

# ALPHA ELECTRICS

THE FIRST 50 YEARS



# THE FIRST 50 YEARS

Alpha Electrics is a family owned and operated business specialising in the sale and servicing of electric motors, pumps and generators.

It has a proud history of delivering quality solutions, with innovative efficiency and to the highest level of customer satisfaction. The results-driven focus of the business is borne in the respect and trust placed in Alpha Electrics' skilled staff, including many long-time employees who commenced with the company as apprentices.

From the vision and ingenuity of the founding Phillips brothers to today's high tech systems and networked offices in Camdale, Devonport and Hobart, Alpha Electrics recognises and celebrates its first 50 years as the cornerstones of its future success.

## Alpha Electrics through the years

### 1960's

Alpha Electrics' founder, David Phillips, completed his apprenticeship at Atomic Industries in Launceston in the early 1960's and joined with his foreman in a motor repair business operating from the foreman's house.

By 1967, David sought to go out on his own and he headed west to establish his own business at a time when no other motor repair services were available in the area. West coast mining operations and other large industrial organisations were sending equipment to Launceston for maintenance and appreciated the opening of NW Electric Motor Service in Wivenhoe which specialised in electrical motor rewind and repairs.

It was a challenge at the beginning to service the large motor market as NW Electric Motor Service was a new business still establishing its reputation. The specialist, expensive equipment required for large motor refurbishments also necessitated the addition of mechanical and small engine repairs to the new company's service offering.

The site was basic and with a dirt floor but David had a great level of ingenuity and technical skill and soon expanded his client base to include small motor repairs for Motor Electrics in Burnie and Jacklins Sawmill in Somerset among many others.

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At this time, repairs were regularly conducted on automotive generators, starter motors, power tools and other small electric motors.

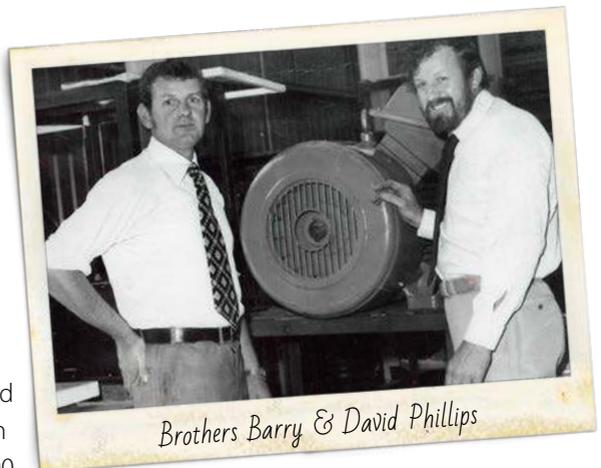
As business grew, David took on his first apprentice, Tim Easton, in what was to become an ongoing commitment for the business to apprenticeship training and development.

The business's reputation for customer service and commitment to 'work around the clock' on emergency repairs has also been a hallmark since the beginning. David worked overnight to repair a 40HP motor for the Somerset sawmill so they could remain operating in an example of the business's commitment to servicing clients. This work ethic has led to a loyal following and much repeat business over the years.

A new workshop was built at the bottom of David's South Burnie house block and in 1969 the business was relocated to this Devon Street site. With the move came a name change to Alpha Electrics Pty Ltd – a new era in mechanical and electric motor services had begun in Tasmania.

As the first in the region to be offering motor repair services, the name Alpha Electrics was selected to capitalise on another first – the listing in the then ubiquitous printed telephone directory.

Fifteen months after the Alpha Electrics business began, David's younger brother Barry moved from Launceston to join the company. Barry had also completed his electrical apprenticeship at Atomic Industries and had been self-employed, busy with small motor repairs. The pair launched into their new partnerships with a working capital of around \$100.



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To the end of the 1960's, Alpha Electrics grew steadily with the addition of apprentices including Anthony Butler, David Austin, Robert Crick, Bryan Farrow, Charlie Trevarthen and Peter Bottle and an office assistant in Jan Anders. Another hallmark of the business was established in this era, linked to the culture established by the founding Phillips' brothers, to have long-serving employees who take pride in the quality of their work.

Key client industries in this era were mining, forestry and equipment manufacturing.

