

John Wood & Co.

The company's early history is slightly confused but it apparently had its origin in 1871, when William Knott, John Wood and John Gee commenced business at the Douglas Foundry in School Common. The partnership traded as Knott & Wood. On the 29th January 1879, William Knott withdraws from the partnership. It would appear that shortly afterwards the company was declared bankrupt. Some sources suggest that the company, now known as Woods & Gee later moved to a new site, the Water Heyes Foundry in Water Heyes Road.

According to Worrall's Directory of 1881, the Wigan and District Directory of 1885 and the Sutton and Co. Directory of Wigan and District 1887/88 the firm was trading as **Wood, John and Co, Engineers and Iron Founders, Water Heyes Foundry, Turner Street**. It is not until 1890 that the firm appears in the local directories as Woods and Gee. It is possible that the name change may have coincided with the move from the Water Heyes Foundry to the next new site at the Barley Brook Foundry in North West Wigan. A brief reference in the *Colliery Guardian* reveals that Woods and Gee first appear to advertise in May 1892.

The Water Heyes Foundry had become unsuitable to meet the ever-increasing demands for the manufacture of stem plant and handling equipment, which the company was supplying to the coal and cotton industries. A major drawback was that the site had no rail access and it may have been a combination of these two factors that in 1890 led Wood and Gee to open their new Barley Brook Foundry to the East of Meadows Colliery. This site had recently been occupied by the transshipment sidings of the Barley Brook Tramroad. On the 6th October 1902 John Gee withdraw from the partnership and it was at this point that the company became John Wood and Sons Ltd. A siding connection with the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway was provided under an agreement dated 28th October 1887. After the closure of the Meadows Colliery circa 1910, this siding layout was altered and a new agreement was completed between the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway and John Wood on the 12th January 1916.

For a short period in the 1890's advertisements in the technical press did suggest that Wood and Gee were involved with rebuilding second-hand locomotives for resale. If we are to believe the contemporary accounts at the time of their opening, the locomotive shed at Barley Brook was being adapted to make it possible to refit several locomotives at one time. This might perhaps imply that they were contemplating the manufacture of locomotives although there are no records to this effect.

John Wood and Sons Ltd were absorbed by the Walmesley Group in 1947. In the 1950's they had an association with Walker Brothers (Wigan) Ltd of Pagefield Ironworks. The association had been described as among the most interesting in the country because of the great diversity and range of their products. The companies at this time were servicing the paper-making and mining industries and other heavy machinery production. Numerous major road and rail tunnels in this country including the Mersey road tunnel had their ventilation plant designed and partially built by Walker Brothers. The firm also pioneered the design of the mechanical refuse collection vehicle.

John Wood and Sons Ltd continued to trade under its own name until the firm finally closed circa 1970. In 1992 the site was occupied by Renentruck which serviced the motor industry.

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