KUSTERS

One Hundred Years of Balance

1911-2011

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Paul Seelen

“A project can only
be successful if at the end
both parties are and remain
completely satisfied”.

George Kusters, *Chairman of Royal Dutch Kusters Engineering*

KUSTERS ENGINEERING

ROYAL DUTCH
KUSTERS ENGINEERING
• TRUSTED SINCE 1911 •

One Hundred Years of Balance

How can my company become one hundred years old? This question will be answered at the end of this book by Prof. Dr Ron Meyer. The perceptive reader will already have come swiftly to the conclusion that the crux of the matter is ENTREPRENEURSHIP. When Handerie Kusters founded his forge in 1911, this was managed the 'traditional' way and there was no systematic policy in place. He was ‘the boss’ and that was that, a boss who worked hard to provide for his family and who was always on the lookout for new products and new markets. In actual fact, the factory arrangement was the first step towards an organized company policy.

When Harrie Kusters took over his father's firm on 1 January 1950, it immediately became clear that he was from a different generation: dynamic, ambitious and progressive. He soon moved from the inner city to the Veegtes, Venlo's first industrial area. Just like his father, Harrie was an old-fashioned craftsman, but he didn't feel like just the boss of the company; he also felt like an entrepreneur. He too was constantly on the lookout for new products and new markets. His instinct was his most important guide.

When the third generation took over the company in 1979, it was already a structured business with clearly defined departments, responsibilities and authorizations. Plans and strategies were soon devised to develop the company further. The third generation too occupied themselves with innovation. ‘Boss and entrepreneur’ were replaced by ‘Manager and CEO’.

In the hundred years that Kusters has been in existence, entrepreneurship has always been at the core of the company. Entrepreneurial spirit is in the blood, is something you're brought up with. Nowadays you cannot run a business without having successfully completed a good management course and you cannot develop new products without having set a strategy for innovation.

It used to be called entrepreneurship. The trick to reaching one hundred years old is about finding the right balance between entrepreneurship and management. We have experienced many successes, as well as many setbacks. The fourth generation is facing the challenge of learning from the past and having the perseverance and the ambition to make new dreams a reality.

We would like to dedicate this book to all of Kusters' staff, suppliers, customers, board members and associates over the past hundred years.

Geert Kusters, Chairman of Royal Dutch Kusters Engineering

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The year 1911

Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* (The Knight of the Rose) debuts at the Königliches Opernhaus in Dresden.

Great Britain has plans ready for a landing in France and Belgium.

The Titanic is launched.

Gustave Garrigou wins the Tour de France.

Russian physicist Vladimir Zworykin is the first to successfully transmit a television image by purely electronic means.

Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa is stolen from the Louvre in Paris.

Anthony Fokker flies his self-made Fokker Spin aeroplane round the Sint-Bavokerk in Haarlem.

In the Netherlands the Trekhondenwet makes it mandatory to have a permit for a dog cart.

The Italian government declares war on the Turkish government.

Dutch jurist Tobias Asser is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in establishing a Permanent Court of Arbitration.

Norwegian polar explorer Roald Amundsen is the first to reach the South Pole.

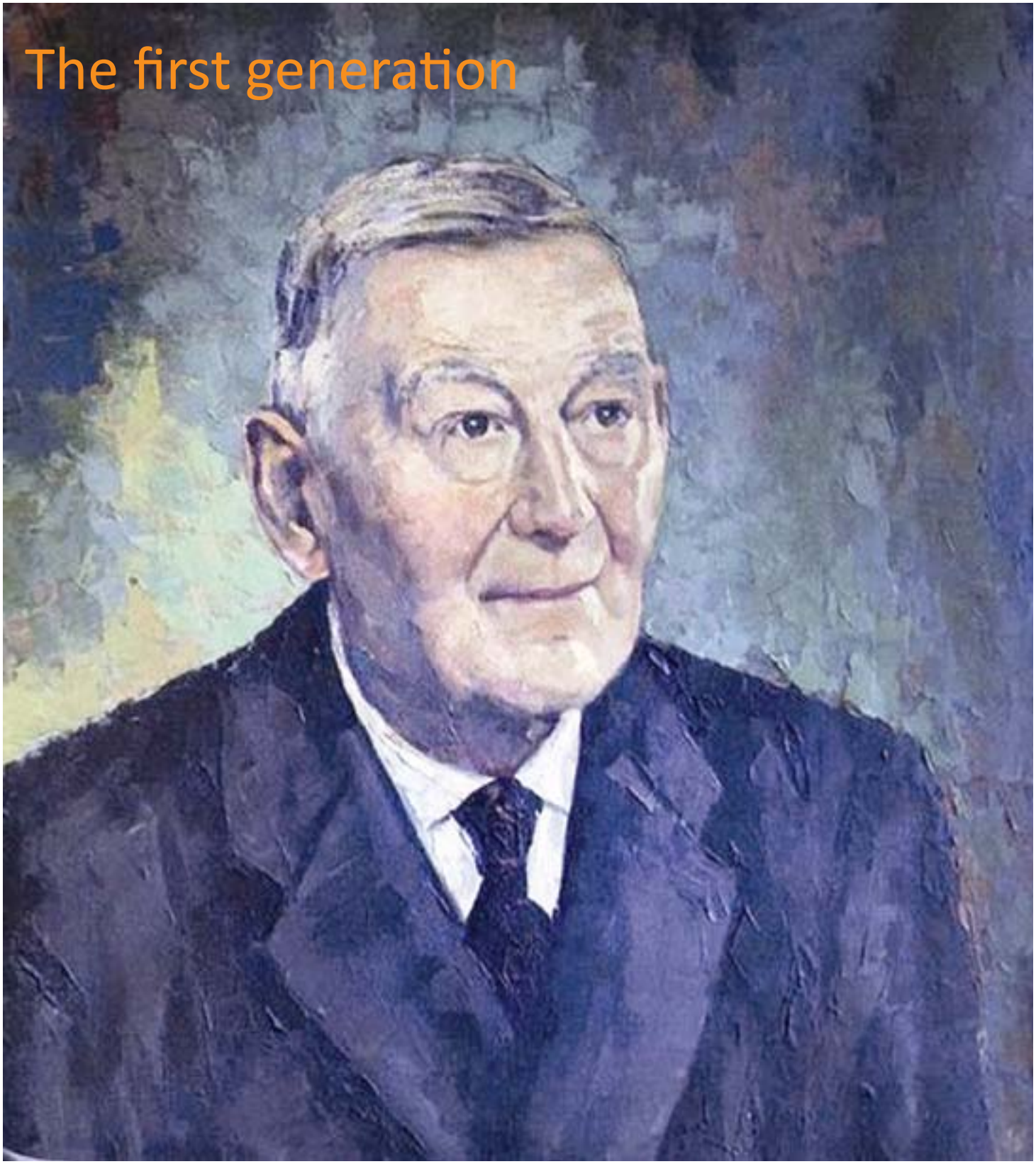
Ernest Rutherford formulates the first model of the atom, in which electrons orbit a nucleus with a slightly positive charge.