*"I'd been working for five years with a partner in our Launceston motor repair business before making the break and moving to the North West coast. Prior to that I was the first apprentice at Atomic Industries, making hot water cylinders.*

*"I hired a shed in Wivenhoe for \$7 a week. The Savage River mine had just opened and there were only auto electricians operating in the local area. All of the big equipment repairs were going through to Hobart or Launceston. I could see the potential, but in the beginning the work was very slack and I had to take on car and generator repairs to make ends meet.*

*"When I look back I'm not sure how I did it. I probably didn't think too much about it at the time, I just got in and did what I could to keep it going. At one point I down-graded my car from a three year old station wagon to an older English Humber to get some extra cash. My wife was very supportive too which made all the difference.*

*"The only way to build up the business was by door knocking. I'd head out and talk to whichever business would see me. They were a bit doubtful of the capabilities of just one person and were used to sending their repair jobs away. Gradually I got a reputation for good work and word of mouth did the rest. We were listed in the Yellow Pages, but didn't do any other advertising. We settled on the name Alpha Electrics after my original suggestion of 'Electric Motor Service' was ruled out by the authorities as being too descriptive to register.*

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*"We began working on irrigation pumps and sawmill motors. It was pretty desperate in the beginning. I called in on Roy Dudley at Motor Electrics; he probably saved my life with the small motor jobs he sent my way.*

*"After 12 months on my own, I put on Tim Easton as an apprentice. My brother then came over to join the business as a partner in 1969. Over the next 4 to 5 years we were able to put on an apprentice every year. The West Coast mines became a big source of business for us.*

*"My brother Barry was the driving force; he had a vision for the business and so he took on the business development side and I ran the workshop. We got on well and worked well together as a team, sharing the responsibility.*

*"It was a pretty relaxed workplace with a fair bit of colourful language. Everyone had a nickname. We worked hard with overtime and Saturday mornings when we needed to and would respond to customer calls for help at 3 or 4 in the morning, but we also took long lunches at the Top of the Town if there wasn't an urgent job on the go.*

*"It felt like a second family; we didn't have many friends outside of work. We held Christmas parties together and went to the Pieman four-wheel driving.*

*"Given the different conditions back then, we also managed to be a pretty accident-free workplace. I recall one incident, though, where Robert Crick the foreman broke his wrist and that got us in trouble with his mother because he was an up-and-coming tennis player.*

*"Over time we were given large jobs that were previously sent to Melbourne and that led to the move to the bigger site at Camdale. We designed and built a coil extractor to strip the coils from old motors. It was a rugged piece of gear and I don't think it was ever patented but it certainly saved us a lot of time.*

*"A meeting of Electrical Engineers from all different businesses was held on the coast and that helped boost the business further, because one of the engineers spoke about the good work being done by Alpha Electrics and that led to more enquiries and work.*

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*"Being in the Electrical Apparatus Society gave us access to new, better equipment. I travelled to the United States three times to check out the displays and we ended up installing a burnout oven. There was about half a million dollars of equipment in the workshop by the time I left.*

*"I prefer the hands-on work and it got to the point where I'd rather be repairing motors than worrying about running the whole business. That's when I knew it was time to hand it on.*

*"I missed the company of the people after I left. I still drive past places where I used to work on motors and I think about time spent servicing them. It's good to know Alpha Electrics is still in there making a difference today."*

