

THE ESSENTIAL TWO DAY ALL-INCLUSIVE EVENT CELEBRATING THE LIFTING AND ACCESS INDUSTRY

Vertikal
days
2026



VISITOR REGISTRATION IS NOW OPEN
SEPTEMBER 9-10 2026 NEWARK SHOWGROUND

- See the latest products and services in our outdoor and marketplace areas
- Meet face-to-face and network with key lifting and access professionals across the industry
- Free entry and parking, complimentary lunch, coffee and refreshments

<https://vertikaldays.net/event-info/visitor-registration>



READERS LETTERS

Hi Leigh,

It was interesting to read on Vertikal.Net this week about O'Rourke buying into Moritsch Cranes. In the last few weeks, a Moritsch luffer has been erected at 50 Fenchurch Street in the City. I am not 100 percent certain, but I think Select (part of Laing O'Rourke) are supplying most of the cranes here to Multiplex. I have attached a photo for info.

All the best

Ian - Cranes etc

See page 7 news for the full story



ALAN CHARLESWORTH 1940 - 2026

In the last issue of C&A, we published a tribute to the late crane veteran Alan Charlesworth when we said that we had been unable to discover details of his earliest working life. The following letter fills in all the details.

Dear Sir,

I was sad to read in the last magazine that my old mate Alan had died earlier this year. The text stated that his crane career started in the late 1970s "as far as was known". I can fill in a bit more information from an earlier period.

Alan joined us at Lambert Engineering Co.(Glasgow) Ltd in 1968 (to the best of my recall). I had been there repping, selling the Hydrocon lattice boom truck cranes since 1965 in my area, which covered the whole of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. We had begun to take the odd part exchange, and I had been 'promoted' to become the sole person specialising in the valuation and sale of used equipment. My old patch was divided up, and as a result, Alan took South Yorkshire and Lincolnshire and also parts of the East Midlands. He lived in the Rotherham area at the time, and I believe he had worked at Mobile Lifting Services prior to joining us. For how long I don't know. It was a major crane hire company also based in Rotherham but I don't remember whether he was on the road for them or hire office based.

Alan and I became good mates and he certainly did OK on the sales side. At that time, the incomparable George Jesner (the original owner of Lamberts)

was still running the company, and he had the uncanny ability to wind us salesmen up like clockwork toys and send us out to sell.

My used equipment duties based me at the Northern depot in Rochdale. In winter 1969, during a very snowy period, Alan phoned me to tell me he'd had a bump in his company Ford Cortina. I asked for the details, and he said he'd been on the A1 (I think) and decided to overtake a snow plough which was busy clearing the inside lane. Apparently he'd got past it and pulled back onto the inside when, of course, the virgin snow slowed him down. The snow plough bladed him effortlessly off the road into a field as a result. I sorted him out with a lift and a hire car, but I can't remember how badly his company car was damaged.

I left in 1970 to go on my own selling used cranes and came into contact with Alan intermittently over the years during his Grove and Krupp days, by which time he'd become a Southerner, of course.

I hope the above fills in a bit of the earlier blanks.

Best regards

Dave Carncross



WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH MARIE CURIE

We received an appeal from a former CPA chief executive and senior director, Kevin Minton, to include a request and suggestion from Marie Curie, which runs hospices and provides care nurses for people suffering from a terminal illness. Kevin's late wife and he were helped by the organisation, and he has now been helping give back in any way he can.



We are hoping that the organisation will have a small booth at Vertikal Days in September. In the meantime, we are more than happy to publish the letter, and to do anything we can to help.

Marie Curie is here for anyone with an illness they are likely to die from, and those close to them. This includes Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia, heart, liver or kidney and lung disease, motor neurone disease, Parkinson's and advanced cancer. Whatever your illness, whoever you are, we're with you to the end.

Behind our expert care is our leading research and over 75 years of experience. Whether you have months, weeks or days left to live, we're here for you with clinical and emotional care, supporting you to be comfortable, free of pain and other symptoms, and able to live the best life you can to the end. We're all unique, and what matters most to you matters most to us.

