



Berry Ritchie

# The Good Builder

The John Laing Story

# The Good Builder

The John Laing S

The story begins in mid-nineteenth century rural Cumbria with an archetypal local builder, carrying out any modest commission, from whitewashing the interior of the church to more substantial jobs. The firm expanded to become well-recognised in the county, and as such might well have remained. But at this point a remarkable figure enters the stage: John William Laing.

Combining exceptional ability for calculation, management and innovation with toughness of character, Laing was put in charge of demanding projects at an early age. At the start of the twentieth century he was running the enterprise which during the six decades under his leadership was to become one of the greatest construction companies in Britain.

By the 1930s the firm was building large housing estates, factories, offices, schools, hospitals, airfields, and virtually every other type of building. The crowning glory for Sir John Laing was Coventry Cathedral, reflecting his deep religious and moral conviction integral to the firm's reputation for fair dealing, craftsmanship and quality.

These attributes including a talent for motivating and retaining first class managers and employees at all levels, have happily been passed to Laing's family successors. Under their leadership the company, despite often harsh economic conditions, has survived and flourished. It has scored many construction 'firsts' - such as nuclear power stations and motorways, to take two notable examples - and continues to win major new contracts like the Second Severn Crossing at home and overseas.

Laing is arguably now the most successful major construction company in Britain.

*continued on back flap*







## The Good Builder



# The Good Builder

The John Laing Story

Berry Ritchie



PUSTAKA PERDANA



1003763



© John Laing plc

First published 1997

*Art Direction:* Hamish MacGibbon

*Design:* John Rice

*New photography commissioned for the book*

*Principal photographer:* Matthew Weinteb

*Other locations:* Seamus MacGibbon

*Location research:* Finn McGough

*Photography of documents:* John Spragg

*Project assistant:* Monica Matthews

*Copy editing and index:* Conan Nicholas

*Type set in* Monotype Sabon

*Colour processing:* Radstock Repro Limited

*Paper:* 150 gsm B&T Matt Art made for the printers by Stora. The manufacture complies with international agreements adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and the EU Environment Act No. 1836/93, including practising a long-term, sustainable forestry policy, using production methods which are resource efficient and safeguard both the internal and external environment.

*Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by*

Butler & Tanner Limited, Frome and London

*Published by*

James & James (Publishers) Limited

Gordon House Business Centre

6 Lissenden Gardens, London NW5 1LX

*Title page picture:* The clubhouse at Creek Golf Course, Dubai, built by Al Naboodah Laing to resemble the sails of a traditional sailing dhow. The 35m-high structure has an observation deck on its top-floor.

*Note on illustrations*

The structures featured in this book were in the main constructed, or refurbished, by John Laing

# Foreword

This is the story of a family company which, over 150 years, has grown in size and stature and has become a major force in the international construction and housing industry, and yet it still remains a caring, family business.

To record all the significant events in a book of this nature would be an impossible task. The sheer volume of material made it inevitable that significant contracts have had to be omitted, key employees not mentioned nor given the recognition they deserve, and important episodes passed over. I would therefore like to pay personal tribute to the invaluable efforts of the thousands of Laing employees and the many directors of the company who have been the means by which the company has achieved all that has been accomplished. It has often been said that it is relatively easy going forward. However, so often our finest hours have been battling in recessions and in the most difficult and complex of circumstances at home and overseas.

While James Laing would not recognise our construction world with its complex projects, computerised design and management control systems, I believe he would see that the values, traditions and professionalism that existed so long ago remain true today.

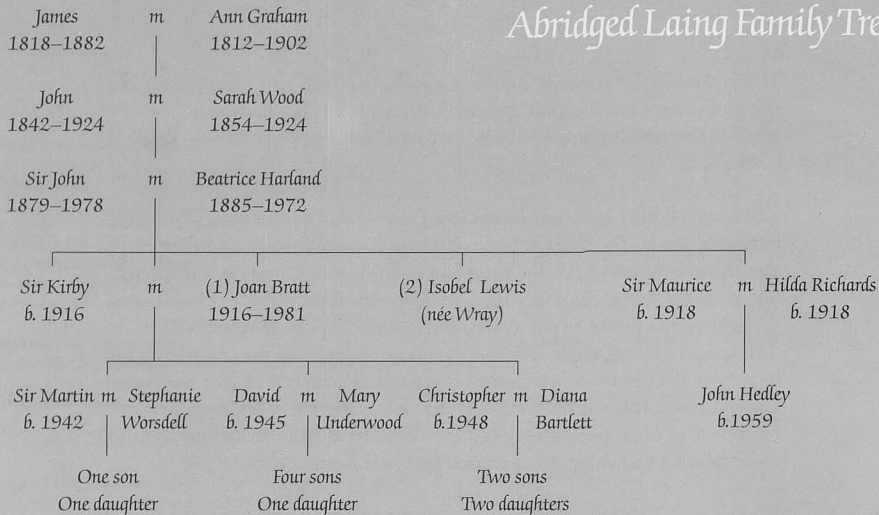
During its lifetime the Laing Group – Construction, Homes and Property – has faced a wide variety of problems and opportunities from depressions, recessions, war, industrial unrest, booms and takeovers. It has managed throughout that period to be flexible and has adapted to the circumstances of the time. It must continue to do so.

Different members of the family have coped with these pressures in their own way so that today the company ethos reflects these varied sources of inspiration, based on the Christian ethics of my grandfather, continued by my father, Sir Kirby, and uncle, Sir Maurice. The tenacity and determination shown and expected by them still exists in today's fine management team and workforce.

We look forward with confidence to the 21st Century.

*Sir Martin Laing CBE*

## Abridged Laing Family Tree



## Author's Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following for their vivid recollections, which made such a contribution to *The Good Builder*: Sir Kirby Laing, Sir Maurice Laing, Sir Martin Laing, Rowland Beecher, Urquhart Broadbent, John Charnley, Charles Craft, Ken Jerrard, John Pymont, John Renshaw, Denis Turner, James Watt and Robert Wood. Alan Thorpe, Laing's archivist, and Kathie Jones, the editor of *Team Spirit*, also deserve special mention for their generous and expert help in researching and editing this book.

### Picture Acknowledgements

Ashmolean Museum 30; British Petroleum Company p.l.c. 148, 152; British Rail 185; Camera Press, London 51, 66, 95, 107; Chadwick/Camera Press, London 137; Carlisle City Council 36; Chorley and Handford 173; Cumbria County Library 34; Barry Stacey/Furness Tourism Partnership 32; Hulton Getty Picture Collection 49, 68, 127, 162; The trustees of the Imperial War Museum, London 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 48, 90, 92, 95, 100, 169; London Transport Museum 68; Finn McGough 111; by courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London 30, 31; Seamus MacGibbon 13, 16, 31, 35, 40, 56, 58, 65, 70, 71, 72, 76, 78; Press Association 190; Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon 96;

Rex Features 94, 104; Oliver Rice 57; RS Studio 56; Science Museum: Science and Society Picture Library 33, 62, 63, 69, 79; St David's Hall 166; Matthew Weinreb 8, 11, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 25, 28, 36, 37, 43, 55, 63, 82, 96, 97, 98, 105, 106, 112, 114, 120, 123, 134, 136, 144, 146, 147, 151, 156, 158, 160, 163, 165, 168, 170, 174, 176, 179, 188-9.

Other pictures come from the archives of John Laing plc. These include paintings by Cuneo, commissioned by the company, on pages 117, 119, 124, 126, 128, 129, 133, 135, 143.