

H Sladen & Son Ltd - On the Road to Fame



The haulage firm of H Sladen & Son Ltd, today based on Daniel's Way at Hucknall, just off the M1 is one of the area's longest established businesses. The company has a proud reputation for customer service and satisfaction – a reputation built up over three generations.

It was back in the 1920s that the firm's founder Harold Sladen first set up in business for himself. The same family has run the

company ever since. Today Harold's son David is Chairman and his grandson Robert is Managing Director.

In March 1927, after ten years down the mines, and more time spent out of work than in work, Harold Sladen borrowed £170 from his father and bought a small coal delivery business with a horse and cart and twelve coal customers.

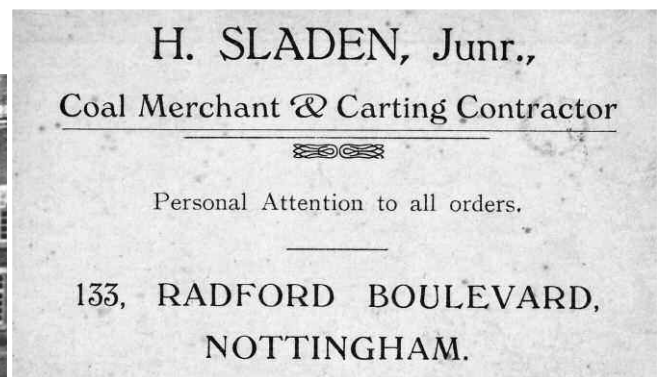
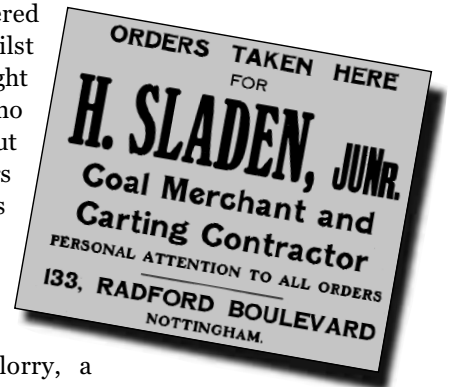
It is a remarkable testimony to Harold Sladen that he should have made the business succeed. Though prospects might not have looked too bad in 1927 the situation two years later was very different. The Wall Street Crash of 1929 heralded a worldwide slump of unprecedented severity. Britain's towns

and cities, not least Nottingham, were not immune to the global economic slump. Unemployment escalated to unheard of heights whilst the Government despaired of finding a solution.

By dint of honest hard work and initiative however, Harold was able to buck the trend. The fact that his main activity involved coal certainly helped him: In the 1930s Britain was still a coal powered nation, and whilst many luxuries might be done without no one could do without coal to fuel boilers and steam engines or to heat their homes.

In 1930 Harold bought his first lorry, a 30cwt. Chevrolet, which was the forerunner of the Bedford lorry.

Meanwhile Harold was a man of strong principles and would not get married whilst he still owed money and the business was not secure. As a consequence he did not marry his wife Daisy until 1934. She had been personal secretary to Mr Milne, who was the Company Secretary of the Boots Co., Nottingham and was therefore able to do the book-keeping for the business which was now growing.



Top left: Harold Sladen, founder of the company. **Top right:** This hand painted advertisement for the company was printed when the company was founded in 1927. **Left:** One of the delivery lorries from the 1950s outside a customer's premises. **Above:** Harold Sladen's first company business card from 1927.

NOSTALGIC NOTTINGHAM



In 1934 Harold bought his second lorry, which was a 'T' Type Ford with twin back wheels, the first of its kind in Nottingham. However, he did not have much luck with this vehicle as the brakes were not very good - when he parked on a hill in The Park, Nottingham, it ran downhill and crashed into a tree. So much for that vehicle! He returned to using the Chevrolet, and in 1936 he bought a Guy Wolf lorry and this proved to be an excellent vehicle for the job and lasted many years.

The outbreak of war in 1939 brought many difficulties, not least petrol rationing and coal rationing. During the war however, from 1939 to 1945, Harold employed two drivers and even bought another lorry, a Bedford two-tonner, which he fitted

with a canvas sheeted body. The lorry worked two shifts per day with two drivers delivering and collecting bulk mail for the Army Post Office. Harold also had a contract transporting prisoners of war to and from work and back to their camp on Wollaton Park.

Whilst the second world war raged the Labour Party had taken a keen interest in what a post-war Labour Government might do if it could beat Winston Churchill's Conservatives and get elected. It planned to nationalise many industries, promoting a socialist plan to take into public ownership coalmining, railways, steel and many other industries - amongst them road haulage firms.

After the war ended in 1945 Harold's brother, Wilf Sladen, came to work for him and together they developed the coal business and with the purchase of J. Alvey Coal Merchants, finishing up with 1,300 customers.