Our mission is to close the gap in end of life care. Almost one in three people dying don't get the end of life care and support they need, and the problem is getting worse as our population ages. By 2050, the need for end of life care will have increased by up to 25%.



We believe a better end of life for all is possible. We push for this by campaigning and sharing our research to change policy and improve the care system. Whatever the illness, we're pushing for the urgent changes that'll improve end of life for all.

PARTNER WITH MARIE CURIE

There are many ways you and your company can partner with Marie Curie and make a difference to people at the end of life, whatever the illness. We've got an amazing track record of successful corporate partnerships, working with companies of all different sizes and across a host of sectors. When you partner with Marie Curie, you'll be partnering with a trusted national charity that reaches the heart of local communities.

Website: <https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/>

Contact: corporatepartnerships@mariecurie.org.uk

If you're living with a terminal illness or have been affected by dying, death and bereavement, Marie Curie can help. Visit the website or call the free Marie Curie Support Line on 0800 090 2309.

Make Marie Curie your Charity of the Year!

Whether you choose Marie Curie as your charity of the year, or support a national campaign, you'll be partnering with a trusted national charity that reaches the heart of local communities.

corporatepartnerships@mariecurie.org.uk



Charity reg no. 207994 (England & Wales), SC038731 (Scotland) M1017



#ShareYourStory

Shape the Future of the
Powered Access Industry



Scan the QR code to watch the latest
#ShareYourStory incident recreation



LAURIE WILSON 1929 - 2026

Last month we received the belated news that Australian crane entrepreneur Laurie Wilson, founder of Wilson Mobile Cranes, in Sydney, Australia, had passed away in hospital on February 6th, at the age of 96. He leaves behind his second wife Maureen, four children, Rodney, Laurie Jnr, Cassandra, and Sharon Lee, plus five grandchildren and nine great grandchildren.

We have been fortunate to have received a huge volume of fascinating material that his wife Maureen had collected, although sadly, we only have a few photographs. We thought however, that we would share some of the material with you while paying tribute to a man who made a huge contribution to the Australian crane rental industry, and who was also a pioneer of the powered access business in the country.

Laurie Wilson was a child of the Great Depression, one of nine children. While he was born in Sydney, the family soon moved to Lithgow, to the east of the city, where his father had a job in the ironworks there.

At the age of five, the family moved to the Port Kembla Steelworks in New South Wales, where, according to Laurie, they lived for two years in a Bag Tent (tent house) with whitewashed cloth walls and a corrugated iron roof, until his dad could build them a Fibro Cottage (fibre cement sheeting). The family would often struggle with finances, in spite of their father working two shifts. Laurie would tell of how he had to walk the three and a half kilometres to school in his bare feet.



In 1940 the family moved to Parramatta, on the western edges of Sydney, where Laurie's father worked in a munitions factory for the duration of the war. At the age of 15, Laurie started a mechanic's apprenticeship with NCR - the National Cash Register company.

WORKING IN THE UK

At the age of 19, he travelled by ship to the UK to visit his father's sisters and work for a couple of years or so. He landed a job in Birmingham with NCR but returned to Australia, after two years, apparently leaving a good few broken hearts behind.

He travelled via South Africa, and once back on home turf rejoined NCR in the spare parts division and later the accounts department. Things began to change for him in the mid-1950s when he landed a job as merchandising manager for a company selling agricultural hardware, steel and feed, becoming what was referred to as a 'Pitt Street Merchant'. When a credit squeeze hit the industry, he faced unemployment and decided to set up on his own working from the family home in Parramatta. He began by importing steel from Japan and selling it on to the railways or steel



Laurie Wilson

plants. He also sold scrap stainless steel and frozen prawns to Japan, and kangaroo meat to Hong Kong. Somewhere around 1956, he changed direction and started a steel fabrication business and soon began installing steel work for new schools and other buildings going up at that time. At one time he employed 40 "boilermakers and ironworkers".

GETTING INTO CRANES

He began renting mobile cranes for his steel operation, mostly from Gordon Marr Senior, whom he described as a "typical 'craney', down to earth and hard-working guy. In those days you had to be a hands-on man, and that is what he was. Marr didn't stand any nonsense from the unions. His son Gordon Marr Junior went on to set up Men from Marrs."

