

The Roblan Story



David and John Lansley were mates and first met in third class at [North Annandale Public School](#). They both attended the [Hunter Bailie](#), as members of the Boys' Brigade.

David started his first job in the office of the Tool Equipment Company. After twelve months in the office he was offered an apprenticeship. As a second year apprentice, Dave began work at British Novelities and was determined that on completing his apprenticeship as a Toolmaker he would establish his own business.

John Lansley who had also completed his apprenticeship in Fitting & Turning worked for a while in partnership with David developing their engineering skills.

The Company, **Robertson & Lansley Pty Limited**, was registered and incorporated on 26th June 1947.

David Robertson was born on the 13th January 1925, when the family was living in Nelson Street Annandale. David's father, a Master Tailor and Cutter, had his tailoring business in Rozelle. In 1935 they moved to Kentville Avenue.

Following the death of David's father, the family moved to Mallet Street Camperdown where David's mother acquired a Sandwich Shop through the help of the Wilkinson family.

David's father used to visit and speak Galic to old Mrs Wilkinson, and the family appreciated the friendship that was given by the Robertsons.

Mrs Robertson remarried (Jim Dowe) and the Family moved back to Nelson Street.



Robertson & Lansley Pty Limited originally operated from premises built at the rear of Nelson Street Annandale.

In those humble surrounds the company had a six inch toolmaker's lathe, a Richardson Drilling Machine and a hand press.

[Ken Roberts](#), a graduate Electrical Engineer and close friend of David and the Robertson Family, was asked to join the company, to develop and manufacture his invention of Australia's first midget radio tuning gang.

In June 1947 Ken was elected the First Chairman of **Robertson & Lansley Pty Limited**.

[Ken Toulmin](#) joined **Robertson and Lansley Pty Limited** on 5th February, 1951.

Through the efforts of Ken Roberts the Company was successful in obtaining orders to produce radio tuning gang condensers for the manufacture of midget radios in Australia.

Robertson & Lansley Pty Limited was growing and obtaining a reputation within the industry for precision workmanship.

By the early fifties the Company was employing up to eighteen workers. The enterprise was housed in a rented site, on the corner of Moore and White Street Leichhardt, which **Roblan** purchased in 1954.



Harry Butler was a close friend of David Robertson through their association with the [Glebe Hockey Club](#).

Born on the 25th July 1924, in Marrickville, Harry married and resided with his family in Bankstown, Abbotsford and Beaumont.

Wherever he went Harry's kind and caring nature won him respect and lasting friendships.

When Harry completed his apprenticeship, as a Fitter & Turner, he approached David for work. At the time there was only enough work for two weeks. Without a worry in the world Harry told David, "that's fine, we'll do the work in one week, and when new work becomes available, I'll help out."



As a great supporter of the apprenticeship system, Harry helped train many apprentices, three of whom were chosen as NSW Toolmaking Apprentices of the Year.

When Harry joined the company, he contributed funds from his mother's estate to put a deposit on a surface grinder. For forty-three years he was a **Director of Roblan Pty Ltd**, and was responsible for the development of the Metal Pressing Division.

Harry was renowned for his tooling skills, sound business judgement and insistence on a fair deal for all echelons of industry.

Harry passed away on the [4th January, 1990](#).

Always tireless supporter of local organisations he held positions of:

- * Treasurer and Selector – Glebe District Hockey Club
- * President of Leichhardt Business Men's Club
- * Commodore of Abbotsford Sailing Club.

At the time of his death Harry was President of the Berry Probus Club.

Harry will be sadly missed by his wife [Isabella](#) (Betty), children, grandchildren and many other close family members.

Always a keen sportsman, Harry was a founding member of the Southern Alps Ski Club. He skied, played cricket, golf, squash and snooker.

However, it was as a member of the Glebe District Hockey Club that Harry's sporting ability excelled. He was chosen in representative teams on several occasions.



First grade Premiers 1945 at Saint Paul's Oval, Sydney University, with the magnificent sandstone retaining wall in the background. Back row: Harry "Bunch" Butler, Jack Taylor, Clive Bunch, Jim Kenny, Kelvin Dickey, Vernon Turner. Front row: Tommy Irvine, Leo Mandlock, Norm Lockhardt, John Quilton and Bill Ross.

John (Jack) McParland was also a member of the [Glebe Hockey Club](#). He had completed training and employment with the Shell Company and the Campbell Company of Haberfield.

John Worley was secretary of the Glebe Hockey Club and knew Jack from his training days at the Shell Company. John asked Jack to audit the clubs books and was impressed by Jack's report, which he brought to the attention of Dave Robertson and Harry Butler.

