

GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES

Bullfinch (Gas Equipment) Ltd celebrates 50 years this year. Managing director Andrew Williams discusses the family run company's highs and lows and its plans for the next 50 years.



Bob Lynes.



Town gas blowlamp.

When the 1950s TV programme Inventors' Corner featured a blowtorch operated by town gas, which was the mains gas at the time, my great uncle Bob Lynes saw an opportunity. Up to that time, blowlamps were nearly all paraffin fuelled.

Bob acquired the patent for the town gas blowtorch from Mr Ball and Mr Finch, and Bullfinch's parent company Rainsford & Lynes started to make the torch under the brand name Bullfinch. It sold well. We then tried the torch out with newly introduced cylinders of lpg and it soon became apparent that a new range of torches would be needed, which formed the basis of our successful Standard Torch range.

Torches require regulators to control the gas pressure, together with other fittings and accessories, and we quickly developed these as well. Heaters, furnaces for melting bitumen and



Combo valve for tanks.

tar and gaslights followed.

Heaters to stop railway points freezing were introduced and were a great success. Burners were developed for specific customers, such as British Telecom, and we continued to use our technical expertise to meet market needs.

At one point, we developed a set of traffic lights powered by lpg, and this looked a real winner until one set had both lights showing green! In the end, we decided that the technical problems would be too great for further development. You can't win them all!

In 1959, due to the rapid rise in sales of Bullfinch products, it was decided to set up Bullfinch as a separate company and new premises were acquired for the Bullfinch operation. Bob Lynes died in 1968 and my father Graham Williams, his nephew, took over the running of the business.

The 1970s and '80s were good for Bullfinch – for example, we sold 20,000 Handlights to Malaysia in one consignment – and the problems with labour relations and energy scares meant that we were able to sell lots of portable heaters and lights. We also developed a number of spark ignition devices, such as the Autotorch, the AutoFlood and the Space Heater.

In the last 20 years, we have developed partnerships with other

companies in order to diversify. Combo valves for bulk tanks, marquee heaters, forced air heaters, small gas cylinders and a range of utility points for caravans and motorhomes are just some of the additions to our range.

Many of the products in the current range have been produced in response to enquiries from our customers, such as the recent introduction of a gas poker for lighting fires and barbecues. One of our key strengths is being able to produce or source products that our strong technical and commercial team can provide technical expertise and backup for.

Eight years ago, we set up our South East Depot in Essex, which enabled us to have a key presence in that part of the country. Our new range of enamelled cookers was originally sourced for the Centenary Scout Jamboree in 2007, which was conveniently

held in Essex, so the South East Depot was ideally placed to take on the challenge of supplying almost 3,000 cookers to feed scouts from all over the world.

We have just launched the FirePower cylinder mounted torch, which we expect to be a real market winner, and we continue to look for new opportunities. Our catalogue has been a key part of our operation and a new edition to mark our 50 years will be available in October. We have also invested heavily in our website, which now provides extra information about our products and services.

Our customer range is very diverse – from scouts to professional plumbers, dentists to railway enthusiasts, farmers to gas installers – and we are focused on ways in which we can satisfy them with products and services to meet their needs. Our byword is 'putting lpg to work', and we still see this as the mainstream of our business for the years to come.

Bob Lynes had the vision to take up the patent for our original blowtorch and, in the years since, we have been able to capitalise on that and have always sought to introduce innovative products into the marketplace. We look forward to the next 50 years positively.

**Contact Bullfinch (Gas Equipment) Ltd on
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Superglow radiant heater.