

# LLOYD DUNN & DUNLITE

An obituary tribute prepared by Charlie Nottle in 1978

*Comments in italics were added by his daughter, Lesley, in May, 2001.*

Lloyd Brooks Dunn, the second son of Lloyd Ernest Lavington Dunn, was born on 17<sup>th</sup> August, 1912, and spent his early years on the family farming property at McHarg's Creek (*near Ashbourne on the Fleurieu Peninsula south of Adelaide*). After several years as a boarder at Prince Alfred College, his secondary education was continued at Thebarton Technical High School (*both of these schools are – in the case of Thebarton Tech was – located in the inner suburbs of Adelaide*).

On completion of his education, Lloyd received an apprenticeship with F C Gilbert, an electrical engineer and manufacturer of the GILCO wind generator, in which company he rose to the position of foreman.

Seeking to further his knowledge, he joined the Saunders Engineering Co, whose main line of business was the manufacture of windmills and pumps for rural applications. As an adjunct to this and under the supervision of Lloyd, the Saunders WINDLITE came into being.

Realising early that there existed a tremendous potential for wind power generation equipment for rural areas, he decided, after a short period with Saunders, to commence business on his own account.

From working in backyard premises (*Mum says he was boarding with a family called Lee, and set up in their backyard shed with just a lathe to begin with*) he finally officially opened for business as the Dunlite Electrical Co Ltd (*Mum suggested the name*) in premises at 22a Tavistock Street (now Frome Street) in the city of Adelaide, on 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1936, with a staff of four.

The first model of wind generator produced was a 12 volt 300 watt direct-drive unit with a wooden two-bladed propeller. This was followed in quick succession by a 32-volt direct-drive, then a geared model with a capacity of 750 watt.

The ready acceptance of the DUNLITE was quickly evident by the rapidly growing sales, and the spinning blades became a common sight all over South Australia and eventually the whole of Australia. Simultaneously, belt-driven generators were produced for use with engines.

In those early days Lloyd canvassed for orders, built the units, and installed them and the necessary wiring. He was often on the road before daylight, and worked seven days a week.

As the company grew, additional parts of the building were rented as they became vacant. (*He found those premises because Mum was working as chief cutter in a dressmaking factory on the first floor of the building, and alerted him to the vacant ground floor. I recall it as a pretty dingy and dirty sort of place. It was eventually demolished when Tavistock Street was widened and re-named Frome Street. The basement was full of beautiful old kerosene lamps, some brass, some porcelain, which he had accepted as trade-ins, and when he moved across the road he took them all out to sea and dumped them! Sacrilege! They are now "antiques" and valuable collectors' items, but I have never quite forgiven him for such philistinism – many of them were so lovely!*).

During the war years, the company was engaged in the manufacture of generating equipment for the armed forces, and eventually, after the cessation of hostilities, was able to build and move into new premises in Frome Street in July 1952 (*I am fairly sure that at that stage it was still called Tavistock Street for a few more years*).

After a short time it was found necessary to add an additional storey to the building, and during this period the concept of the compact single unit 32 volt d.c. generating set was initiated, this design dispensing with the belt and pulleys previously used.

This principle was carried through to the eventual design and manufacture of alternating current machines. An early innovation was the direct coupling of the alternator by a series of flexible steel discs to the flywheel of the engine, thus eliminating the alignment problems previously experienced.

Under Lloyd's guidance the first and only brushless alternator set, wholly manufactured in Australia, came into being, representing a significant advance in design concept. (The present company now manufactures a complete range of these machines up to 325kVA capacity.)

In 1965, having reached the capacity of the Frome Street factor, the first stage of another was built at 28 Fullarton Road, Kent Town (*an inner eastern suburb of Adelaide*). Further extensions were made during 1966-67, and a design and development centre was built at 110 Rundle Road, Kent Town in 1967.

To maintain a continuance of technical know-how and to expand into export markets, Lloyd made frequent overseas trips, the company being run in his absence by a staff committee.

Early in the company's history he established a superannuation fund for employees, and after ten years of service all premiums were paid by the company.

A profit-sharing scheme, with a proportion being allotted to a provident fund, and accumulating interest, was also operating, and the value of unused sick leave was paid out each year as a bonus.