The first large group of Chinese come to the Netherlands.

And……

Handerie Kusters (31) opens his own forge in Venlo.
The start of a story that reads like a boy's book…

The first generation



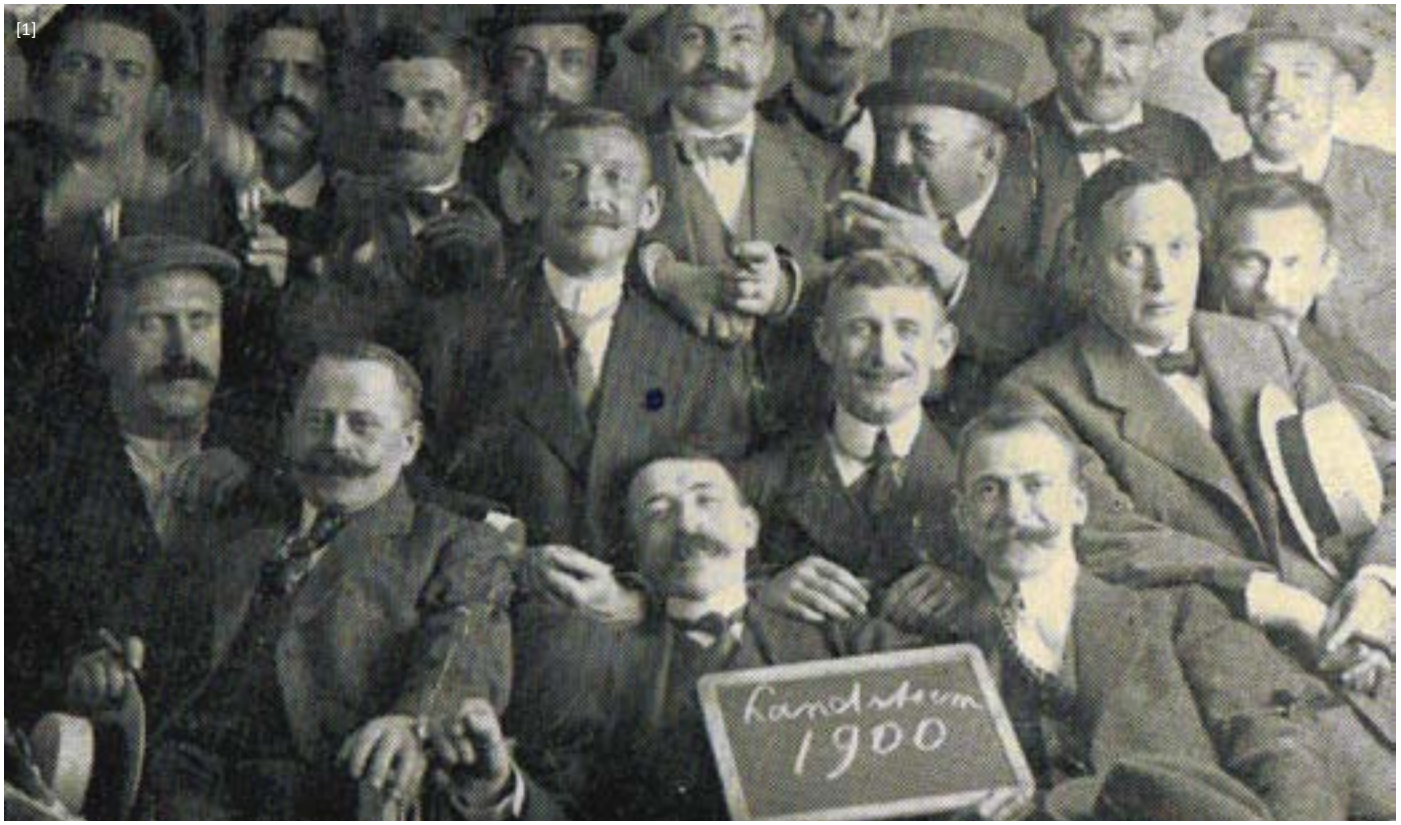
1 Like father, like son

1.1. The Koestraat in Arcen

[1] In Arcen, Handerie Kusters was a member of the Landstorm (Dutch home guard). The Landstorm was a volunteer organization with security and guard duties. Handerie (with moustache) features in the middle of the photo, which dates from 1900.