**David Phillips**

## **1970's**

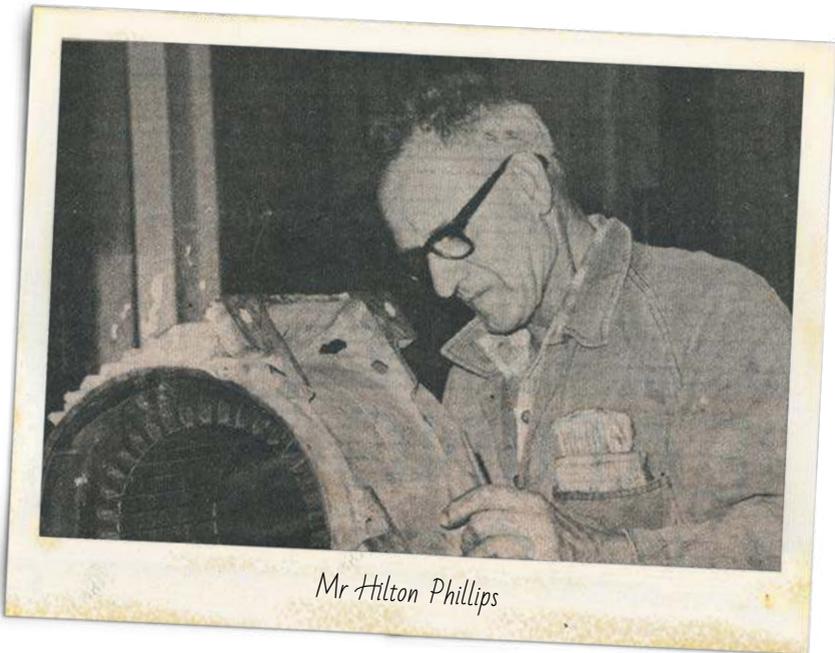
With the business growth, came the need to find bigger premises. This decade saw Alpha Electrics open a branch office in Launceston, another in Stony Rise Road Devonport, and relocate the founding business to a custom built facility in Scarfe Street, Camdale.



*Official opening of the Camdale workshop*

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The Camdale move was well supported by family and the company's 11 tradesmen and six apprentices. Bryan Farrow's father built the business sign and David's wife, Shirley Anne and Barry's wife, Marina both assisted with painting and decorating while their children lent a hand with tidying the site ahead of the grand opening in March of 1977. David's daughter, Tricia, would one day go on to work for the business and be part of its 50-year milestone. David's sons Michael, Darren and Steven would also be involved with Steven becoming a Director in the early 2000's and Michael completing his apprenticeship and later managing the Burnie office.



*Mr Hilton Phillips*

The workshop floor space expanded to 531 sq metres with the 1977 move, five times the size of the Wivenhoe site. An adjoining office of 167.2 sq metres housed the business's administration. Mr Hilton Phillips, Barry and David's father was one of many to attend the facility opening.

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Work was consistently busy with workdays of 15 to 16 hours not uncommon as the business became firmly established in Tasmania. Alpha Electrics was specialising in electric motor rewinding and repairs to industrial electrical equipment. Repairs to the Lake Margaret generator for the Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Co was an example of the industrial services offered by the business at this time.

Alpha Electrics was also the sole Tasmanian stockist of McKay Dynamics' Barlow-Westward AC and DC geared motors, disc brakes and geared brake motors, the Singapore-made Teco AC drives and Taiwanese Burt motors ranging from 0.5 to 100HP. The business was committed to servicing the products it sold and retained a product range closely aligned to electric motors.

In 1977, the workshop housed an overhead travelling crane with a lift capacity of 7.5 tonnes. Recognising limitations in the manual operations of the business, the two brothers designed and arranged construction of a coil extractor which was first commissioned at the Camdale opening. This unique machine enabled multiple electrical winding components to be removed from old motors simultaneously; delivering a new level of speed and safety to the task.

In the same year the business relocated to Camdale, it extended its reach into new motor-based sectors of irrigation and pumping. Alpha Irrigation operated as a division of Alpha Electrics, offering equipment and servicing initially from the Camdale and Launceston facilities and later incorporating a Devonport site at Stony Rise. There was limited choice in the irrigation supply market in Tasmania at the time; an opportunity that Alpha Irrigation capitalised upon with its offers of one-stop design, sales and servicing.

Alpha Irrigation was appointed the Tasmanian agent for Trailco travelling irrigators, the IEL industrial pump and irrigator range and associated equipment. Non-exclusive sales rights were also held by the business for IBC, Davey and Onga pressure pumps.

When opened, the 300 sq metre Stony Rise Road branch housed a three-tonne travelling overhead crane in addition to storage areas, offices and a showroom. The opening was officially made by then Mayor of Devonport, Ald Kerry Berwick and was attended by approximately 100 engineers, contractors and local industry

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representatives who heard presentations from Melbourne-based representatives of stocked products including Barlow-Westward, Delairco and MTE control gear.

