

OPEN FOUNDATION

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY
CLASS - 1.00 P.M. - 3.00 P.M.
TUESDAY'S
MARGARET HENRY

NAME: LYNNE BONSER
SUBJECT: REGIONAL HISTORY ASSIGNMENT
TOPIC: A GONINAN & CO LIMITED
LENGTH: ESSAY - 1000 WORDS

DUE DATE: WEEK ENDING 25th AUGUST 1989
DATE SUBMITTED: 22 nd AUGUST 1989

Alfred Goninan, originally of Cornwall, United Kingdom, a mining engineer and entrepreneur of outstanding ability was the founder of the Company A Goninan & Co Limited.

'Alfred Goninan arrived in Newcastle in 1899¹ and immediately recognised the city's business potential. Every year new coal fields were being opened up in the area and the small city was bustling with the commercial activity this brought on. Alfred Goninans' business idea took shape. He would start up an engineering enterprise servicing the coal industry in and around Newcastle. 'In May 1899, a five and a half acre leasehold was acquired at Wickham.'² A few months later the first employee was hired. Two years later Alfred Goninans brother Ralph, on his return from the New Guinea gold fields, joined the company.

In the first years the manufacture concentrated on coal mining equipment. The major activity was manufacture of skips and wagons for the transportation of coal. This business was successful and expanded very rapidly. 'To provide sufficient funds for expansion the two brothers decided in 1905 to change their partnership into a private company.'³

A major concern of Alfred Goninans was the company's development and keeping ahead of competitors. 'In an address to shareholders in 1909, he states this policy, " It becomes essential that the whole of the mechanical design should be of the latest and most up-to-date design".⁴ Goninans' progressive image began to form in the community.

During the first World War supplies became more and more scarce, in particular of wheels and axles, a vital part of Goninans wagon business. To solve this problem, 'Goninans together with four other companies, among them Howard Smith, set up a new steel plant in Waratah.'⁵ The Commonwealth Steel Products Company Ltd produced its first wheel and axle set in 1920. The Goninan shares in the company were later sold to BHP, although Alfred Goninan kept his seat on the Board of Directors.

1. Minutes of A Goninan & Co Meetings.
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Ibid

To supply the engineering requisites to the collieries the 'Goninan brothers set up Engineers and Colliery Supplies Co Limited in 1910.'⁶ At this time, the rapid expansion of A Goninan & Co Limited had started and eventually the Company outgrew its Wickham premises. 'New workshops were built on a twenty nine acre site at Broadmeadow and were ready in late 1919.'⁷ Some ten years later Engineers and Colliery Supplies Co Limited took over the vacated site in Wickham. The new plant facilities were the most modern then available in Australia. They comprised both fabrication and machine shops and had railway lines laid throughout to facilitate the handling of raw materials and products. The Company's new head office was reputedly the second largest administrative building in the Newcastle district.

By the mid 1920's the facilities of A Goninan & Co Limited comprised a boiler shop, a foundry including a brass foundry, pattern shop, store, machine shop, blacksmiths shop and a wagon shop. A wide variety of engineering products were manufactured at the new works for customers both in New South Wales and interstate and a new product line, rubber machinery was introduced. Examples of the Company's work at that times are:-

- 66 ft span bridges for NSW Government Railway.
- Structural parts for Newcastle Gas Co's plant.
- 40 ton Billet Shears for BHP.
- Structural parts for the Sydney Railway station.

However, products for coal handling and coal transportation in the Hunter Valley collieries were still a major part of A Goninan & Co Limited's business.

An interesting manifestation of 'Alfred Goninans entrepreneurial and engineering confidence is the setting up of Goninan Bridge Corporation Limited in 1924.'⁸ This consortium headed by Goninan was established to quote the Sydney Harbour Bridge. 'Goninans quote for a cantilever suspension bridge however was lost to Dorman Long & Co, who won the order with a \$4.2 million arch bridge.'⁹

Nine years after A Goninan & Co Limited became a private

6. Ibid
7. Ibid
8. Ibid
9. Ibid

enterprise, the first tentative steps were taken towards an association with Howard Smith. " The then owners of Caledonian Collieries in Newcastle offered, in 1914, to buy 10,000 Goninan shares. The offer was declined, but Howard Smith seeing the potential benefits in an involvement with a reputable engineering manufacturer came back in 1917 with another offer. This time they were able to acquire 18,750 shares in A Goninan & Co Limited. The election in 1929 of H B Howard Smith, as a director of A Goninan & Co Limited, was another significant move towards their participation in the management of Goninans."¹⁰

The first major management change came with the resignation of Alfred Goninan in 1933 after thirty four years as a company leader. His brother Ralph took over as a General Manager of the Company. "In 1938 A Goninan & Co Limited became listed on the stock exchange."¹¹ In 1946 Ralph Goninan was in turn succeeded by his son, Ralph Junior, who managed Goninans until his retirement in 1968. Ralph Jr, stayed on the Board of Directors of A Goninan & Co Limited, Engineers & Colliery Supplies Co Limited and Commonwealth Steel Co Limited until his death in 1972. "Howard Smith's participation on the board of Goninans continued from 1929 onwards and through to their acquisition of Goninan's as a subsidiary in 1964."¹²

After the Second World War, a period of rapid growth and high profitability followed. The original emphasis on jobbing work began to give way for a project orientated policy and the company acquired many licences for the manufacture of products of leading international designs. "In the early fifties Goninans commenced the manufacture of locomotives."¹³ During this time the Company's production of rolling stock increased considerably. The sixties brought with it a major involvement in the sugar industry. Sugar mills of Goninan design and manufacture are now among the worlds largest. During this decade Goninans manufacture of mineral grinding mills made headway and the Company also participated in the modernisation of Newcastle harbours coal loading facilities. In 1967 the Company designed and built a modern coal shiploader in the harbour basin, the first of its kind in Newcastle. In the seventies several major developments gave the Company a new competitive edge. To

10. Ibid

11. Ibid

12. Ibid

13. Phamplet on Railway Technology and Products Division

Goninan's traditional coal handling products, were now added new sophisticated equipment for the extraction of coal and ore. Most important however was Goninans branching out into the manufacture of passenger rail cars, making the Company a leader in the field.

Continual upgrading of the Broadmeadow plant accompanied the development of Goninans production. A large gear planner was installed in 1973, enabling Goninans to be recognised with top international manufacturers. Meanwhile Goninans production and design engineering capabilities advanced considerably with the introduction of more highly skilled personnel into the Company and the advent on the market of dramatically improved computer aided design facilities. The Company installed its computer aided design and draughting system in 1981.

The emphasis on specialised engineering will grow even stronger in the decade ahead, as Goninans looks towards a diversification into higher technology-based industrial equipment. This will be a particularly challenging task for Goninans, demanding continuous monitoring of new technological advances and new industrial processes. The Company's traditional engineering and manufacturing activities are already entering this new phase. At present Goninan is developing its expertise in problem analysis and new process design application, providing their clients with customised solution packages, which incorporate the best and latest in technological innovation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Goninans minutes from meetings 1901-1989
Pamphlets- Engineers to Australia-Goninan
Pamphlets- Railway Technology and Products Division
Pamphlets- Precision Gearing for Heavy Industry
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