Antonius Hendrikus ('Handerie') Kusters was born in Arcen, a picturesque village eight miles north of Venlo, on 11 December 1880. Handerie's father Henricus had a thriving forge in the Koestraat. In 1911 he transferred his business to his eldest son, Toon.[1] Henricus did not forget his five other children (two sons and three daughters). They were given a generous 'pay-off' of fl. 5000 each, enough to build a respectable home. Handerie decided to leave the village and try his luck in Venlo.[2]
In 1911, Venlo was still a modest provincial town with 'only' 18,000 inhabitants, but it was developing rapidly. The connection to the railway network and the dismantling of the old defences had given the town fresh zeal. New roads and houses had been built in the bare, flat landscape surrounding the former fortress; no fewer than 95 were completed in 1911, by far a record for Venlo. The Frederik Hendrik barracks were built on the Blerick side of the River Maas. This increased the number of soldiers in the town. The town's nightlife benefited greatly from this. Venlo abounded in eateries and theatre halls. What's more, it was able to call itself the 'owner' of the first permanent cinema in the Netherlands, the Eerste Venlosche Kinematograph (later renamed the City Theater) on Vleesstraat, founded in 1907 by entrepreneur Jos Caubo.[3]

Auction Market gardening grew and flourished. The demand for vegetables grew by the year, particularly due to the rapid growth of the population in neighbouring Germany, Venlo's most important sales territory since time immemorial. In order to be able to charge high prices, the market gardeners started offering their products collectively. In 1909 they had two large hangars built on an



[1]

[2] Production at Pope around 1900. Pope started out with thirty employees, but had in excess of one hundred at the turn of the century.

undeveloped plot on Rodestraat, just outside the Roermondsepoort. The Venlosche Veilingsvereeniging (Venlo Auction Society, VVV) was born and held its first auction here on 3 June 1909.[4]
It was not just with market gardening that things were going well; even traditional sectors like clayware and the envelope industry were bringing prosperity. But for years it had been a foreigner that had been providing the real 'upsurge' in Venlo - a young, brilliant British engineer…

Pope In 1889 Frederic Robert Pope, born the son of the captain of a clipper in Liverpool in 1865, opened the light bulb factory E. Goossens, Pope & Co. on the corner of Mercatorstraat and Hamburgersingel (now Deken van Oppensingel) using capital from Venlo-based merchant family Goossens. Within a few weeks the factory was able to fulfil the first orders, including a shipment of one thousand light bulbs for lighting Amsterdam's Kalverstraat. Pope started out with thirty staff, but had a hundred by 1894 - a year in which 125,000 lamps were produced. The factory was doing so well that they went down the takeover route.
In 1896 Pope attempted to take over a competitor in Eindhoven, the as yet unknown Philips & Co., which was in dire straits at the time. Pope made a bid of fl. 24,000. Ultimately this proved to be fl. 1,000 too little, whereupon Philips decided to give things a go under their own steam again. If the takeover bid *had* been successful, then the history of Venlo - and Eindhoven - may well have been very different.[5]
Inspired by Pope's success, a second light bulb factory was opened in Blerick in 1892: Constantia Electric Works. Here too there was a great deal of optimism. Right from the outset there were eighty (!) employees on the payroll. Another factory followed on Hogeweg in Venlo, focused on the production of artificial silk gas mantles, under the name Aurora.

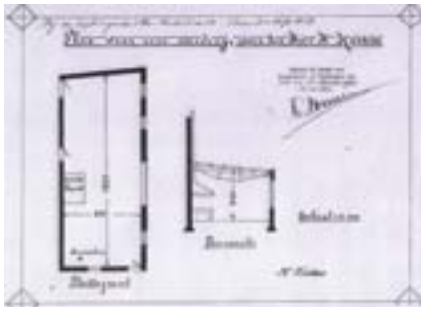

[2]

Both these last initiatives were not blessed with a long life. A hard competitive battle on the market for light bulbs resulted in Constantia being bought out by the resurgent Philips in 1904 (for strategic reasons). Manufacturing was halted pretty much immediately. Aurora was forced to close down because the factory was no longer able to hold its own financially.

No city of light Pope did not take over Philips; Philips took over Pope in 1920. The consequence of this was that it was not Venlo but Eindhoven that went on to become the city of light. Nonetheless, Frederic Pope's innovative entrepreneurship was imitated in Venlo. In 1901 the Van der Grinten family, former pharmacists, opened a butter colouring factory on Hogeweg, which would later expand to become worldwide photocopying giant Océ.
Venlo was rapidly catching up with *the* industrial centre of North Limburg, the neighbouring town of Tegelen. Around 1911 a total of 775 people were working for industrial companies in the municipalities of Venlo and Maasbree (to which Blerick belonged until 1 January 1940), with 765 people working for industrial companies in the municipality of Tegelen.

On 24 March 1911 Handerie Kusters rented a room next to Hotel Gerritzen on Grote Kerkstraat. At that time he was earning a living as a career sergeant in the Army, but he had *very* different plans.

1.2 9 June 1911



[5]

On 12 May he married Gertruda Mulders, who was from the same village, and bought a house and a plot of land on the corner of the Zuidsingel and Sloterbeekstraat[3] and applied to the local authority for a building permit and a Nuisance Act permit for a "forge without power".
A mere two weeks later - the cogs of bureaucracy evidently turned rather quickly in those days - he had been granted both permits and was able to make a start on the construction of a stone workshop measuring 72 m^2 with a 3.5-metre-high wood-cement roof. On 9 June 1911 Handerie registered his brand new company with the Dutch Chamber of Commerce.[6]

Farrier Handerie is listed as a 'farrier' in the local telephone books (so-called 'adresboeken') at the start of the previous century. Sure enough, the shoeing of horses was his primary occupation. In the front of the forge was a 'travalje' (wooden box) and a furnace, which he would work with from early in the morning until late at night. Handerie's forge was a traditional blacksmith's workshop. It was one of scores of such forges in the city and its immediate vicinity. Handerie did everything by hand. The only tools he used were bellows, chisels and a "hand-powered drill". His forge did not have any steam-powered equipment, as is stated emphatically in the insurance policy Handerie took out with the Brusselse Maatschappij in November 1911 (in return for payment of fl. 6.55/annum) to cover himself against "fire, lightning, gas explosion and boilers bursting".[4] As such, Handerie's business was not officially registered as a '*factory*'. That changed when he purchased a 2-horsepower electric motor in 1918, which he

[3] The certificate of marriage, drawn up 12 May 1911.