The Devonport facility manager was David Austin – who completed his apprenticeship at Alpha Electrics Burnie - with one tradesman specialising in irrigation (Andrew Cooper) and one apprentice electrical mechanic on site.

Alpha Electrics had a steady intake of apprentices throughout the 1970's, with annual additions of students undertaking their Electrical Mechanical training. This base course was supplemented by specialised motor winding and armature tuition by Alpha Electrics to account for their client's specialised requirements. There were no shortage of rewinds to complete and employees were dedicated to the different tasks of stripping motors or winding with plenty of overtime on offer.

Key client industries in this era were mining, agriculture and electrical utilities.

*"It was my first job, straight out of school. I was at the employment agency and saw an ad that mentioned electric and motors and thought it might be working with cars. My brother dropped me off on the first day and I walked in to the Wivenhoe site, but couldn't see a workshop, only a gravel track with a shed covered in blackberries. A fellow appeared and said 'Are you looking for me?' and I said 'Don't know. Who are you?' It was David Phillips and that was my first interaction with him in what would become a 50-year association.*

*"The workshop was only about 10 metres by 4 metres with a dirt floor at one end and concrete slab at the other. It was all hand tools back then and my first task was to take apart motors. I got interested in it and enjoyed the work. I would hand wind motors using a bit of timber with nails in it. It took hours. The site cat would sit on my feet for warmth during those long jobs.*

*"When we moved to South Burnie, we were right on the railway line. It soon grew from three of us, to five then kept growing. We'd set each other challenges to see who could complete tasks the quickest. Country music was played continuously. They were long days with a steady amount of work. We sometimes worked Christmas Day if a customer needed it.*

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*"We socialised together too – camping trips to Sandy Cape, counter meals on weekends; not just the staff but their families too.*

*"The work is all about problem solving. Every fix required a different solution and was very hands-on. The work was pioneering in a lot of ways. It's satisfying to bring a motor back to life and is a good trade combining a lot of different skills if you've got the mettle for it.*

*"It's much more technical now with big advancements in test gear and controllers. But at the end of the day, it's still a set of coils with a shaft that turns.*

*"Alpha Electrics is a unique business that at its core gives good service to customers. The in-house experience and knowledge built up over its 50 years is a real achievement. It's been a good ride I guess."*

**Tim Easton**

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## 1980's

This decade was a period of steady growth for Alpha Electrics and by the end of the '80s there were branches operating in Camdale, Devonport, Hobart and Launceston and an employee base of 30 people, 21 of which were at the Camdale site. It was an era when mechanical repairs were common and replacements were considered expensive and unnecessary when a fix could be implemented instead.

David and Barry were joint managing directors with David focused on workshop management and Barry on sales and general business management. They shared the responsibility of running the business under a common work ethic aimed at achieving both employee and customer satisfaction.

In 1987 the business won its biggest competitive contract to date with a \$250,000 tender to supply 184 Teco electric motors to Aberfoyle's Hellyer Ore Concentrator on the West Coast. Alpha Electrics' track record in supplying, servicing and maintaining the machinery was a key factor in its competitive success and remains a feature of the business today. The company's ability to respond to big jobs set it apart, as did the convenience of its North West coast location. Star Electrics in Hobart was considered to be Alpha Electrics' biggest competitor at this time.

Barry Phillips made the decision to retire in 1984 and sold his share of Alpha Electrics to Geelong-based Bob White Electrix, with David continuing as the other share partner.

Key client industries in this era were mining and agriculture. In addition to large motor jobs, the Alpha Electrics team were also turning their hands to Davey pumps, milk vat agitators and other equipment below 75kW.

*"Electric motor repair is a particular skill. It requires an eye for detail and a combination of electrical and mechanical knowledge. We did our apprenticeships with electricians. Nowadays apprentices are sent to Victoria for specialist training it has become such a niche skill.*

*"It wasn't unusual for the Alpha Electrics apprentices to know more about motors than their teachers because of the specialist work that the business was doing. The equipment we had and the jobs we took on couldn't be*

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*experienced anywhere else. If you wanted to be in electric motors, Alpha Electrics was the place to be.*

*"We used to share Friday night drinks and have a team Christmas dinner at David's house. Before that there were Christmas barbeques at the site office. There was no other business doing what we were, so we had that in common."*

***Bryan Farrow & Charlie Trevarthen***

## **1990's**

Technical innovation in the 1990's saw an increase in the level of automation in the business, both in the office and workshops.

