A G COOMBS
An illustrated 70 year mini-history of the Building Engineering Services Company founded in Melbourne, Australia in 1945

Compiled by Brian Roberts of the CIBSE Heritage Group from the book by Marcella Hunter
The Early Years

Allan Coombs was born in Melbourne in October 1920. At the age of seventeen he commenced a five-year apprenticeship with Hawkins & Wilcox, a Melbourne firm specialising in plumbing and pipe fabrication, continuing to work for them until the end of the War in 1945 when he decided to branch out on his own.

Working as a one-man operation he gradually built up his business. As this grew he employed extra plumbers and in 1947 registered the trading name A G Coombs. By the early 1950s he was carrying out domestic plumbing, dust extraction, and hot water heating and ventilation. By 1953, Allan had built a proper office and factory and went on to establish a sheet metal shop. Following the boom in high-rise buildings, in 1958 he moved into the world of commercial air conditioning.
Allan Coombs “Learning the Trade,” 1940s

A G Coombs’ staff outside the company’s new offices on Cochranes Road, Christmas 1956
The Federal Hotel and Coffee Palace in Melbourne, built in 1890, received a new lease of life when the services were upgraded by A G Coombs
The Royal Children’s Hospital, 1955-1963 was a major mechanical services installation

Royal Children’s Hospital 1959: Pouring concrete over the embedded panel heating pipes
A ventilation system was installed by A G Coombs in this offset printing plant in the late 1950s.
Loading an air conditioning plenum unit, housing the fans and coils for an air conditioning system
Checking the fan bearings in an air conditioning system
Rolling sheet metal, early 1960s
Construction of Collins Place in the early 1970s was badly disrupted by trade union disputes
Collins Wales House completed in 1978
A G Coombs developed a special Air Flow Test Apparatus for commissioning
Manufacturing spiral ducting
The Coop’s Shot Tower of 1888, saved and incorporated in the Melbourne Centre
In a joint venture, A G Coombs installed the mechanical services in the podium of Melbourne’s Crown Entertainment Complex during the mid-1990s
Also during the 1990’s, A G Coombs upgraded the services at 140 William Street (formerly the 1972 BHP House)
More photos of A G Coombs’ installations
A G Coombs’ Major Projects 2003-2012
More A G Coombs’ Major Projects from 2003-2012

Melbourne’s GPO

National Australia Bank headquarters, Docklands

The Herald & Weekly Times building

Hamers Hall (part of Arts Centre Melbourne)

Pipeshop
Philip Coombs joined the family firm in 1976 as an apprentice plumber. He worked for the Company for the next thirty-six years taking over the management and ownership in 1985. He went on to transfer ownership to a group of senior executives under the leadership of Russell Telford who had joined A G Coombs as a site foreman in 1988. Though no longer family owned, the Company continues as a major Australian Building Engineering Services Contractor.