[4] The wedding photograph

[5] Construction plan for the first section of the forge, dated 11 April 1911

[6] Handerie is allowed to get building...

[3]

[4]

[6]

BEKENDMAKING.

[7]

[7] The first insurance policy, drawn up by Henri Goossens, scion of the exceedingly rich family from Venlo who financed Pope.

[8] *Gerdeneers* (Venlo dialect word for market gardeners) wait on the Zuidsingel and Rodestraat until they can auction off their products. Handerie profited from this.

started to use to power his drill as well as a cutting machine he had purchased in the meantime.[7]

Bullseye The site Handerie had chosen for his business turned out to be a 'bullseye'. Situated right next to the forge were the four access gates to the Venlosche Veilingsvereeniging (Venlo Auction Society, VVV). At the crack of dawn hundreds of market gardeners (called *gerdeneers* in the local dialect) and wagoners would arrive at the auction society by horse and cart to auction off their products. Until around midday there would be a long queue, running from Sloterbeekstraat through the Zuidsingel to the auction society's gates. There were throngs of people in front of Kusters' forge six days a week (auctions were held on Saturdays too). The market gardeners sometimes had to wait hours until it was their turn. To kill the time, they would occasionally pop into the local cafés for a glass of lemon gin with sugar or a glass of beer. Moreover, they would exchange the latest items of news boisterously in the middle of the street. The weather and the (in their view usually far too low) prices were welcome subjects. A great many market gardeners had their horses shod and their cartwheels repaired at Handerie's forge. (In those days carts had wooden wheels around which an iron band would be fitted. This band would expand in the summer and would have to be shortened.) Initially only members of the VVV would call in on Handerie, but from 1915 he even did business for competitors from the Coöperatieve Veiling-Vereeniging (Cooperative Auction Society or CVV, also known colloquially as the ‘Boerenveiling’ or 'Farmers' Auction House'), which had been set up on Havenstraat by the market gardeners from the villages around Venlo.

[8]

[9]

[9] Frans Maas, a very good customer of Kusters for years.

[10] The *gerdeneer* (Venlo dialect word for market gardener) Jos Stikkelbroek was probably the first buyer of a Venlo Warenhuis (in 1925). An invoice addressed to him remains extant.

[11] The market gardeners usually took care of the finish of the greenhouses themselves.

Transport companies The combination of railway access and the Maashaven (harbour) made the southern edge of the town pre-eminently suited to industrial activities that would not be at home in the cramped town centre. Around Handerie's forge it was a hive of activity. On the other side of the street was a shoe polish factory. Roermondsestraat and Tegelseweg teemed with businesses capitalizing on the rise of the motor car, such as suppliers of car parts and tyres, garages (often with a petrol pump) and taxi companies. On the Molensingel a thriving timber yard had been established which even had its own docks. As well as the CVV, Havenstraat was home to a dairy (De Nijverheid), a grain merchant's and an ironmonger's. On Sloterbeekstraat there was a clog factory as well as another ironmonger's. And then in the immediate vicinity there were in excess of ten transport firms, the majority of which specialized in transporting vegetables.

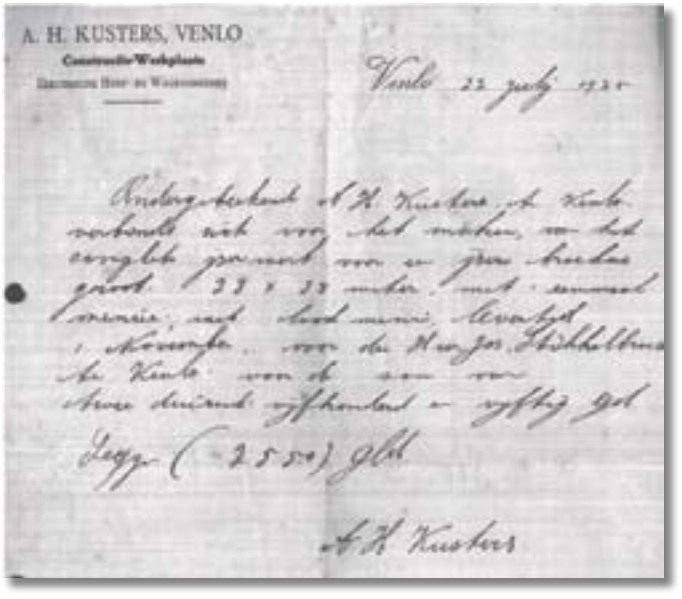
Zelfbewegers The first lorries these transport firms had were referred to colloquially as ‘zelfbewegers’ ('self-movers'). They were unwieldy and barely faster than horse and cart. Because the roads were poor in those days, carts' suspension was often broken, and this was something Handerie's people were quite capable of dealing with. As it happened, Handerie not only carried out repairs but also made frames for the bodies of lorries, over which the tarpaulin would then be pulled. Among Handerie's clientele were haulage firms (some of whom would go on to earn international renown) such as J.P. Janssen, Van Zwamen, Van Wylick and not forgetting Frans Maas.

Nedinsco Another important customer was optical instrument factory Nedinsco, which had been established in a former chocolate factory on the Molensingel in 1921. The company, the full name of which was the Nederlandse Instrumenten Compagnie (Dutch Instrumentation Company), was a remarkable business, set up by the famous Carl Zeiss. During the First World War Carl Zeiss had played a significant role in the German weapons industry. The most modern optical instruments, alignment and measuring equipment emanated from the factory in Jena.
Following the German surrender, the allies only allowed Carl Zeiss to continue manufacturing for the home market. In order to circumvent the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, Carl Zeiss set up companies in the neutral countries of the Netherlands and Sweden as a front.