A business trip to the United States of America as members of the Electrical Apparatus Society triggered the purchase and installation of new equipment including a burnout oven. The oven was installed in Camdale and helped transform a two-hour, manual wire-removal job using gas into a fifteen minute process.

An automatic winding machine and new testing equipment, including portable test machines, streamlined the way of working at Alpha Electrics. In the office, a telex machine improved the efficiency of communication with Singapore-based motor and parts manufacturers and computer programs were also being adopted to replace the historic card-filing systems.

With the business well established, David retires from Alpha Electrics and joins Irrigation Tasmania, transferring management of the business to Michael Phillips.

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## 2000's

The new millennium commenced a milestone period for Alpha Electrics with the sale of the business to Anthony Butler, Stuart Paine and Steve Phillips being finalised in 2004. As testament to the business culture, all three had completed their apprenticeships with Alpha Electrics and for significant periods of their careers have worked with the company.



A Hobart branch was re-established in 2003 and the company commenced a period of acquisitions, with some businesses retaining established operating names including TasRewinds. TasRewinds was later brought under the Alpha Electrics banner when combined with another acquisition, Timco Electrics. This re-established Alpha Electrics in Devonport and once again made the company a leading electric motor sales and service provider in Tasmania.

In 2005, the Hobart site doubled its floor space to 700sq metres and a new Launceston branch soon followed to accommodate the growing products, services and associated customer base.

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By this time, Cape Country had also been integrated into the business with its pump products and maintenance as had Hobart-based welding repair capabilities and two electrical specialists in Martin Smith Electrical and Trevor Grant Electrical.

A significant product line was secured, with Alpha Electrics becoming an authorised sales and service centre for WEG motors. Previously, TECO Australia was supplying component motor in crates delivered to Alpha Electrics for assembly. Given Alpha Electrics' strong track record, the business was being encouraged to establish sales outlets on mainland Australia and pursue distribution beyond Tasmania.

Key client industries in this era were mining, agriculture, aquaculture and manufacturing.

## **2010's**

The Alpha Electrics' Launceston branch was closed in 2010 and subsequent management changes saw Steve Phillips exit as a business owner with his share purchased by Stuart Paine in 2013.

The new decade brought exploration in the bearings market with Alpha Electrics merging with Alpha Bearings around 2014 under the Alpha Electrics name and Damien Johnstone making the transition as a Director into the combined entity.

Branches remained in Devonport and Hobart and the main workshop continued to thrive at the business's head office in Camdale, serviced with two 10 tonne cranes, and 5 tonne and 2.5 tonne forklifts. Significant expansion of equipment and its capacity included doubling the length of the electric baking oven. The need for additional storage sees the business expand into warehouse space adjacent to the Camdale site.

The facility utilises a 10 tonne balancing machine with the capability of balancing rotating equipment up to 8 metres in length and 3 metres in diameter, in what is an upscaling of capacity and capability equal to the business's own journey from strength to strength.

The increased capacity helps Alpha Electrics secure new major contracts, including the largest contract of the company's history with Grange Resources to have two

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synchronous mill motors designed and tailor-made to fit existing infrastructure. Alpha Electrics supplied the motors in late March 2015 and assisted local and international service engineers and technicians with installation.

Key client industries in this era are mining, agriculture, aquaculture and manufacturing.

*"With 50 years of experience behind us, Alpha Electrics has a unique level of market knowledge and a detailed understanding of our customers' motor repair histories.*

*"We've built a strong supplier network and have maintained long term relationships with both customers and suppliers. The Alpha Electrics database sets us apart from the competition.*

*"The company has evolved significantly over time, particularly in response to the growing volume of motor technologies and supply chains. We carry a large range of stock to meet today's demands and product sales constantly increase. Customers are less likely to get smaller motors repaired nowadays as compared to the early years.*

*"Having all of that past knowledge is a definite help in running the business. We learn from experience – both good and bad – and that guides us in the right direction.*

