

PROFILE
HIRE TECHNICIANS

Hiretech reaches 50

As Hire Technicians Group Ltd celebrates its 50th anniversary, Robert Aplin updates the pioneer's story by charting its move out of hire into manufacturing and distribution world wide.

As you can see from the pages reproduced here from our article originally published in January 1995 to coincide with his retirement, John Rogers is credited as the founder of the tool and equipment hire industry. He opened the first tool hire shop, trading as Hire Technicians Co, on Saturday 12 March 1955. Over the next 18 years, Hiretech, as the company became known, built up a network of eight hire branches in the south east of England.

In the early 1970s, John Rogers' role in developing this industry was of vital importance as he was also involved with the first Hirex exhibition, the industry's own magazine, Hire News, and was responsible for the formation of

Hire Association Europe, becoming its first Chairman. In the early 1980s, Hiretech also established a franchise DIY hire operation within Sainsbury's new Homebase operations, reaching 62 outlets at its peak.

As Hiretech continued its pioneering journey, in June 1974, it also acquired the tooling rights to the USA's Clarke floor sanders and started manufacturing the machines it had distributed for many years. The company has clearly come a long way since its first foray into manufacturing as it has grown its production capacity in Watford into what is now believed to be one of the largest floor sanding operations in the western world.

Hiretech out of hire

In the summer of 1998, Hiretech sold its hire activity in order to concentrate on the manufacture and distribution of its floor sanders and wallpaper

strippers. Its hire depot in Bushes Arches in Watford, originally opened by John Rogers in April 1962, was acquired by HSS, with Speedy taking over the Luton premises and the Hemel Hempstead hire fleet and contracts. By this time, the company was managed by Mark Rogers, John's son, who had taken over as Chairman and MD on his father's retirement. He states "our future was in manufacturing and we needed to make a significant investment to increase our production capacity to meet the demand for floor sanding products. High demand helped to accelerate our business plan to dispose of our hire operation. Its sale represented the end of an era after 43 years, but we have continued to use our hire experience to design and produce sanders and wallpaper strippers that hire companies want.

PROFILE The industry's founder

Following the announcement of John Roger's retirement from Hire Technicians Group Ltd, the company he founded in 1955, Robert Aplin talks with him about his 40 years in the tool and equipment hire industry.

It is always a great thrill to meet pioneers of the tool hire industry. In this case I had the pleasure to talk with the industry's founder, for John Rogers is credited with starting tool hire in this country back in 1955. Since then he has built his company, Hire Technicians Group Ltd, to become a leading tool and equipment hirer as well as a manufacturer, distributor and exporter of popular products to the hire industry on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond. After 40 years in his industry, he has now decided to retire, so in the Hirex Show issue of the hire industry's magazine which is jointly owned by HAE, all of which he was closely involved in launching, it is particularly appropriate to profile John Rogers' working life.

He first wanted to run his own company in 1954. At that time, having trained as a structural engineering draughtsman, he was selling industrial safety equipment in his father's small business. "These post-war boom years saw the early stages of DIY growth, particularly following the introduction of hand power tools. The problem was that these tools were expensive and not everyone could afford to buy them. I wondered if the people who were doing-it-themselves would hire the tools, but there was no precedent. When I investigated further, I couldn't find any hirers and so there was nobody to talk to about hire."

"With a couple of friends we each invested £140 and set out to find premises. At that time I was living in Shoreham but

working in Park Royal, London.

In those boom times there wasn't an empty shop anywhere, but I eventually found half a shop - a chiroprapist had the other half - vacant in Wembley High Road. In those days Wembley was a wealthy town with a tremendous amount of housing development. On Saturday 15 March 1955 we opened the shop, which was the first retail outlet in the UK to specialise in hire. For two years however George Newman and I retained our existing jobs and Arthur Westlake, who was unemployed at the time, ran the shop for us for the first year. We bought a few Black & Decker and Wolf electric tools, electric paint strippers and paint spray compressors for £300 and started business as Hire Technicians Co. Our first hire was for an electric paint stripper."



John Rogers' half a shop in Wembley High Road was the first retail outlet in the UK to specialise in hire.



John Rogers (centre) inspects, with the President of Clarke, the first batch of floor sanders to be manufactured by Hire Technicians.

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BASIC BUSINESS PRINCIPLES

"There was no precedent to what we were doing and we had therefore to decide certain basic business policies. We decided that we had to get a deposit for any item hired and, secondly, we were strict on the return of equipment. If customers were late returning items, then they would be charged extra. Also, equipment had to be returned clean, otherwise we would charge. We thought that this was the right way to go about our business and we kept to these principles. We also wrote the basic terms of a hire contract which were improved upon when a solicitor visited the shop to hire an item of equipment."

Within two years Hire Technicians had become so busy in hire that there wasn't enough equipment available. By now the company was doing big business with builders and employed a man to run the shop. Arthur Westlake had left after a year, apparently, because he saw no future in the business! From 1957 John Rogers worked full time in Hire Technicians and moved his family from Shoreham to the premises above the shop. The proceeds from the sale of the family's bungalow was put into the business. "We were desperate for capital for more equipment."

By this time other potential hirers were visiting the Wembley shop, enquiring about how they could start a tool hire business. "I gave them all the help I could - telling them how to go about hire. Other shops opened in the London area; my view was that the more hire shops, the better. As the public began to know more about hire, the more business it would mean for us."

John Rogers soon acquired the other half flat tenant to let him have the yard at the back of the premises. This enabled the company to greatly increase its range of equipment to include scaffolding and ladders as well as operating a small truck for deliveries, "which were always charged for." Major contractors like Costain and Taylor Woodrow became daily customers. "We were making high profits but every penny was ploughed back into the business. Our biggest struggle was to get enough equipment."

Visitors to Wembley High Road were

Executive Hire News



By the mid-60s Hire Technicians was selling Clarke floor sanders to other hire companies

coming from further afield and one day early in 1961, an American walked in and said that he owned a rental business in California and introduced John Rogers to the Clarke floor sanding machine. "I arranged for a machine to be delivered from America and this triggered the start of our distribution activities. There was a locally-built machine for the DIY market but it was a poor machine and was difficult to maintain. We began selling the Clarke sander to other hire companies and very quickly sold 200 machines. The Clarke unit was double the price of the sander previously available in the UK. We simply told other hirers to charge double the hire rate."

The month of April 1962 saw Hire Technicians open a second outlet, which was to become its HQ site, on Bushey Arches in Watford. "The premises were previously a pub and were much bigger than Wembley. We grew extremely rapidly when we opened in Watford. In the office upstairs we soon had six girls typing invoices all day long for account customers alone. We achieved a 25% increase in turnover year after year after year."

Hire Technicians' expansion continued apace throughout the rest of the 60s and early 70s. The company's next depot was opened in Leigh-on-Sea, Essex in June 65. "Someone had visited me, saying that he wanted to start his own tool hire shop but he did not have any money. So we formed a 50:50 joint venture with him and traded under the Hire Technicians name. The opening in Chelmsford in August 72 was a similar joint venture. In between times Hire Technicians opened further wholly-owned branches in Luton in April 67, Tonbridge, Kent in June 68 and at Wimbledon in March

BREAKTHROUGH INTO MANUFACTURE

Distribution also grew steadily in the early 70s, it accounted for Technicians turnover. In July 1974 the company made another breakthrough when it started manufacturing floor sander which the core selling so successfully. "Clarke



John Rogers recalls that "I felt undoubtedly the best years before"

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