However, Laurie soon decided to buy his own crane and rent it when he was not using it in the steel business. He started with a six tonne C.A.P. LM6 truck crane purchased second hand from Clarke Cranes in Melbourne. Recalling that crane a few years later, he said: "I can still vividly remember walking behind it and picking up the bolts and nuts as they fell from it." In spite of that, it triggered a love for cranes that never left him.

The crane went straight out on a permanent rental to BMG's Prospect quarries. He quickly added a 15 tonne CAP truck mounted crane, but that was also snapped up on a permanent rental contract. He said: "I had bought two cranes but still didn't have a crane!"

OUT OF STEEL INTO CRANES FULL TIME

By 1965 the steel fabrication business was beginning to give him grief, so when "the Boilermakers union began playing up, so I said: To hell with this, I don't need to put up with this nonsense. So, I sold the assets at auction and paid off all the guys. Leaving me free to focus on the emerging crane business."

In 1966, he established Wilson Mobile Cranes, based in the Sydney suburb of Blacktown, and purchased more CAP truck cranes, along with more modern Coles cranes, which at the time were mounting superstructures made at its UK plant on locally built PMC chassis at its plant in the Milperra suburb of Sydney. Speaking of the new cranes, he said: "They were good cranes, or the uppers were. We had a lot of problems with the running gear and diffs and so on. We used to

order them three at a time to make sure we had enough cranes to meet demand. They'd typically break down on the way to their first job! It was a bit of a disaster to start with."



Early C.A.P crane

EARLY AERIAL LIFT ENTRANT

In 1975, having spotted the potential for powered access rental, he set up Skymaster Plant Hire, building a fleet of booms and scissor lifts along with telehandlers. He said he was inspired to do so by the construction of Sydney's Darling Harbour. "I got the gear from JLG, put it on a truck and went straight to the job. After that I never saw it until the harbour was finished and the machines started coming back into the yard. I then had to do something about it, so we built the business from there."

By the late 1970s the Wilson crane fleet ran to 23 units, mostly the Coles and CAP cranes. Speaking around that time, Laurie said: "I began to realise that we needed to swap the older cranes out for new, more modern ones that were coming on stream. I also realised that size really does matter. They had started to manufacture concrete panels that were double the size we were used to. So, I purchased two 200 tonne Demag truck cranes. We pioneered these big cranes coming into Australia and getting them registered and approved. It was a big gamble for us at the time. But you don't gamble unless you have confidence in yourself. And at the time we were the only ones that could handle them. We went on to become specialists in the installation of tilt-up panel work."



Continued on p74



Laurie Wilson (L-R) at the age of four, in the UK at 19, as St John Ambulance officer at 29 and with wicked sideburns at 39

Then in 1981 he purchased his first Japanese crane, a 23 tonne Kobe-built P&H truck crane and went on to swap out the old Coles cranes, which were beginning to show their age. He later added more Demag truck cranes, including an 80 tonner and two 130 tonne HC 340 purchased at Bauma and also began buying Katos. His sons Rod and Laurie Junior also joined the business.

The next big step was the move into large crawler cranes, starting with a 300 tonne Demag, one of the first three to be delivered worldwide. "This crane went to work in Adelaide as soon as it arrived," said Wilson. "It took 18 trailers and a low loader to move all the gear. It also worked on the Sydney Olympic stadium." A year or two later, he added a 250 tonne CC1400, which was also the first to arrive in Australia.

Over the years, the Wilsons also made a number of acquisitions, taking over F.S Cranes in 1989, which operated cranes inside the Shell Oil refinery in Clyde, near Parramatta. This was followed in 1991 by Mobile Crane Co, purchased from Greg Melrose, who later went on to set up Melrose Crane Hire.

SELLING TO BRAMBLES - FOCUSING ON ACCESS

In mid 1998, Wilson sold the crane business to Brambles, apparently instigated by - once again - 'problems' with a union. which he said: "Caused me to accept what was the fourth buy-out offer from a very persistent Brambles."