*"Most of all, our history has created strong, long-standing relationships with our major customers and that's an invaluable legacy of Alpha Electrics and one that we're careful to maintain."*

**Stuart Paine & Anthony Butler**

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## An evolution of Alpha Electrics' products

Alpha Electrics and its historic divisions of Alpha Irrigation and Alpha Bearings have experienced a wide range of products, equipment and mechanical evolution through the years. Demonstrating experience that is second-to-none, Alpha Electrics employees have turned their skills to many brands including:

### In earlier years

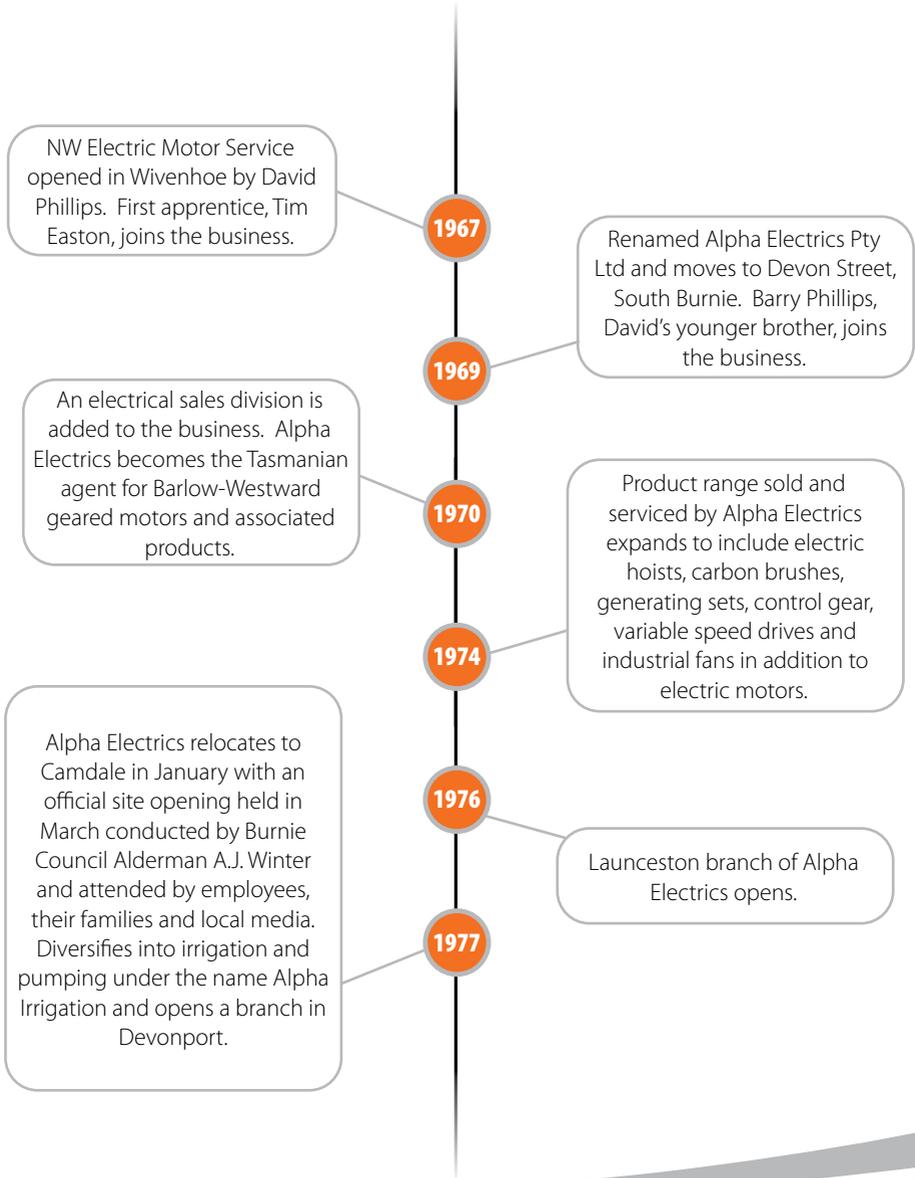
- McKay Dynamics' Barlow-Westward
- Teco (manufactured in Singapore)
- Burt (manufactured in Taiwan)
- Trailco travelling irrigators
- IEL pumps and irrigators
- IBC

