company embarked on what was to be its boom years of the 1970s and 1980s.

The company had purchased the former N.H. Foundry and its canteen and pattern shop together with the buildings of the 19th century five storey mill. The foundry site was demolished and cleared and a new office complex was built on it in 1984/5 to replace the temporary buildings on the old sports field, while the latter buildings were converted into a Laboratory and other office space. Among market expansion at this time was a large order for the Russian Oilfields which required considerable addition to the site's workforce. In addition McEvoy helped to create a plant in Egypt to assist its middle East market. It also increased its interests in Australasia as well as widening its role in North Sea Oil through its Aberdeen and Great Yarmouth plants.

In 1986 however the site heard the sad news of the sudden death of F.R. (Ray) Newman at the age of 75. Still actively engaged in promoting the company's interests after over 40 years

service his death did however, finally end the involvement of the Newman family with valve production at Woodchester.

It was not long after that the first signs of recession in the oil industry began to affect the company. After various attempts to reduce costs, a large scale redundancy programme was announced. It involved the closure of the night shift and a considerable reduction in its workforce.

It also now began to change hands after being merged with America's Smiths Industries several years previously. In 1987 Smiths were forced to sell the site because of a costly patents court case and the Company became part of the large American company Cameron Ironworks. After the redundancies and the name change, things settled and generally continued in the same way as the earlier 1980s. Suddenly there came another change in ownership when the whole of Cameron Ironworks were purchased by the giant Cooper Industries, a large American Conglomerate.

There was some disquiet at the move. There were the usual rumours, denials and activity behind the scenes, but in a short while, life settled back into the old routine, although the fall in oil consumption world wide was causing problems to all the oilfield equipment manufacturers as the market became restricted. However it was still a considerable shock to the 350 employees when in the autumn of 1993 Coopers announced that because of over capacity in its Oil division the plant would be closed during the next 12 months or so.

This period saw the gradual run down of the site as production was transferred to the Cooper Oil Tools headquarters at Leeds. Some of the workforce did accept transfer there but the great majority had to accept redundancy. At the end of October 1994, the remaining plant was sold and the site closed and now awaits the arrival of its new owner Critchleys, formerly of Brimscombe.

Thus saw a sad and inglorious end to 115 years of valve manufacture at Woodchester. During that time it had employed large numbers of local people not only from the immediate locality, but also Gloucester, Cirencester, Sherston and the Severn Vale. Very few families in the Stroud District did not have at least one member, several in fact having two or three generations involved.

As well as providing so much employment the companies also provided many social activities for its employees in sport and leisure both for them and many others who provided opposition on the first class sports field from the 1930s. The company also provided the Sports and Social Club building which was opened in the former Munition factory and woollen mill in 1947. Both were certainly the envy of many who passed by them on their way to employment in other parts of the county.

This then is the sad end to a story of ups and downs in the life of Newman Hender and McEvoy who both eventually fell foul of today's industrial disease better known as business politics which eventually achieved something that two world wars could not, the end of an era.

Editor's Note: The Newman Hender Records are now in the Gloucestershire Record Office.