As you might expect, Laurie Wilson did not retire, instead, he focused on building his access rental business, Skymaster Plant Hire, selling that business to United Equipment in 2006, by which time it ran a fleet of around 160 units, including 60 JLG and Snorkel boom lifts. He remained with the business for the rest of that year, helping with the transition as he had agreed, retiring at the age of 76. He then devoted himself to his home

in Arcadia and its adjoining five acres of land, including a paddock with a couple of horses.

ALWAYS READY TO HELP

In addition to his day job, Laurie Wilson spent a great deal of time working with the local Rotary club, helping to raise funds for good causes for which he was named a Fellow of the Paul Harris Foundation and a member of the Paul Harris Society. He also helped set up the 7 Hills Rotary club in Kampala, Uganda. Back at home, he helped the Junior Chamber of Commerce with its skills development programmes and had worked as an officer with the St John's Ambulance service from his late 20s. He was also a regular volunteer at the Parramatta hospital, perhaps to get a taste of his desire when still at school to be a doctor.

Speaking in 1985 as Wilson Cranes was preparing to celebrate its 20th anniversary, he said: "Perhaps my greatest achievement during the first 20 years was the ability to survive the credit squeezes and the latest severe recession. Not forgetting, however, one's ability to survive the antics and destructive tactics of the Builders Labourers Federation."

"My hobbies, it could be said, are Rotary and work, although not necessarily in that order. My priorities may soon change when Maureen and I move in a few weeks to a five acre property in Arcadia."

A LOVEABLE ROGUE

Laurie Wilson has been referred to as a 'Loveable rogue', who loved to tell jokes and go to lunch 'with the boys'. By the time he reached his 80s, if not before, he was happy to take up any opportunity to pass on his thoughts and philosophies. Here are a few of them.

"Worry is interest borrowed on trouble. It's something I've believed for most of my life."

"You won't pick any words of wisdom up from the current generation, they didn't come through the university of hard knocks. They've grown up in a sheltered atmosphere and wouldn't know how to take the risks that I took on with no education and no money. You can achieve whatever the mind can conceive."

"I have learnt to deal with stress. Don't let anything get over you, just move on, strength of mind and power of positive thinking. If you're not a positive thinker, you write yourself off."

"There's three kinds of people in the world, people who make things happen, people who watch things happen, and people who say what happened."

"My ancestors were chosen, by some of the best judges in England, to come to Australia. In other words, I'm a First Fleeter. My relative was James Wright, he was a highwayman. Thank God he

came. He was sentenced to death for robbery in 1783, but his sentence was commuted to transportation. He is buried at the old cemetery at Parramatta. I know exactly where he is."

Laurie Wilson was a true one-off, created from the hard times of the early 1930s, and developed through the Second World War and the early 1950s.

Footnote: Con Popov

C.A.P. Cranes was started by 'legendary' crane designer and manufacturer Constantine Alexander (Con) Popov. He studied engineering at Harbin, China and later at Stanford in the USA and worked on major projects such as the Chien Tang River Bridge in 1937. He then set up in Shanghai, running a major business, representing British engineers Babcock & Wilcox, while also consulting for Texaco Oil, and served as president of the British Institute of Engineers.

He migrated to Australia in 1952 and bought a small boiler making shop in Bankstown. When a downturn hit the business the following year, he began developing a small hydraulic truck crane which he completed in 1954. Although it took him a year to sell it, the eventual sale marked the birth of the CAP crane brand. The LM6 crane with telescopic boom, was launched in 1960. Popov sold the business to Industrial Engineering in 1967 and retired, having produced at least 1,000 cranes over the 12 years he owned the company.

Con Popov made a minor comeback in 1990 when he spoke at the 1990 CICA (Crane Industry Council of Australia) National Crane Conference, thanks, to the efforts of Laurie Wilson, a founder member of the association's NSW chapter. Con Popov passed away in June 1997 at the age of 87. In 1998 CICA introduced the annual Con Popov Memorial Award which honours individuals for outstanding, long-term contributions to the industry. Nominations are made through State Associations and presented at the annual CICA Conference Gala Dinner.



Con Popov