Recently qualified with the Australian Society of Accountants and the Institute of Chartered Secretaries, Jack was invited by



David Robertson to help him and Harry Butler with the company office work, in the absence of the company accountant (Maxwell Looms), who was in hospital with appendicitis.

Jack's skills, and his quality reporting to the company on professional matters, so impressed Dave and Harry that he was asked to join the company.

On 5th February 1955 Jack was appointed to the position of Accountant and Company Secretary of **Robertson and Lansley Pty Ltd**.

Kenneth John Arthur was born 24th February 1922. He commenced work with **Robertson and Lansley Pty Ltd** on 1st September 1957, as a Toolmaker.

Later Ken worked in the tooling design drafting office, at the Moore and White Street premises. He was later appointed a Director and Manager of **Moulded Plastics (Mfg) Pty Ltd**, which operated from premises in Mallett Street Camperdown, under the stewardship of the foreman at the time, Evan "Darkie" Morris.



Ken was also a member of the Plastics Institute of Australia and served on various committee officer roles.

In 1969 the plastic moulding business was relocated to the present site, 233 Catherine Street, Leichhardt.

Ken managed this Division until his retirement, on 14th July 1983. He moved to Nelsons Bay, on the NSW north-central coast.

Ken passed away, in hospital, on 24th December 1995.



Alfred Willis trained as an industrial chemist and founded the company, **Moulded Plastics Pty Limited**, in 1945.

In 1944 Alfred was elected as the first president of the NSW Plastics Institute.

Alfred played an active role in founding the Plastics Institute of Australia, and was elected its second president in 1947.

Alfred and his wife Gladis had two children , a son Barry and a daughter Lynette.

Robertson & Lansley Pty Ltd made and repaired plastic moulds for **Moulded Plastics**, and so began the friendship and collaboration between David Robertson, Alfred Willis and Harry Butler.

In 1956 the two companies amalgamated and operated with cross holding in each company.

Robertson and Lansley Pty Limited later became the property holding entity to the business that was registered in 1967 as **Roblan Pty Limited**.



In 1968 **Robertson and Lansley Pty Ltd** began construction of their new premises at 233 Catherine Street, in Leichhardt, an inner- western suburb of Sydney.



[The land](#) had been purchased, the previous year, to enable expansion of the business, which was growing rapidly.



The plan was for a 34,000 sq. ft (3,160 sq. m) building, to house the Administration offices, Plastic Moulding, Metal Pressing and Tooling/Design Divisions of the Company.



The construction was completed successfully by the end of the summer, and occupied early in 1969.

The addition of the Stores and Distribution centre followed in the late 70s, to meet the demands of the rapidly expanding imports distribution agency, established in the previous decade.



The shop floor - the main section of the building - housed the Metal Pressing, Moulding and Tooling divisions, well into the 90s.



In 1998 the Metal Pressing Division was relocated to Ingleburn, to enable the expansion of both the Metal and Plastics arms of the business.



Today the Leichhardt premises house the Administration, Plastics Moulding and Distribution Centre.





The policy adopted by [Dave Robertson and Harry Butler](#) towards the development of all staff, but particularly apprentices, has paid dividends over the years.

This policy has paid dividends beyond the shop floor, into the Board Room and Administration. Roblan's executive is successful because it knows and understands the business from the Toolroom through to the Board Room.



[Harry Butler](#) was passionate about the apprenticeship system. He was the driving force behind hiring the best prospects and guiding and encouraging them to achieve their best.

This same policy, of selecting the brightest and the best, has been reflected in David, Harry and Ken Robert's policy from the very beginning, where they poured their own life-savings into purchasing the best equipment available.



It is no accident that **Roblan Pty Ltd** has produced three National Apprentices of the Year, in as many decades, with several others well placed over the years.

This has kept Roblan at the forefront of the Industry in Australia. Indeed Roblan has pioneered the implementation of new technology over the decades.



The climate engendered by Harry on the Toolroom floor has continued, with his proteges passing on their expertise to the next generation of **Roblan** craftsmen.

Today **Roblan Pty Ltd** has the proud reputation of having the highest quality tradesmen and craftsmen, working with the best equipment money can buy, to produce the finest quality workmanship this country can deliver.



Roblan Pty Ltd has always grounded its success and reliable quality on the implementation of cutting-edge technology, and has often lead the way in this country.



That tradition continues through to the new century. In January 2013 **Roblan** upgraded its Plastic Injection Moulding plant with the latest Sepro Robotic Technology.



In October 2015 **Roblan** consolidated its facilities, by moving the Accessories Division [PSA] and the Tooling Division to [19 Broadhurst Road](#), adjacent to the Pressing Division, at Ingleburn.

