

Bradken

Company History

As the leading global supplier of differentiated consumable and capital products, Bradken sales offices and manufacturing facilities are strategically located to service the global resources, energy and freight rail industries.

Bradken's five market focused divisions

- Mining Products
- Engineered Products
- Power & Cement
- Rail
- Industrial

provide quality products and services, drawing on its years of experience, from modest beginnings as a steel foundry in the 1920's. Today, Bradken's product range includes innovative and differentiated consumable and capital products for the mining, power generation, rail, steel making, smelting, transport, sugar and cement industries.



It's a far cry from its humble beginnings, which were grounded in a lot of luck, some true entrepreneurial spirit and a dedicated commitment by its founders. Bradford Kendall Ltd was incorporated on 20th March 1922 after two BHP steelworks employees - Leslie Bradford (General Manager) and Jim Kendall (Chief Mechanical Engineer), got lucky at the races one day in 1920 and pledged the £15,000 winnings to start the steel foundry business. The horse they backed, 'Jack Findlay' completed a remarkable sequence of five wins during 1919 and 1920.



Each time Leslie Bradford and Jim Kendall, and a group of friends, rolled-over their bets, and by the 24 January 1920 they had won a small fortune. On the 28 April 1920, Bradford and Kendall used their winnings to establish the Alloy Steel Syndicate to build a steel foundry in Alexandria, Sydney to take advantage of what they saw as an untapped potential for industrial growth. While there were a number of larger foundries specialising in engine castings and other industrial products, the foundry industry was limited, consisting primarily of small regional foundries producing largely iron and brass, and focused on providing products to restricted markets.

From the beginning the family-orientated company took a customer-focused approach to business and developed a commitment to research and development.

It used well-qualified and experienced technical specialists, ensuring its product developments met customer needs and expectations in terms of safety, performance and cost-effectiveness.

Originally Bradken made contract castings for industry in general before moving into manufacture of licensed products in the form of railway couplers and undercarriages in 1926. This development led Bradken into the first of many strategic business relationships, forming, for example, a close affiliation with [American Steel Foundries \(ASF\)](#) which still exists today.

Established in the boom years of the 1920s, the company quickly had to adjust to the bad years of the Great Depression. This was the first real test of the company's character, and it proved extremely good at adapting to change. During these years it not only survived, but excelled, supplying manganese steel products to the mining industry and eventually manufacturing dredge buckets for the Malayan tin mining industry - the first step in developing the company's export business.

Following the Great Depression, it faced the prospect of slowing demand for its main business of supplying railway requirements. As World War II began to take hold, Bradford Kendall recognised Australia's changing needs and switched foundry production to armament castings - a move that proved very lucrative.

The company was engaged by the Commonwealth Government to build a foundry for making cast armour for the Australian built tank program. While it began by producing aerial bombs, naval gun parts and tank hulls, its biggest contribution to the war effort was the development, in 1940, of the world's first one-piece cast tank hull, which was created through the company's own initiative and expense. The Ministry of Munitions accepted the Cruiser tank design and Bradken was commissioned to make the tanks as part of the war effort.



After the war, Bradford Kendall Ltd experienced a great surge of growth boosted by Australia's need to rehabilitate its neglected railway systems. The introduction of diesel electric locomotives, and the demand for higher speed and larger capacity freight trains, were also key forces behind the company's growth.



In 1948, it took advantage of this boom and listed on the Sydney Stock Exchange. This growth surged on into the 1950s when a number of Bradford Kendall foundries were built in South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria and Queensland. The company carried out all the design, engineering and construction of its plants, adopting the latest international concepts. In 1954 it acquired the [ESCO licenses](#) (a leading edge foundry technology company specialising in cast products) and since then Bradken has successfully made an extensive range of ESCO ground engaging tool castings.

During the 1960s and 70s the company continued to expand its local operations, as well as build on its early export success. In December 1974 the company officially changed its name to Bradken Consolidated Limited, following the formation of a new subsidiary, Bradford Kendall Foundries Pty Limited in 1973. But in the early 1980s the company fell on hard- times and in 1982 was purchased by Australian National Industries (ANI), which had built up its stake in the company since the late 1970s. Bradken effectively became a division of ANI. At this time, ANI also comprised a number of specialised engineering divisions including ANI Ruwolt, ANI Arnall, ANI Hoskins and the Engineering Services group which itself consisted of five autonomous engineering entities. It was during this period that Bradken's fabrication division, on the back of the manufacturing and servicing of a range of draglines for the mining industry, embarked on a phase of unprecedented growth.