### In recent years

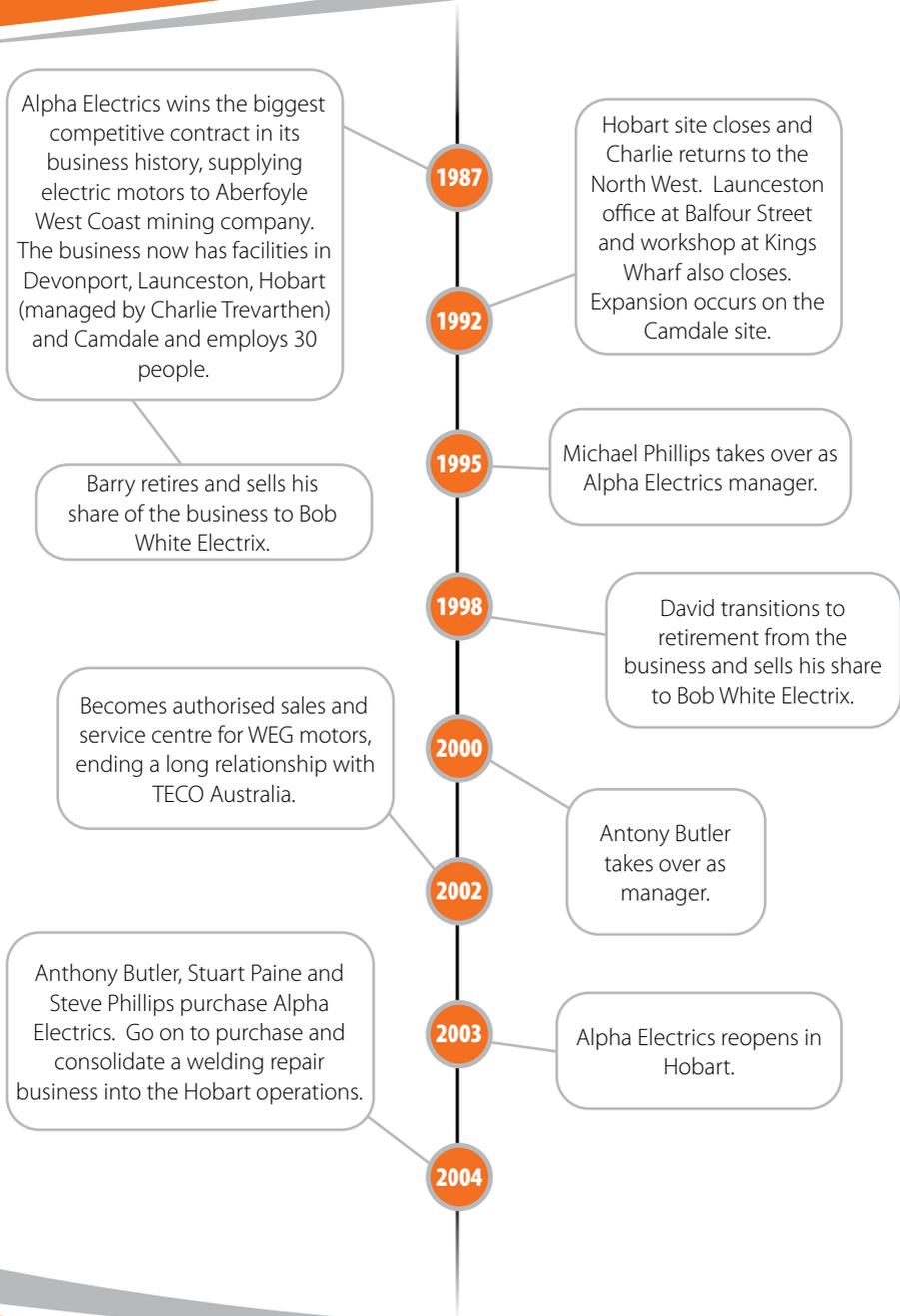
- Davey pumps
- Eriez Magnetics
- WEG electric motors
- Keto
- Calpeda pumps
- Philmac
- Bonfiglioli gearboxes
- Genelite
- Acrodyne actuation and control and vibrator motors
- Franklin Electric
- Grundfos pumps
- Flygt
- Nilfisk / Gerni pressure cleaners
- Scorpion
- Peerless compressors
- Raptor submersible pumps
- Ingersollrand domestic compressors
- Global Pumps
- John Crane
- Nord

