

A stirring success: Ken Wood and the food mixer

On Thursday 7 September 2017, a commemorative blue plaque marking the location of the original workshop of legendary culinary industrialist, Kenneth Wood, was unveiled by the Mayor of Woking, Cllr Graham Cundy.

It's a little known fact that the internationally recognised Kenwood brand had its humble beginnings in Woking. Yet from a small workshop in Goldsworth Road 70 years ago, Ken Wood and his business partner, Roger Laurence, would develop a prototype food mixer, the iconic Kenwood Chef, which would revolutionise the culinary world.

It was 1947 when Ken and Roger started their first workshop together at 79 Goldsworth Road under the name Woodlau (the departure of Roger a few years later would see the firm renamed to Kenwood). It was purely by luck, as Ken explains in his unpublished memoirs: "Roger changed trains at Woking and during his wait went to an estate agent opposite the station who introduced us to Harry Waters and he had a small shopfront next door to a fishmonger."

Whilst at the workshop they developed the A100 'turnover toaster' – the first production model toaster sold in the UK – as well as the prototype A200 food mixer. "With our production of the A200 food mixer, turnover toaster and egg poacher, we were bursting at the seams!" announced Ken.

So in 1948 the company expanded to premises on Hipley Street in Old Woking (where Harvey Water Softeners now stands).

Ken recalled: "We started moving on the Friday evening and a team of us worked right through the weekend getting a few hours sleep...and had the production line of the A200 food mixer ready for production by 8 o'clock Monday morning."

Over the next few years the food mixer continually developed and production of the food mixer trebled eventually selling over 27,000 units. Kenwood became Woking's largest employer with 700 staff.

The classic food mixer would be the firm's most successful product, later being renamed the Kenwood Chef, and re-released in its most iconic form in 1959 after a redesign by famous industrial designer Sir Kenneth Grange. Sir Kenneth was responsible for other iconic designs such as the Wilkinson Sword razor, London black cab and Anglepoise lamp.

By 1962 Kenwood had outgrown its Hipley Street premises and the decision was made to relocate production to Havant. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Do you know any friends or relatives who worked at Kenwood? Kenneth's stepson, John, is keen to hear from anyone who worked at the factory in Hipley Street. Visit www.facebook.com/KennethMaynardWood to post your memories.