During the 1980s and early 90s, Bradken's engineering division came to the fore. It completed the fabrication, construction and supply of a broad range projects from cranes and storage units to numerous draglines, including a Marion 8750 Dragline for Curragh Queensland Mines - one of the largest modern draglines in Australia, with an operating weight of 6,600 tonnes.

In October 1990 ANI moved its head office, from its original location at Alexandria, back to where its founders had first worked together, Newcastle. At this time, ANI changed its organisational structure to incorporate its diverse facilities into strategic manufacturing and distribution groups by creating ANI Manufacturing and ANI Product Group.

Bradken, Comsteel and ANI Ruwolt amalgamated to form ANI Manufacturing, with a focus on engineering and manufacturing development. ANI Product Group was formed through the amalgamation of ANI Arnall, ESCO Products and ANI Hoskins, and was to focus on the mining, mineral processing and wear parts markets.

In 1994, as part of a management restructure undertaken by ANI, the ANI Engineering division was created. The division comprised ANI Ruwolt, ANI Hoskins, ANI's grinding mills business, the crusher spare parts and service business and ANI's Australian Environmental Engineering business. This restructure was designed to ensure that all facets of engineering activities covered by ANI were incorporated into one centralised business.

The late 1990s saw the company undergo some of the biggest changes in its history. In October 1997 Bradken went through a major restructure, regionalizing its sales force and rationalising its foundries. Then in January 1999, ANI was taken over by Smorgon Steel Group. Since that time, Bradken has divested its offshore businesses while folding in the ANI Businesses of ANI Wear Resistant Products, ANI Mineral Processing and ANI Engineering to form the company that exists today.

Throughout this period of restructuring, Bradken's fabrication and heavy engineering remained a major source of the company's growth. It continues to fulfill major projects throughout Australia, with recent projects including a deal to construct over 700 coal wagons for Queensland Rail and another contract to supply nearly 650 iron ore wagons for Hamersley in WA - using BHP plate steel to fulfill the demand.

In 2001, Bradken changed hands again, with Smorgon Steel Group announcing the sale of the company to CHAMP (Castle Harlan Australian Mezzanine Partners Pty Ltd), United States-based ESCO Corporation and Bradken Management.

The business underwent considerable restructuring, with significant capital injection by the owners to improve the operational efficiency of the business and become globally competitive in the major resource and rail markets. In August 2004, Bradken Limited listed on the Australian Stock Exchange and reached sales of \$400 million with 2,000 employees. The same year, ESCO Corporation and Bradken celebrated a 50 year prosperous relationship.

Prior to these ownership changes, Bradken had remained a very tight-knit family affair. While Leslie Bradford (Director) and Jim Kendall (Chairman and Managing Director) were the founders, they were both committed to keeping the business in family hands. This commitment saw Mr Bradford's son, George Bradford, serve as a director at Bradken for 35 years, 28 as a chairman, and Mr Kendall's son succeed his father as Managing Director, a position he held for 36 years. Both sons retired in the late 1970s when it came under the control of ANI and Comeng Holdings.

In the following years, Bradken acquired the Roche Castings Henderson foundry, Geoff Brown & Company specialty scrap steel merchants, Wundowie foundry, Firth Rixson Castings and AmeriCast, Inc.



Bradken believes this restructuring process, change of ownership and significant acquisitions place it in a unique position to face any upcoming challenges and to pursue its growth strategies aggressively.

Throughout the years, Bradken has retained a close relationship with BHP. This is nowhere more evident than when looking at the management of Bradken. Before he and Jim Kendall pooled their race winnings to create Bradken all those years ago, Leslie Bradford had worked for BHP. He remained with BHP after Bradken's creation and during his 45 year career at BHP worked his way up to General Manager and then Chief Executive Officer. Similarly Jim Kendall worked at BHP as a Chief Engineer.

This relationship was reinforced when ANI moved the Bradken Head Office to Newcastle in 1990, creating many opportunities for local employees especially ex- BHP employees. This relationship continues today, with Bradken's current Managing Director, Brian Hodges, a former chemical engineering trainee with BHP Newcastle, having worked for BHP for over 20 years. More than luck was needed to stay in business through the great depression, World War II and to survive the early 80s and subsequent takeovers.

Bradken's story - and a remarkable one at that - is of a customer-friendly company, committed to providing innovative products. Built on luck, mateship and strong family ties, its success has come from its ability to adapt and change direction to suit market demand. Its focus on customers and its willingness to research and develop new, innovative products ensure it remains at the forefront of its business.