Nedinsco was one of these companies, ideally situated just over the Dutch-German border. Whether the Dutch government was aware of the true nature of Nedinsco is uncertain. However, the fact is that they never impeded Nedinsco, perhaps also because the company created a lot of direct and indirect opportunities for work in Venlo and surrounding area.
Handerie probably knew nothing of this whole story. He cherished Nedinsco as a good client. Among other things, he produced iron transport boxes for submarine periscopes measuring five to seven metres long for the factory.[8]

No customer list for Kusters from the pre-war period remains extant. It is known from newspaper articles, however, that Handerie produced a new iron cogwheel for the Onderste Molen (a watermill not far from the border with the German village of Kaldenkirchen),[9] that he made frames for factories (construction work), steel windows and doors, decorative ironwork and - from the middle of the 1920s onwards - greenhouses too.

[10]


A. H. KUSTERS, VENLO
Constructie-Werkplaats
Venlo 22 juli 1930

[11]

1.3 Greenhouses

In the west of the Netherlands, (heated) greenhouses had been commonplace since as early as 1890. In Venlo the first one was built on Stalbergweg in 1908.[10] It was a demonstration greenhouse, in which plants were cultivated in accordance with the instructions of a Rijkstuinbouwleraar (government horticultural teacher). Up till then, Dutch Light glass (single-pane and so-called Lents windows) on flat garden frames had chiefly been used for the purposes of cultivating vegetables and plants. The production of agricultural plants under glass - at that time mainly tomatoes, cucumbers and table grapes in the Venlo region - continued to grow steadily. Handerie wanted a piece of the pie. At the start of the 1920s he developed a greenhouse with perpendicular 'façades', which was soon dubbed the Venlo Warenhuis (Venlo Greenhouse). What was the blacksmith's secret? Handerie 'lifted' the traditional flat greenhouse off of the ground and mounted the roof (the glazing bars, the glass and the ridge) on a base of iron columns with horizontal joists and load-bearing drainpipes.[11]
Just like its predecessors, the Venlo Warenhuis was heated by large coal-fired boilers. The disadvantage was that the boilers also had to be filled at night - though Handerie would go on to devise a solution for this too.

First buyer The Venlo-based market gardener Jos Stikkelbroek was probably the first person to purchase a Venlo Warenhuis. According to an extant invoice from 1925, he paid Kusters fl. 2,550 for the (red leaded) ironwork for a greenhouse measuring 23 x 38 metres. The iron structure was made in the forge and then red lead was applied on a stretch of grass on the other side of the Zuidsingel, the so-called Weitje van Laumen. Carpentry and glasswork were supplied by third parties.
Handerie's 'invention' proved to be tremendously successful. To this day, the Venlo Warenhuis is the most common type of greenhouse (albeit adapted to the latest state of play in terms of technology), particularly when it comes to the growing of vegetables and cut flowers.

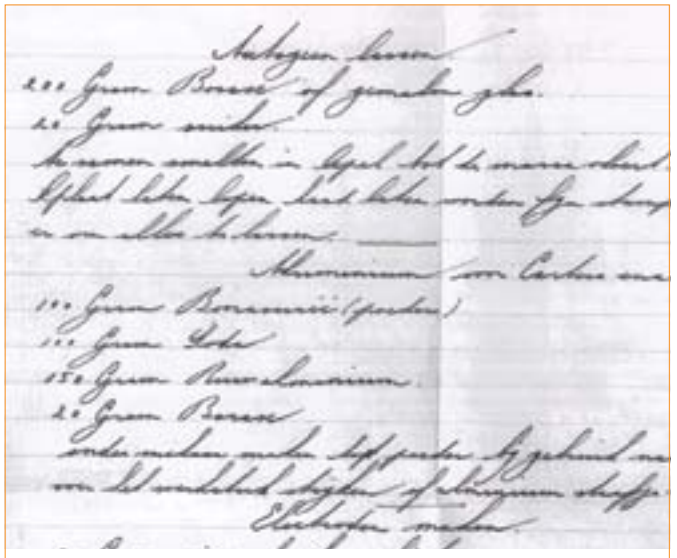
Flooding 1926 was a disastrous year for Venlo. The River Maas burst its banks and reached its highest level since 1799. Half the town was flooded, as can be seen from countless photographs dating from that time. The residents of the old poor area 't Hetje, between Jodenstraat and the river, had to be evacuated. The government sent in troops to supply people who had become isolated due to the flooding or to release them from their perilous situation. Depending on the water level, connections were 'maintained' by means of footbridges, horse and cart and boats. The gasworks and the power station were put out of action by water damage: the whole of Venlo was without power for days. Even the comparatively low-lying Venlo-Zuid was affected. The Zuidsingel was one big expanse of water. There was over half a metre of water in Handerie's home and forge. Handerie and his wife (as well as the four children they now had) were forced to move up to the top floor. Work in the forge came to a standstill, and nothing could be produced for ten days. The damage was not insignificant, and it later turned out that neither the authorities nor the insurance company would pay compensation. The only concession that Handerie and hundreds of his fellow victims finally obtained was a donation from the local flooding committee, who had organized a collection by handing the hat round among private individuals.[12]

[12] The Zuidsingel under water (1926).

1.4 Crisis

[13] Good behaviour was rewarded!

