

HENRY, Sir David (1888–1963)

Engineering businessman, company director, forestry industrialist

David Hendry was born the third of four children to Robert Hendry, a labourer, and his wife, Agnes Stevenson, on 24 November 1888 at Juniper Green, Midlothian, Scotland. His mother died when he was young. On leaving school, David worked as a clerk in the Mossy Paper Mill at Colinton while attending night classes in Edinburgh, possibly at Heriot-Watt College. Indifferent health prompted him to emigrate to New Zealand in 1907. He worked as a farm labourer near Wellington and briefly for the Government Printer before becoming a subscription seller for *Wise's New Zealand Post Office Directory*. He then moved to Christchurch, where he was joined by his sisters, and founded an engineering business with Henry Starkie. When the business failed he shifted to Auckland to start afresh. Hendry, now calling himself Henry, married Mary Castleton Osborne, who was 10 years his senior, in Hamilton on 28 April 1915; they were to have one daughter.

Henry found work with an engineering and patents company owned by S. Oldfield and D. B. Hutton. By August he had bought into the firm, and it was renamed Oldfield and Henry. Within four years he owned the organisation which, from 1926, was known as D. Henry and Company. Shortly thereafter Starkie, who was now Henry's brother-in-law, joined the company and helped it expand into a profitable small-scale plumbing manufacturer and supplier. That the business survived the depression is a reflection of Henry's determination to succeed, which was buttressed by his strong Presbyterian faith and an abhorrence of alcohol. As he succeeded in business he became increasingly involved in a wide range of organisations, such as the Rotary Club of Auckland, the Boy Scouts' Association, the YMCA, the Auckland Manufacturers' Association (eventually becoming national president), and the Auckland City Council (1931–33).

Henry was offered an unexpected business opportunity in 1936 when invited to chair the board of newly formed New Zealand Forest Products. It was the successor to New Zealand Perpetual Forests, a bond-selling company that had established over 150,000 acres of plantation forest. Henry was responsible for organising the transfer of assets between the two firms, driving a hard bargain in the process. Sensitive to public disquiet about the excesses of bond-selling companies and their overblown claims of high returns, he dispensed with those directors who had Perpetual Forests connections. He was appointed managing director in 1938 and promptly signalled to shareholders that forestry was a long-term investment and that they should not expect quick profits; no dividends were paid until 1952.

Henry's primary concern was planning for the future utilisation of the company's forests. At this time sawmill technology for handling *Pinus radiata*, and the commercial manufacture of pulp and paper from this species, was undeveloped. Consequently, in 1939 he travelled to the United States and Europe to investigate integrated sawmill and hardboard production. This was only one of many overseas trips designed to achieve successful forest utilisation. Another obstacle to the company's plans was the 1936

Industrial Efficiency Act's requirement of a licence to manufacture pulp and paper, multi-wall bags and fibreboard. Henry believed the government was obstructing private enterprise and he battled against what he regarded as excessive red tape, with some success.

In 1941 a sawmill and insulating board plant was opened by New Zealand Forest Products at Penrose. Henry suffered criticism for giving sole distribution rights to D. Henry and Company. He also encountered the equally determined A. R. Entrican, the director of forests from 1939 to 1961, who had his own plans for an integrated state-private sector forest-processing complex. The two men clashed, publicly and privately, on many occasions into the 1950s.

In 1943 David Henry chose a mill site near Tokoroa, adjacent to the company's forests, naming it Kinleith after a paper mill in Currie, near Edinburgh in Scotland. The election of a National government in 1949 effectively ended any likelihood of an integrated operation, and left him to concentrate on Kinleith, where the first commercially produced kraft pulp in New Zealand was manufactured in 1953. For Henry, this was the culmination of 17 years of effort. In 1954 he was made a KBE for services to the exotic forest industry. In turn, he endowed a forestry scholarship bearing his name in 1956 to provide overseas training for employees of New Zealand Forest Products. He also established a substantial trust for the Auckland Presbyterian Orphanages and Social Service Association. Business achievement was paired with personal loss, however, for his wife died on 2 March 1954.

In Hamilton on 24 November the following year, Henry, now aged 67, married Dorothy May Osborne, the younger sister of his first wife. He did take time out in 1955 to return to his native Juniper Green to honour his old headmaster. A famous picture of him and other old boys of the Juniper Green school appears on the commemorative calendar prepared in 2007 as part of the celebrations of 300 years of Juniper Green history.

He showed no interest in retiring from the company, continued to battle the government over industry licensing, and displayed increasingly erratic behaviour. In 1958, for example, he encouraged the British pulp and paper giant Bowater Paper Corporation to make an unsuccessful offer for New Zealand Forest Products, and in 1959, while doggedly pressing for a processing plant in Canterbury, he made uncharacteristically rash press statements. Now clearly ill with heart trouble, Henry had to contend with further difficult company matters. Many meetings were held in his Mount Albert home, during which he repeatedly lashed out verbally.

David Henry lacked warmth and humour in his working relations and tended to be abrupt and demanding with his subordinates. Yet he was a fluent and persuasive speaker whose self-assurance, business acumen and tenacity were vital in enabling New Zealand Forest Products to overcome enormous barriers and to develop into one of the country's largest industrial enterprises. He died of heart disease in Auckland on 20 August 1963, survived by his wife and daughter.

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