

*A  
Brief History  
of the  
Henry Boot Group of Companies*



*Banner Cross Hall, Sheffield*

*Group Head Office since 1932*

**Henry Boot**

# Henry Boot

Henry Boot has been at the forefront of building and civil engineering in the UK for over 100 years and is today established as one of the leading property and construction based companies in the country.

## OUR FOUNDER

Henry Boot, son of Charles Boot who was a farmer in the now densely populated Heeley district of Sheffield, was 35 years of age when he founded the business which was to become Henry Boot PLC as we know it today.

Following a seven year joinery apprenticeship, Henry gained over 20 years practical experience with large local building firms before launching out on his own in 1886.

Progress from initial jobbing work was rapid and he soon successfully moved into larger scale public works and housing projects. The company continued to flourish as his son Charles became more involved and Henry retained an active interest until his death in 1931.



**HENRY BOOT**  
(1851 - 1931)

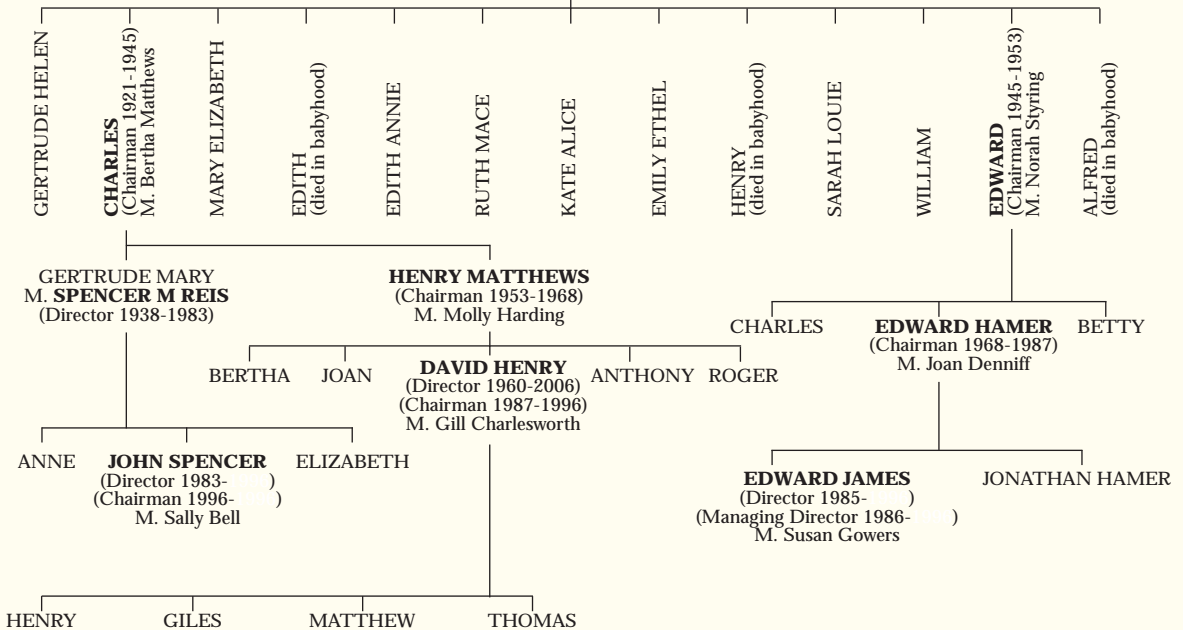
M. Hannah White

## THE COMPANY

The firm was incorporated in 1919 shortly after which time Charles, the eldest of Henry's three sons, took over the running of the company from his father. Upon his death in 1945, Charles was succeeded by his brother Edward.

His nephew Henry M Boot assumed control upon Edward's death in 1953 and retired in 1968 at which time his cousin Hamer Boot became Chairman and Managing Director.

Upon the retirement of Hamer as Managing Director in 1986 he was succeeded by his elder son Jamie whose second cousin David H Boot became non-executive Chairman from 1987 until 1996 when John Reis assumed the position.



## EARLY YEARS

Charles Boot, the eldest of Henry's three sons, became a partner in the business at an early age and on the outbreak of the 1914-1918 War headed the company's efforts in obtaining a variety of Government contracts. Notable examples included the major phase of the Army Camp at Catterick in Yorkshire, Manston Aerodrome near Ramsgate (value £225,000), the Calshot Seaplane Base (value £337,000), the Tees Naval Base, an American Army Rest Camp and Hospital at Southampton and Chepstow Military Hospital.

Many other similar projects were carried out, all demanding speedy and economical construction under difficult war-time conditions.

In one year alone during the Great War, 1,000 military buildings and over 50 miles of roads and sewers were completed. The company also operated specialised plant including a multi-bucket excavator for the extraction of coprolite for the munitions industry.

