FROM GLASGOW SHOP
TO INTERNATIONAL GROUP

The Centenary History of
P & W MacLellan Ltd
1890 - 1990

Haden MacLellan Holdings plc
George MacLellan Blair (Chairman) and his office staff in the 1890s

The Partners and their Managers reviewing Gare du Nord drawings
CHAPTER 1
A NOTABLE EXAMPLE
1805–1890

Contrary to popular belief, industrial enterprises in Britain have a remarkable ability to adapt rapidly, and often radically, to changing economic circumstances as the history of Haden MacLellan Holdings plc bears testimony. The present company was registered in London on 15 February 1890 as P & W MacLellan Ltd with offices in the Trongate, Glasgow, and 8 Great Winchester Street in London, to carry on the business of ‘engineers, wagon and bridge builders, iron, steel, metal, timber, and general merchants’. By that time the firm was over eighty years old. It had been founded in Glasgow in the year of Trafalgar 1805 by Donald and Humphrey MacLellan who opened a hardware shop at 178 Saltmarket, then in the commercial heart of the city. The MacLellan family were farmers at Luss on the west bank of Loch Lomond. The partnership only lasted four years and in 1809 Donald set up on his own around the corner at No 5 the Trongate. He specialised in supplying pedlars who travelled the countryside selling their wares to the scattered communities of the highlands and islands. A typical sale was to Thomas Scouler, a travelling merchant, in August 1825, which comprised hardware, like knives and scissors, as well as other merchandise — silk purses, silver pencil cases, brooches, gold earrings, and gold seals — to delight and entrance the unwary housewife. During the 1820s, he enlarged his trade, stocking, by the end of the decade, a bewildering variety of goods, pocket and penknives of all shapes and sizes, cutlery, tea caddies, razors, snuff boxes, buttons, needles, thimbles, nut crackers, garters, candlesticks, toddy ladles, dolls, Jew’s harps, and toy barking dogs. The shop moved in 1826 along the street to No 9 Trongate. Since Donald MacLellan had no children, he planned to pass his, by now, successful business, on to his nephews, Peter and Walter, the sons of his eldest brother, George. Peter was apprenticed to Andrew Liddle, an ironmonger with premises at 102 Argyle Street and owner of the Globe Foundry to the west of the city centre. Donald MacLellan died in 1831 and his widow moved the shop further down the street to No 115 Trongate. On 1 November Walter MacLellan, the younger of the two brothers, came to help his aunt run the business. He was joined by Peter in June 1832 on the completion of his apprenticeship. At Whitsunday of the following year, an uncle, also called Peter, took over the stock and furnishings for £337 from his brother’s widow, with the intention of managing the firm until his nephews had sufficient experience to continue on their own. The business prospered and three years later an additional warehouse was opened at 26 Robertson Street. In 1839, uncle Peter retired and P & W MacLellan was formed. The young men quickly expanded their trade to cater for the needs of Glasgow’s industries. By 1844 they were turning over between £500 and £1,000 a month, selling to a large number of account customers, like Randolph Elliot & Co, millwrights and engineers, Ebenezer Dove, a draper in the Trongate, William Henderson & Sons, soapmakers, candle manufacturers and oil merchants, Charles Tennant & Co, the chemical manufacturers, and P & W McOnie, sugar machinery makers. Most of the transactions were for relatively small sums, suggesting that the firm continued to deal largely in ironmongery and tools. They still supplied merchants in rural Scotland, with an agent in Campbeltown in the Mull of Kintyre doing a large trade. The partners decided in 1844 to begin manufacturing on their own account, renting a small smith shop in Greenhill Place, before purchasing their own premises the following year at 20 New Wynd.

P & W MacLellan advertised themselves as ironmongers, smiths, gasfitters and bellhangers in the Glasgow directory of 1846. Two years later they added iron merchanting to their activities, reflecting the growth in demand for iron with the boom in railway construction at the end of the decade. They seem to have started making iron bridges at this time. In 1850, P & W MacLellan took the bold decision to
Early history

build complete foot suspension bridges in partnership with a contractor, Mr Virtue, using by then well tried technology. Construction of their first bridge across the Clyde, designed by Alexander Kirkland, started in January 1851 and was completed at the end of June 1852. Mr Virtue carried out all the building masonry work, while P & W MacLellan supplied the iron chains, plates, and bolts with the help of the Paisley engineers Hanna Donald & Wilson. So confident were the partners in their ability to undertake such constructional engineering projects that they converted their works in New Wynd into an iron warehouse and purchased larger premises for £2,500 at 10 Adelphi Street or Terrace, which they named the Clutha Iron Works, from the ancient Celtic word for the Clyde meaning strong.

From its small beginnings the MacLellan's enterprise had now grown into a sizeable business. In 1854 Duncan MacLellan, the youngest brother of Peter and Walter, became a partner and was given a fifth share in the profits. During that year they added the stamping of bolts and rivets to their advertised activities. By then Peter and Walter's stake in the firm had grown to £8,698 each. When the annual accounts were made up at the end of the year, they held stock in the various premises valued at over £20,000 and had outstanding accounts totalling £36,000. They owed their suppliers £25,000. The partners had made a modest investment of £60 in the Perth & Dunkeld Railway as a means of securing orders. During 1855 they took an equivalent stake in the Glasgow Londonderry Steamer Co, presumably to give them favourable rates for the transport of merchandise to Ireland. At the same time they began to build bogies for railway wagons and the wagons themselves. The total profit for that year was the then large sum of £10,239, of which two-fifths each went to Peter and Walter and one-fifth to Duncan.

The firm expanded again in 1856, with the investment of over £1,000 in the iron warehouse in New Wynd and the purchase of property in Dundas Street and the Albert Grain Mills, which were converted into workshops.
The MacLennans with one of the columns for the Gare du Nord
Debenture of 1899
The Company continued through the two World Wars until 1987 when MacLellan became part of Haden MacLellan Holdings plc