A few years after the flooding, Venlo found itself under dark skies once more. The worldwide crisis that ensued after the stock market crash in 1929 was particularly acute in the Dutch economy, which was heavily oriented towards international trade. In Noord-Limburg the ironworks, foundries and machine factories were faced with the toughest choices. Even in other economic sectors prices - which were not all that high to start with - were put under further pressure. In a few factories production had to be curtailed out of sheer necessity. In other locations salaries were reduced. However, whatever measures were applied, these efforts were of little use. As a matter of fact, the situation continued to deteriorate.
Here and there workers were turfed out, even from the Pope factory, which was renowned for its robust status.
Neither was the situation rosy in the market gardening sector that was so crucial to Handerie. Nevertheless, Handerie managed to keep his business going without redundancies by seizing upon the scant opportunities that continued to present themselves during these difficult times and exploring uncharted territory as well. Handerie's forge made virtually anything for which there was a need, from bicycle racks to full steel shopfronts (a new phenomenon in the world of construction) and steel windows and doors.
Handerie was more than capable when it came to managing his affairs. He was even able to put some money aside, which he used to buy a plot of land on Tegelseweg that he later sold on for a sizeable profit. Handerie's staff were paid well. According to Pierre Heemskerk and Jeu de Swart, both of whom were already working for Handerie prior to the Second World War, the daily wage was even a fair bit higher than the competitors were paying.



Handerie's 'recipe book' *- Was he afraid that the old tradition of blacksmithing (welding, etc.) would end up being lost? That could well be the case. The fact is that in the 1930s Handerie compiled a handwritten 'recipe book' in which he noted down exactly what ingredients were required and in what quantities for oxy-fuel welding and scores of other techniques related to blacksmithing. Parts of Handerie's recipe book remain extant.*

[13]


A. H. KUSTERS
VENLO

[14]

[14] The old building, years after Kusters moved premises. The dilapidated 'H. Kusters' shed was the first to be built, in 1911.

Tobacco stash *- Handerie always had a stash of chewing tobacco in a little box in the turner's lathe, where he kept his chisels. One day 'Jeu Bil' decided to play a dirty trick on him. Behind the sheds were piles of rabbit pellets. Jeu prepared a small roll from a couple of handfuls of pellets, and switched it with the chewing tobacco. When Handerie popped some tobacco in his mouth next day all hell broke loose.*

[15] Group portrait taken in 1929 during the graduation ceremony for the Ambachtsschool (Technical School). Handerie is seated ceremoniously in the middle of the first row.

Prestige The 'village blacksmith' Handerie Kusters was regarded by his colleagues in the town as an exceptional craftsman. A craftsman who was also possessed of a well-developed commercial instinct. And so there is nothing peculiar about the fact that Handerie was elected Chairman of the Venlo division of the R.K. Bond van Smedenpatroons (union of forge owners) at the start of the 1920s. In this capacity he became closely involved in the Ambachtsschool (Technical School) on Tegelseweg, where half of the students were following a practical farriery course. In 1929, the Limburgsche Illustratie (a local Sunday newspaper) published a group photo, taken at the graduation ceremony for thirteen farriers from the Ambachtsschool. As Chairman of the union/co-examiner, Handerie is sitting in what for him is rather unusual Sunday clothing in the centre of the first row. He is flanked by the Director of the school and other local dignitaries. One of those graduating was Jo van Tulder (standing, holding a horseshoe), who went on to be a highly valued force in Handerie's forge for many years.

Strongmen Handerie bought the steel he needed from the companies Van de Loo on Sloterbeekstraat and Geurts-Janssen on Havenstraat. Suppliers delivered large orders by lorry, and smaller quantities had to be picked up by Handerie's staff themselves using a handcart.
For the purposes of lifting and shifting the iron bars, Handerie employed strongmen. One of these was Jeu Hendriks, called 'Jeu Bil' by his cronies. Jeu liked a drink, and not just during his free time. The blue thermos flask he religiously brought to work each morning contained not coffee but *joech* (young or matured jenever).


[15]

[16]

[16] One of the first advertisements (1932).

[17] The nigh on full 'crew' from 1939.

It was said of Jeu that he was as strong as a crane. He needed to be. A length of iron was six metres long and weighed a good couple of hundred kilos. Two men would have to carry a bar like this on their shoulders. Handerie's musclemen did tend to pace themselves. though they often worked alone when the boss was looking in their direction, wagging tongues would claim.
Handerie was a 'rough diamond' sort. He nearly always acted like a normal worker. The only thing that distinguished him from his staff was that he wore a short, worn-out jacket instead of overalls. Handerie spoke in broad dialect and had 'countrified' habits. Thus he was a fan of chewing tobacco, and he had a tendency to take a pee in the middle of the workshop when he was desperate. What's more, he was a real spitfire. He not only set high requirements of himself but also of others. And if he thought someone hadn't done their work well enough, he would chide them in front of the whole team. And in doing so he was far from always being in the right.

Better side Nevertheless, Handerie did have another, more refined side as well. He had genuine compassion for his people. He banned some from smoking because he thought that it was bad for their health. It is not without reason, then, that Handerie was called 'father' by his staff.
He was also a father to his customers. When they paid a visit to the forge, they were always invited to pull up a seat next to *mooder* (mother) in the kitchen for lunch (his business and his home overlapped seamlessly). It was rarely the case that there were no guests at the table.

52 hours Incidentally, Handerie's wife Gertruda Mulders didn't just take care of the 'company catering'. She also handed out the pay packets on Saturdays. Working weeks of 52 hours and more were the norm in the forge. Furthermore, overtime was common, though it was paid at Kusters. In fact, the staff only had time off on Saturday afternoons (after 1 pm), Sundays, religious holidays and during carnival - two afternoons off during Venlo's carnival and one afternoon off during Blerick's carnival. "I was never bothered about the fact that I had to do so many hours", says Jeu de Swart, playing down the situation. "Particularly since 'father' himself was the last to cut corners."

[17]

1.5 War

[18] Wiel was hit with a hefty fine for his work for the Dutch resistance.

From the mid 1930s the Dutch economy started to recover. Handerie's forge was operating at full speed. But not for very long. Like a thief in the night the German army crossed the border on 10 May 1940. Barely five days later the matter had been settled: the Netherlands surrendered.