It is interesting to reflect that after starting with one handcart and later one horse-drawn cart, transport facilities had increased to twenty horses and carts and half a dozen mechanically propelled lorries by 1914. Records show that more modern replacements were made as the horses were 'retired to grass'. For example, old documents show that in 1920 a new large Opel truck, registration number WA 1448, was purchased at a cost of no less than £850.

## INTER-WAR YEARS

A company office was set up in Paris immediately after the war and in conjunction with the French Government administered contracts for the re-construction of war-ravaged towns and villages.

Within two years of becoming a public company in 1920, the company was operating not only from Sheffield, London and Paris but from Barcelona and Athens, undertaking the construction of harbours, underground railways, waterworks and drainage systems throughout Europe.

In fact, the Athens office dealt with one of the biggest contracts of the time - a £10,000,000 (1927 value) project comprising land reclamation and protection, together with irrigation works and the construction of roads and bridges. The contract was completed in 1952, work having been suspended only when Greece suffered foreign occupation during the 1939-45 War.

During the 1919-1939 inter-war period, Henry Boot built in excess of 80,000 houses, significantly more than any other contractor in the UK. Of these some 50,000 were built for local authorities, over 9,000 for rent (through Henry Boot subsidiary companies First National Housing Trust Limited and Henry Boot Estates Limited) and the balance for sale to the private sector.

Also at this time the company carried out an extensive programme of commercial and industrial building, including roads, schools, hospitals etc.

In 1932 the company moved to its present headquarters at Banner Cross Hall in Sheffield and its London office was moved from premises in Victoria Street to 10 The Boltons, SW10 (vacated in 1985).

## PINEWOOD STUDIOS

Pinewood Studios at Heatherden Hall, Iver, Buckinghamshire, were designed and constructed by Charles Boot as a Henry Boot development during 1936. Based on the best USA film studio practice and layout, the considerable work, including in-house design, was completed within a period of only 12 months.

By acquisition of Baldry, Yerburch and Hutchinson Limited (founder member of the Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors) vast underground fuel storage tanks and other facilities for the Navy in Lioness and the Shetland Islands were installed prior to and during the Second World War.

Flettons Limited (brickworks) was also acquired in this period and operated for a number of years before being sold to the London Brick Company.

The company continued to undertake all types of construction work, large and small, both for the public and private sector. These are too numerous and varied to mention, but include the beginning of Welwyn Garden City and the acquisition and near-successful development of the Benny Railplane for rapid urban transportation.

1939 saw the commencement of a further spate of work for the Navy, Army and Airforce, including aerodromes, ordnance factory buildings and hospital camps (including what is now Butlin's Pwllheli) all of which were contracts where time was of the essence.

Henry Boot also played its part, together with the country's other major top 20 contractors, in the monumental construction of the Mulberry and Gooseberry Harbours for use in the invasion of Europe on D-Day, 6th June 1944.

## FURTHER EXPANSION

Charles Boot, JP, died in 1945 and was succeeded by his brother, Edward Boot. Work proceeded apace and traditional Henry Boot building work was supplemented by the formation of a civil engineering company.

Of particular note amongst the wide variety of building and civil engineering work undertaken were Phoenix bungalows, aluminium bungalows, British Iron & Steel Federation houses and Reema houses (for the Coal Industry Housing Association and local authorities) and pioneering work in soil stabilisation. Further work was also undertaken at the Denham and Pinewood Film Studios which by now had been acquired by the Rank Organisation and where Charles Boot's son-in-law, the late Spencer M. Reis, had assumed the role of Managing Director which he held until his retirement.

Henry Matthews Boot (Charles' son) succeeded Edward Boot upon the latter's death in 1953 and turnover continued to increase in the areas of building and civil engineering. This included long term contract work for the National Coal Board and British Steel Corporation, railway engineering contracting, joinery manufacture and houses for sale.

An innovative step taken in 1965 was the introduction of Banner Building Society, a Henry Boot subsidiary formed to offer mortgages to the general public for such commercial property as housing, guest houses and public houses. This activity continued until 1982 when the business was transferred to the Midshires Building Society (now Birmingham Midshires - part of Halifax Group plc).

Henry M. Boot retired in 1968 and Edward Hamer Boot, Edward's son, became Chairman and Managing Director.

Expansion of group activities continued, part of which was the acquisition of a foundry in Bingley, West Yorkshire in 1974 to support the railway engineering activity. The foundry traded in Bingley until 1980 when it was transferred to existing premises in Leiston, Suffolk from where it operated until its closure in 1983.

1976 saw an increase in overseas work initially in Hong Kong where the company supplied and laid all the trackwork for the Mass Transit Railway System in joint venture with Gammon (Hong Kong). Other extensive international railway and civil engineering work was also carried out including a £13 million railway sub-contract on the Kowloon-Canton Railway for Leightons of Australia.