Often an employee in financial difficulties due to sickness or otherwise was given assistance until their problems were overcome.

*(I remember that Lloyd took great pride in the fact that his employees were not members of a union, and that on one occasion, when a union delegate came to see the staff to get them to join up, they forced him from the premises, quite sure that they could not be better off. He had a very loyal work force, and many of them were with the company from the time they left school until they retired. Those who went to WW2 returned to find their jobs still open for them.)*

*Lloyd did not go to the war, because his manufacturing of generators made his a reserved occupation, but he spent evenings instructing in the theory of flying for pilots. He was colour-blind, so was not allowed to fly at night himself.)*

He was, in his own way and without the benefit of engineering degrees, a genius in his chosen field. A shrewd businessman, he put back into the company in the early years more than he took out, and so established it on a sound financial basis.

He was a life member of the Grange Sailing Club and served a term as president. *(Lloyd loved sailing and in the late forties sailed most weekends at Grange in the "Swift" – also named by Mum. Swift was club champion, and in the summer of 1951/52 they represented South Australia at the national titles. It was a sharpie – what is now known as "the old heavyweight sharpie" since the development of fibreglass and the "lightweight sharpie".)*

For several years he piloted his own plane *(He loved flying, and had a three-seater Klemm Eagle – I remember going up in it as a child with Lloyd's great friend Ross and his daughter, who was my best friend. Apparently the wives/mothers spent the entire time on the ground praying for a safe return, as he was a bit of a daredevil!. The plane came in very useful for installations in the distant country – Lloyd would ship the bits and pieces up to the stations – Oz word for ranch – by rail, then fly up and install them.)* and for a number of years owned a farm at Clayton *(on the shores of Lake Alexandrina near the mouth of the River Murray)* where he built up a fine Red Poll beef cattle

herd. It was here that he found time to relax, and he especially enjoyed water ski-ing.

*(Every year in November, there was "the Dunlite Picnic" in the National Park at Belair, when employees and their families were treated to a good old-fashioned picnic – sizzling sausages, icecreams for the children, races of various kinds – I remember them very fondly. And then in January there was the day at Clayton, when all the employees and their families came, and as well as the usual food and drinks, everyone who wanted to could try water skiing and aquaplaning, sailing in the catamaran he had down there, rowing in the dinghy, or just splashing about in the water – which was a good deal less polluted than it is now!)*

In 1968, after prolonged negotiations in which the welfare of his employees was of prime concern, he sold the business. *(To Pye of the UK, I think, which was a subsidiary of Phillips of Holland – it was then sold again to Davey Pumps, and became Davey-Dunlite, but since being taken over by Onan the Dunlite name has returned to prominence.)* He was retained in a consultative capacity, finally retiring from active participation at the end of 1970.

During the last few years, seeking an outlet for his still considerable energy and drive, he purchased an area of virgin bush near Port Vila in the New Hebrides *(which is now Vanuatu)* and set about building up a cattle ranch, which at the present time *(1978)* is well established.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April 1939 he married Marjorie (Midge) Hooper, living first at Seaton, then moving to St Georges. With the frequent trips to Port Vila it was decided to leave St Georges and purchase a home unit at Burnside. His son Robert lives *(did then, but no longer does)* in the St Georges house. His daughter, Lesley, also lives in Adelaide.

He lived life to the full and will be missed by his many business and social friends, ex-employees, and his family.

*Lloyd died on 5<sup>th</sup> July 1978 after suffering a stroke early in the morning of 1<sup>st</sup> July. He had always said that if he had a stroke he wanted to be allowed to die rather than "fixed up" by the doctors – he would have hated to have survived, paralyzed and speechless – as indeed happened to his brothers. George died at 89 and Charlie at 75. Lloyd would have been rather surprised to die before his 66<sup>th</sup> birthday, as he came from a family of very long livers – most in their late eighties or nineties, but we all feel it preferable that he died rather than living incapacitated. We still miss him, and feel sad that he never saw his only grandson (my son Tom, now eighteen) as they are very alike. Tom has a job as a web page designer, and I think that Lloyd would have loved computers and the internet and had a lot of fun with them.*