Relatively little changed for the average Dutch person. Life went on as usual. This was also the case for Handerie's forge. The occupying force didn't seem to be all that bad. However, Handerie's youngest son Wiel thought differently from the outset. He was involved in the resistance movement from early on, as is evident from a letter of 10 February 1941. The Commander of the Sicherheitspolizei (German Security Police) imposed a fine of fl. 500 on Wiel (or his father) for cutting electricity cables belonging to the Wehrmacht in Heerlen, where Wiel was studying at technical college at the time.
In 1942 the Germans 'borrowed' Handerie's best welders to do up the Maasbrug (bridge over the River Maas). Pierre Heemskerk was one of the 'chosen ones'. When the bridge was ready after four weeks, to the great anger of Handerie Pierre was posted to De Globe ironworks in Tegelen in order to work for the German war industry.

A few months later the Germans tightened things up even more. It was a case of one restrictive measure after another. Jeu de Swart was enlisted in the Nederlandsche Arbeidsdienst (Dutch Labour Service) in 1943. He was sent to Germany to do forced labour and spent nigh on two years working at a forge in Boisheim under the smoke of Duisburg.
Appliances and consumables became ever more scarce and in the end were rationed.

Nevertheless, the Kusters family didn't have it tough. When Handerie's eldest son Harrie (Sr.) married Lucie Driessen from Blerick on 22 February 1944, the menu read: *Pastries, Soup, Asparagus with Eggs and Butter Sauce, Potatoes, Peas and Carrots, Sprouts, Roast Beef, Rabbit with Apple Sauce, Pudding with Biscuits, Fruit, Coffee and Cake*. A variety of wines were served to accompany the dinner.

Increasingly dangerous Meanwhile it was getting more and more dangerous in Venlo. There were nine civilian casualties during a bombardment in April 1944. This was merely a forerunner of the misery that would follow. On 6 June 1944 (D-Day) the Allies landed in Normandy. The front subsequently made great strides in approaching the Netherlands. English and American planes bombarded the German Ruhrgebiet virtually on a daily basis and could be seen and heard clearly in the skies above Venlo. Venlo itself became a target too. On 24 August 1944 the first projectiles exploded in the vicinity of the forge. At that point the damage was (as yet) light - the insurance company only had to pay out fl. 255. After this, the events followed in quick succession. On 'Dolle Dinsdag' ('Mad Tuesday'), 5 September 1944, the Germans had to relinquish the military airfield at the Groote Heide.
On 14 September the Germans announced that all male residents of Venlo between 14 and 60 years of age would have to report in Blerick and build defensive works (sconces) on the Groote Heide; and a few days later the same went for women from 16 to 45 years.

[18]

National socialist hoodwinked *- Handerie had a member of the Nationaal Socialistische Beweging (Dutch national socialist movement, or NSB) on his team. Although the man was an excellent worker, his colleagues disapproved. They mocked the 'blackshirt' at any opportunity. Owing to the fact that there was no coat stand, the man would always hang his jacket - sporting the notorious triangular NSB pin - on a nail in the wall. One day the pin, which he was very proud of, turned out to have been daubed with orange lead tetroxide (so-called 'red lead'). The NSB member was furious and immediately reported the incident to the Ortskommandant, who telephoned Handerie at once. Fortunately the episode didn't have any consequences for the 'culprits'.*

[19] Considerable damage was caused in the immediate vicinity of the forge.

[20] Handerie's family, at that time still complete.

Substantial damage Between 18 October and 18 November, British bombers carried out thirteen attacks on Venlo's bridges over the River Maas, which the Allies deemed to be of considerable strategic importance. Pretty much all of the bombs missed their target, but cost over three hundred civilians their lives and laid waste to a large section of the old town centre.
Even the forge and Handerie's home adjacent to the forge sustained substantial damage. On Tegelseweg, Roermondsestaat and Rodestraat there were dozens dead. Handerie didn't think it sensible to tempt fate any longer. At the end of October he left with his family - on foot - for Velden, three miles to the north of Venlo, where he was welcomed by family living on Rijksweg. It was there in the cellar that his first grandson, Harrie Jnr, was born.
What the Allied war planes hadn't managed to do the Germans did

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[21] 1 March 1945. American tanks roll in from Kaldenkirchen: Venlo is free once more.

[22] Newspapers issue extra editions.

themselves in the end: on 18 November they blew up the bridges. This put an end to one of the darkest periods in the town's history. In a mere six weeks, the centre of Venlo had turned into what the Germans were apt to refer to evocatively as a *Trümerhaufen* (pile of rubble). Mid December the southern part of town was cleared by the occupying force and, like the town centre, declared a no-go area. Incidentally, this didn't stop Handerie - who wasn't afraid of anything or anybody - from occasionally jumping on his bike and cycling from Velden to Venlo to check up on his home and business.

Liberation On 3 December 1944 Blerick was liberated by the British. Venlo was now truly a town on the front line. The final three miserable months of war had arrived. On the morning of Thursday 1 March 1945, young boys came running into the town with fistfuls of cigarettes and chocolate. Still panting, they told the locals that they had gotten them from American soldiers. The moment of truth came a few hours later. The tanks of Lieutenant-Colonel George Dahlia rolled out of Germany from the direction of Kaldenkirchen. A few hours later and the last fatigued German defenders had been vanquished. Venlo was able to start celebrating, as well as to take stock of the sad situation.

The damage caused by Allied bombers and shells in particular turned out to be immense. Nigh on 500 people had perished. Of the 7420 buildings in Venlo, 831 had been destroyed, 1496 had severe damage and 3359 had light damage. “There are houses still standing there, nearly a whole street. Unfortunately it is no more than an illusion, a hoary mask; behind the façades, which still look like they are in reasonable shape, it is a mass of rubble”, wrote ex-resident Wiel van den Randen (photographer and reporter), clearly moved, in the Katholieke Illustratie (a Dutch illustrated weekly).

