

Leading the Market for Three Decades

Henry & Hymas By Claire Suttles



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The Sydney and now Brisbane based company burst onto the scene in 1985 with a new form of construction for the Australian market. “They helped introduce tilt-up construction to Australia,” Director Bruce Bradnam says of founding partners Geoff Henry and Ian Hymas, who borrowed the innovative concept from America. “Up until then, most Australian industrial buildings were steel framed with blockwork walls which was labour intensive, time consuming and involved erecting a lot of scaffolding. “Clients loved how much time and money tilt-up construction saved. Panels as large as eight metres by eight metres and weighing up to 40 tons could easily be cast onsite and simply lifted into position. It speeds up the whole construction process,” Mr Bradnam explains.

The innovative construction method caught on quickly and Henry & Hymas made a name for themselves by specialising in this form of engineering and construction. The team’s expertise covered not only the structural work, but the wall panel shop detailing as well, setting them apart from many competitors. A Henry & Hymas employee even wrote one of the first computer programs for panel detailing and the complex program helped cement the company’s place as the Australian leader in tilt-up design.

Henry & Hymas originally focused on industrial projects. “This was a growth area and the design could be easily adapted to a tilt-up [construction method],” Mr Bradnam explains. In 1993, the company moved into a new sector when it introduced the first tilt-up shopping centre. “Our clients approached us and said, ‘we think that we can save a lot of money if we can convert this to tilt-up from the original block design,’” Mr Bradnam recalls. “So that year the team worked really hard all through Christmas to provide the client with an alternative design ready for them in the new year.” The innovative new plans were well received and tilt-up made its retail debut. The concept was so successful, in fact, that a large portion of the industry quickly followed suit. Today, tilt-up

construction is used to build over 60 per cent of industrial and regional shopping centres throughout Australia.

Henry & Hymas continues to move forward. “Tilt-up was our starting point and we have evolved from there,” Mr Bradnam explains. “We have spread out a long way since our initial start.” Now, the company boasts a wide range of capabilities within the civil engineering, structural design, water engineering, strata engineering (please see sidebar for further details) and tilt-up and precast concrete sectors. The team has even launched a subsidiary company called Optimal Stormwater to handle stormwater treatment and stormwater harvesting jobs.

Indeed, Henry & Hymas’ projects are as diverse as their expertise. The company still leads the industry in precast and tilt-up design; however, the team regularly carries out a wide variety of high profile projects in many other areas as well. The company is particularly active in the retail sector, and regularly provides Professional Consulting Services to big names like Woolworths, Coles, Harvey Norman, Masters Home Improvement and Bunnings, as well as to industry leaders in other sectors including Sydney Airport Corporation, Sydney Water, Stockland, Australand, Goodman, ING, Mirvac and Orlani Property Group. “We never turn down a challenge, so we have been led in different directions,” Mr Bradnam remarks. “The wider the scope, the more interesting it becomes.”

One of Henry & Hymas’ most notable recent projects is the Oran Park Town Shopping Centre. Located where the Oran Park Raceway once stood, the western Sydney location is one of the city’s most promising growth areas. A vibrant main street and retail centre will serve as a community destination for the expanding suburb. Stage one of the Greenfields & Landcom development opens next year and will include 4500 square metres of commercial space, 9800 square metres of retail floor space, Sydney’s largest Woolworths, and a medical centre.

The team also recently completed a peer review on the Grande Côte Project in Senegal, West Africa. This off-the-beaten-path project clearly demonstrates Henry & Hymas’ broad scope of expertise. It isn’t every day that the team has to deal with “a huge lagoon floating in the desert,” Mr Bradnam explains. The project, which will be one of the largest mining and floating mineral separation plants on the planet, “involves flooding pontoons in the desert to dig up sand and then extract all the minerals from the sand.” When it opens in 2014, the plant is expected to be one of the top producers of zircon and titanium dioxide products in the world.

Henry & Hymas was hired by SNC-Lavalin to perform an independent check and verification of the pontoon structures. “It was a massive job,” Mr Bradnam recalls. It was also an important one. After carefully analysing the pontoon structure, the experts at Henry & Hymas successfully identified a key problem. One of the critical pontoon connections was overstressed and had a safety factor lower than Australian Standard requirements. In response, the team made crucial recommendations to ensure that the pontoon connection would be strengthened to comply with Australian Standards.

With any project – whether it is a state of the art shopping centre or massive pontoons floating in the desert – Henry & Hymas offers several key advantages. “Economy and buildability” are major strongpoints, Mr Bradnam insists. “We have always put a lot of attention into providing customers with savings [regarding] construction costs. We are always very aware of economical designs and economical solutions.” Henry & Hymas Director Ray Kusturin says that the company’s flexible, client friendly approach has also been crucial. “A lot of consultants have the approach that whatever they have documented is what has to be built. However, we work with builders to resolve their problems on site quickly and effectively.”

On site realities may not always mesh with the original concept, Mr Kusturin explains. “You have to

adjust your design to suit site constraints and site requirements. So we tend to take a more pragmatic and practical approach.” The team is well versed in the latest, most innovative approaches, Mr Bradnam adds, and they maintain an active role throughout the construction process to ensure that all goes smoothly. “Builders appreciate the effort we put into helping make things work, especially when something doesn’t quite go right.”

Henry & Hymas is eager to continue providing clients with affordable and buildable solutions. The company already holds a solid market share in many areas of the business, but is still seeking expansion in key areas. When it comes to structural work, “we are happy with our position in the market and the size we are,” Mr Bradnam reports. “One growth area that we see is the water projects.” Specifically, the team plans to focus on smaller, turnkey design and construct projects within this promising sector. With nearly 30 years of experience under its belt, Henry & Hymas has the know-how to successfully tackle a new sector – and remain at the top in the areas in which it has traditionally focused.