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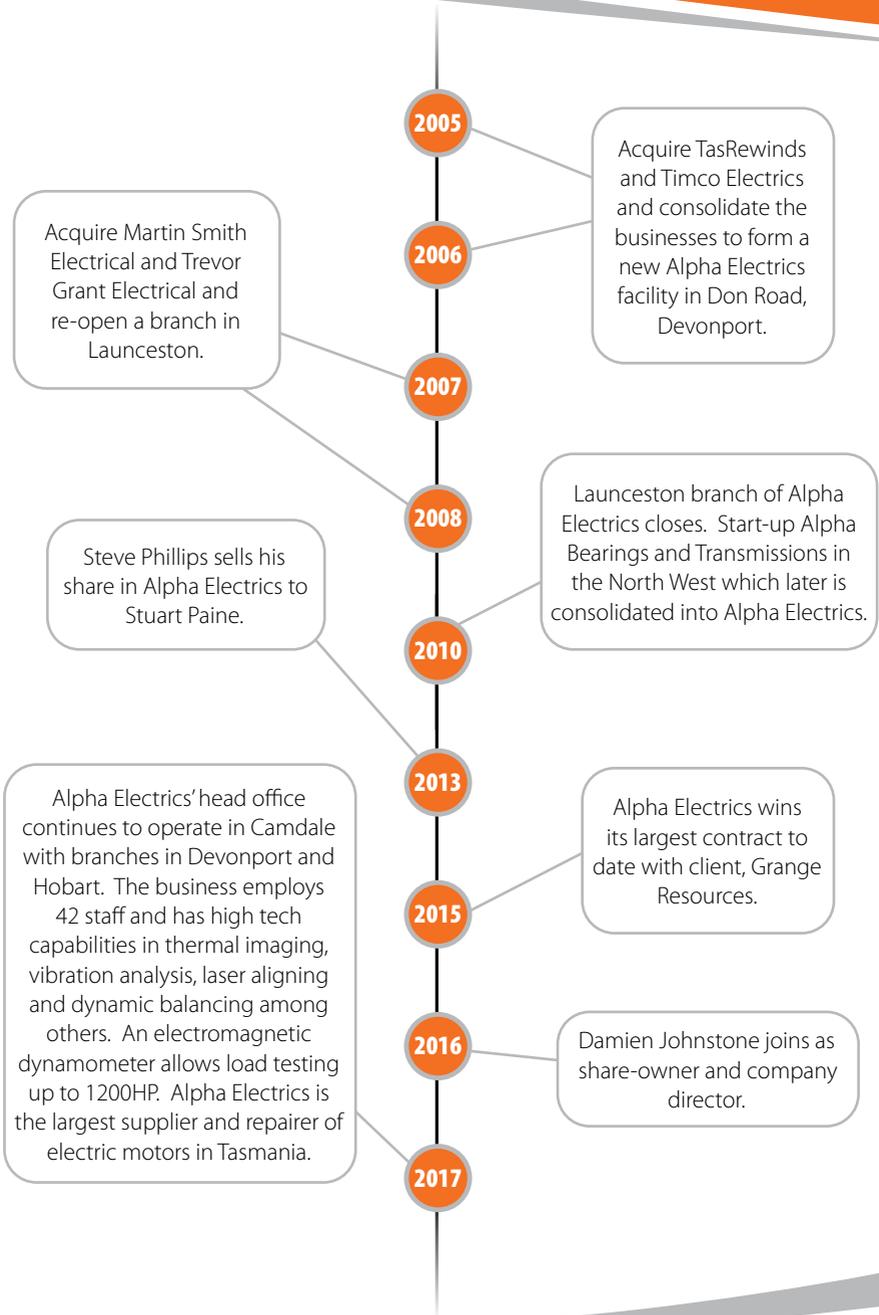
## Milestones in Alpha Electrics' history



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