Over the next few years work was also carried out in Nigeria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and in Singapore where a £120 million railway and associated civil engineering contract was undertaken in joint venture with Gammon (Hong Kong) and Singa Developments.

In 1984 Thos. W. Ward (Railway Engineers) Limited of Sandiacre was acquired to strengthen the group's railway engineering activities in this country and overseas, and the following year Henry Boot was proud indeed to be awarded the Queen's Award for Export Achievement.



*The Queen's Award  
for Export Achievement*

## COMPANY CENTENARY

1986 was significant for a series of notable events - it marked the company's centenary (100 years of trading through two world wars and six monarchs); Jamie Boot, son of Hamer Boot, assumed the position of Group Managing Director upon his father's retirement; and the Rothervale Joinery company was sold after almost 60 years in the Henry Boot group.

David Boot took on the mantle of non-executive Chairman in the following year and it was only a matter of months later in September that Hamer Boot died at the age of 65. He had been a Director of the company for 38 years and in his 19 years as Chairman had seen its turnover increase eighteen-fold.

Further rationalisation of group activities was achieved in 1988 with the sale of the railway engineering activity which had been operational since the mid-1950s.

## CONTINUING GROWTH

A further period of stability followed through the 1990s, when group activities encompassed construction, private housing, property development, land management, plant hire and training, and each year enjoyed successive increased growth in profit and earnings.

In late 2002 the first of a number of company disposals took place as the group looked to specialise on a more focused range of activities. By June 2003, the group had tailored its operations to concentrate on property, land, construction and plant hire, and was able to devote its resources to even greater effect in these core activities.

## PRESENT DAY

Today Henry Boot is a fully listed company on the London Stock Exchange with a sound reputation for reliability and integrity in its specialist markets. The company still retains its family links, and Jamie Boot has been Group Managing Director since 1986.

John Reis is non-executive Chairman, having assumed the position in 1996 when David Boot relinquished the role after nine years.



*Jamie Boot - Group Managing Director*

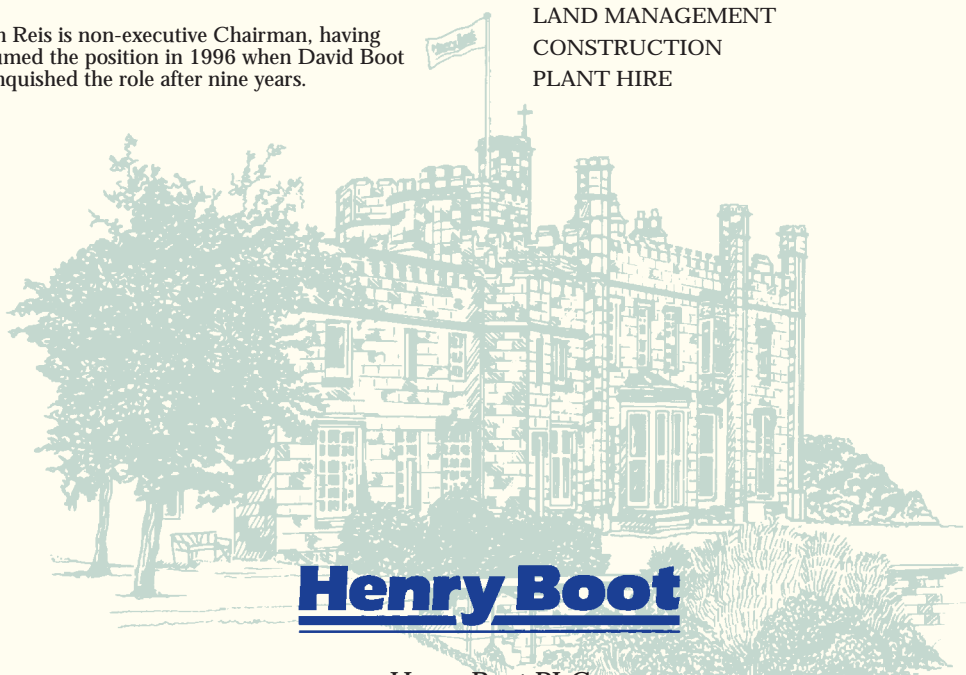
Property development is the lead Henry Boot activity and continues to make a significant contribution to group progress through its nationwide success. This also applies to the land management activity, which has successfully applied its land acquisition and planning expertise in many parts of the country.

The construction business specialises in serving the needs of commerce and industry in the North of England, and enjoys an enviable reputation for the quality of its performance. With strategically situated hire centres in the Midlands and North of England, the plant hire activity also meets the increasing requirements of industry and the general public.

It is this flexibility and strength of performance that has kept Henry Boot at the forefront of its markets for well over 100 years, and which ensures that the company is well placed to continue its impressive progress in the new millennium.

## Group Activities

PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT  
LAND MANAGEMENT  
CONSTRUCTION  
PLANT HIRE



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