Company History 1979-2010

WEC Group Ltd has grown to be one of the North West's most prominent businesses. Its origins however were modest.

1979-1986

The Welding Engineering Company was founded in 1979 by Steve Hartley and Ross Place, having both fallen victim to 'the three day week'. Following redundancy, Steve and Ross, both time-served tradesmen and in their early twenties, set out to provide a welding and fabrication service from a 1,000 square foot make-shift shed in Taylor Street, Darwen.

Business was steady and by 1983 expansion was due. A fire at the plastics factory next door spurred the pair on to purchase a larger site on Cranberry Lane, Darwen. At a cost of £10,000, the business, now employing four people, moved to the 10,000 square foot, semi-derelict site, which required major work, but was just about affordable.

The Group's second site at Cranberry Lane, Darwen

It was at Cranberry Lane that Steve and Ross' fortune changed. Approached by one of the first CCTV companies in the UK, they were asked to design and produce a camera tower. The pair accepted the project and set about designing the TW8 (the ST8 static 8m tower). The design was a success and from this small start the camera mounting side of the business was born.

Cranberry Lane was also the scene for the firm's second major contract, winning business to produce motorway poles for Philips (now TYCO). With this contract Steve and Ross were able to clear their debts and begin acquiring the additional necessary machinery and skills to increase productivity.

1987 - 2003

Over the next eight years, business grew from strength to strength and in 1987, the business became a limited company.

Mead's Reach Bridge, Bristol, fabricated by m-tec, our division which specialises in stainless steel architectural pieces

With employees and machinery now outgrowing Cranberry Lane, expansion was due and in 1992 the company and its 100 employees moved to a 20,000 square foot site on Junction Street, Darwen.

It was here that Ross decided to leave in order to concentrate on other interests, leaving Steve to run the company. Over the next few years, another 35,000 square foot of premises was purchased to accommodate the growing business.

Technological advancements played a part in the next phase of the company's growth with the introduction of digital and laser technology. Steve took the plunge and bought the company's first laser cutting machine in 1998. Its capacity was soon reached and a second machine was purchased enabling the firm to provide a laser cutting service externally.

The growth of the company required re-organisation of products and services into three divisions; Welding Engineering, Camera Mounting Solutions and Laser Engineering. The company also changed from WEC Ltd to WEC Group Ltd in 2003.

2004-2005

Still expanding rapidly, a new site was required to house stock, machinery and the 100+ employees. In 2004 land was puchased on Spring Vale Road and a purpose-built facility was created for Welding Engineering covering 30,000 square foot. In 2006, an additional purpose-built office block and car park was added to the site.

In 2005, m-tec was set up to facilitate the demand for street architecture. Specialising in bespoke architectural metalwork and consultancy, m-tec works with architects, artists and councils on urban regeneration projects and has been responsible for the Group's involvement in the design and manufacture of some of the most striking and unique pieces of street architecture in the UK.

At the end of 2005, Steve was approached by a local precision engineering company, with an opportunity to purchase the company along with the range of educational and industrial machinery they produced. As the Group was sub contracting machining, it made sense to bring this in-house and, in December 2005, the company was purhased along with another 15,000 square foot of space on Junction Street to house the division. The division re-branded to Hi-Spec CNC in 2007.

2006-2008

In 2006, the Group formed the WEC Welding & Engineering Academy, focusing on training apprentices in the art of welding and fabrication. The apprentices are provided with the skills they require to compete in the industry and the Academy is going from strength to strength.

In 2008, the Group made its second acquisition, purchasing laser specialists 5750 Components Ltd in Liverpool to increase much needed capacity for its laser division.

The Group also committed to a three year sponsorhip of their local football club, Blackburn Rovers, to increase awareness and encourage recruitment from within the local area.

The Technology Centre, built to house the latest in laser cutting technology

2009-2010

In 2009, a purpose-build facility for the laser division was opened. 'The Technology Centre' was built by the employees of WEC Group to house the latest laser cutting machines in the world.

SP Fabrications (a small fabrication house) and Nutter Aircrafts (precision engineering company) were acquired in 2010 to build upon the Group's current service offering.

Now with over 300 employees and 140,000+ square foot facility, the small welding and engineering company set up in 1979 has become one of the largest in its industry and a major local employer.

The Future

The future looks bright for WEC Group Ltd. 2011 will see the company consolidate all the Group's businesses under four main umbrellas: WEC Fabrication, WEC Laser, WEC Machining and WEC Camera Mounting Solutions. The introduction of WEC Rail will also enable the Group to provide a one-stop-shop for the rail industry.

Apprentice working on a crane to showcase at the World Skills Olympics

The WEC Academy, which is growing from strength to strength, is due to be involved in the 2012 World Skills Olympics as well as fabricate a Spitfire Memorial to take pride of place in the centre of the local town. The company will continue to invest in this unique apprenticeship scheme, which is well thought of within the educational and professional arena as well as getting the seal of approval by Prime Minister David Cameron on his visit in 2010.

The restructure of WEC Group Ltd

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