When the incoming Labour Government nationalised road haulage firms Harold's relatively small operation, in any event concerned primarily with coal deliveries, was not large enough to be caught in the net of nationalisation.



Road haulage was more of a sideline until denationalisation when Harold bought two 'A' licences and two 'B' licences. This was a unique opportunity - all of the larger pre-war road haulage firms had gone out of existence as a result of post-war Government policy, now however, enterprising

Top left: Harold and Daisy Sladen pictured in the 1930s. **Left:** A joint outing with George Dominic Ltd and Thomas Hind Ltd in the 1950s. **Above:** David Sladen, son of the founder driving a float in the Nottingham Lord Mayor's Show in the 1970s.

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Between 1960 and 1970, with HJ Heinz now a major client and up to five vehicles dedicated just to Boots, the business grew from three vehicles to ten vehicles and outgrew its original premises. The year 1970 saw the business move to Old Basford and to much larger premises.

Company founder Harold Sladen now retired at the age of 68. This was a sad day for him as the business had been his life. His wife Daisy also retired and David's wife Margaret took over the accounting side of the business and now became Company Secretary. New challenges arose almost immediately. Those who lived through the early 1970s will readily recall the three-day week and monetary inflation rising to almost 30 per cent. Most worrying of all to anyone involved in road haulage was the Arab oil embargo and the massive hike in fuel prices. For some time it was even expected that diesel and petrol would have to be rationed as it had been during the war. Happily, David Sladen proved to be as resourceful and energetic as his father in meeting the challenges posed by new problems. If Harold had been able to meet and overcome the difficulties of the 1930s then his son David was quite the man to meet the 1970s with equal vigour. H

folk like Harold could take advantage of the Government's change of heart. It was a period when many of today's road haulage firms came into existence.

In 1958, David Sladen, Harold's son, came to work in the business and over the next five years the coal side was phased out and eventually sold whilst David developed the haulage side of the firm's operations.

In 1960, the firm became a Limited company and H Sladen & Son Ltd was put on to the business map. In 1968 the firm began delivering for the Gerard Soap Works (later to become Cussons.)



Top left: David alongside on of the company's Bedford TM's in the 1980s. **Below left:** From left to right: today's Managing Director, Robert Sladen, pictured with his parents David and Margaret Sladen. **Above:** Part of the Sladen & Son fleet in the 1990s. **Below:** David about to drive into the company's new premises in Daniels Way, Hucknall in April 1998.



NOSTALGIC NOTTINGHAM



By the late 1990s the company had outgrown its Lincoln St, Old Basford premises. H Sladen & Son Ltd moved to a new purpose built depot which included extensive warehouse, parking and garage facilities alongside modern offices at Daniels Way, Hucknall.

Robert Sladen became Managing Director in 2001 when his father David retired from that post to become company Chairman. Today the company has 20 vehicles and 30 trailers. The fleet is constantly replaced and updated, many of which are provided in customers' own liveries.

Sladen & Son began delivery work for Kennepak in 1974 in Castle Donnington, delivering supplies of pet food all over the country. Now in the 21st century Kennepak is still a major customer. Other new business opportunities also arose. From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s RHM would be a major customer in conjunction with Atlas Express.

David Sladen's son Robert joined the company in 1988, starting at the bottom, doing everything, and learning all aspects of the business,



In the 21st century H Sladen & Son Ltd continues to apply the same business philosophy followed by its founder - that excellent customer care and service are the company's first priority.

Meanwhile, who knows, maybe one day Robert and his wife Maria's two young sons will in turn carry on the family business founded so long ago by the great grandfather Harold Sladen.



Early 1990 was a turbulent time for the company with the demise of some very long established customers – one of whom left a very large debt. When that customer got into difficulties it caused serious knock on financial problems for H Sladen. Happily other customers rallied round and helped keep the business afloat. Sladen's were fortunate at this time to have DMW Logistics as a customer, the relationship grew with five vehicles and also trailers in their corporate livery. DMW Logistics, based at Kirkby in Ashfield, have continued to be a major customer.

Indeed throughout its long history H Sladen & Son Ltd has been fortunate to have some very loyal customers without whom the story could have been very different. In the early 1990s the firm found itself delivering railtrack, crossings and junctions for Balfour Beatty Railway Engineers from Sandiacre to the Channel Tunnel then being built. Also took gun barrels from the Royal Ordnance factory up to Cumbria for test firing out to sea before bringing them back again.

Top left: David retires in 2001 handing over the reins to son Robert. **Left:** David Sladen (left) is bestowed with Life Membership of the RHA, 2002. **Above:** One of the Sladen fleet carrying the customers' own livery trailer. **Below:** Sladen's change of livery to white.