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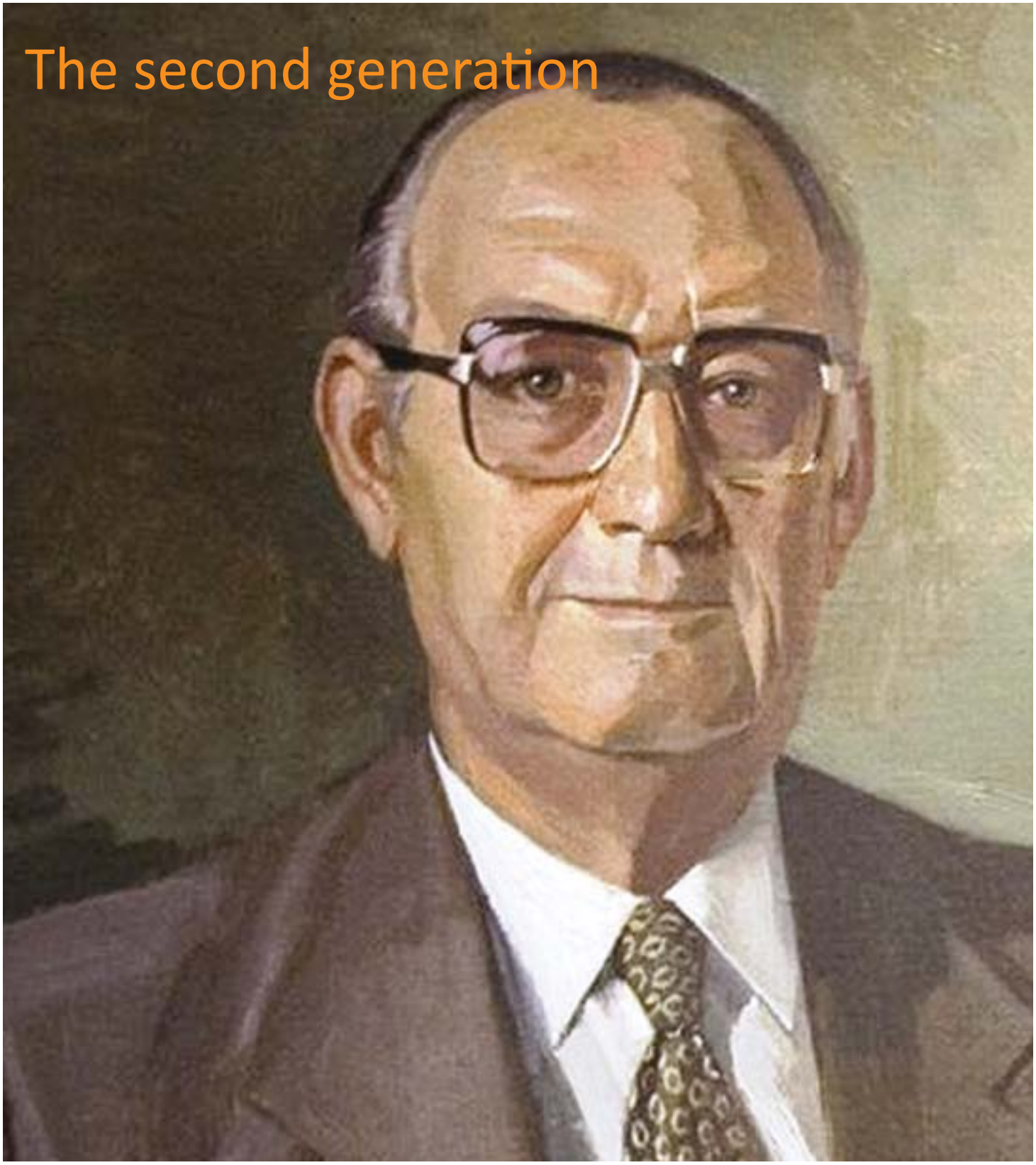
Loss Officials from the Ministerie van Openbare Werken en Wederopbouw (Ministry of Public Works and Reconstruction) assessed the damage to Handerie's forge as being to the tune of fl. 2,990 (at an insured value of fl. 7,000).
The damage to the house was estimated at fl. 1,050. Infinitely worse than this was the fact that Wiel was among the war dead. Handerie's youngest son was killed in Tegelen by shellfire on 21 December 1944. He too had (of course) been 'predestined' to work in the business.

The second generation



2 From traditional craft to industry

2.1 Changing times

[23] Fabrieksreglement (Factory Regulations) 1952: the first step towards a structured corporate policy.

[24] Kusters was a pioneer in the Veegtes. As yet Venlo's first industrial area was still characterized by empty plots containing a single farmhouse.

Once building contractor Haegens from Horst had repaired the damage to its workshop, production could be restarted at the beginning of 1946. Contrary to Handerie's wishes, the clock couldn't simply be turned back. Times were changing at the old forge. Harrie (Snr, 1915), Handerie's eldest son, had joined the business in 1932 and made his presence felt. Since 1 January 1940, father and son had had a partnership under the company name A.H. Kusters & Zoon.[13] On several occasions already, Harrie had made noise about the fact that the company could no longer develop on the Zuidsingel. At the tail end of the 1940s his opinion was corroborated once more.
Kusters had landed a sizeable order. The forge was tasked with building a hangar for the beer brewer Heineken in Heerlen. To this end, huge iron trusses were produced. The assignment could hardly be carried out in the small workshop. And so Harrie proposed relocating once again. Handerie demurred vociferously. He moaned at anyone who would listen, saying he thought it was a waste of money. However, Handerie couldn't oppose his son. The founder's time had (almost) run out. On 1 January 1950 the partnership was dissolved: Handerie retired begrudgingly, Harrie became the new, only owner, upon payment of a takeover sum of fl. 63,545.11.

Another generation Just like his father, Harrie Kusters (Snr) was an old-fashioned craftsman. He had completed his studies at the Ambachtsschool (Technical School) as well as attaining sub-certificates in the evenings, including one for 'Electric Welding of Construction Work and Steel Windows and Doors'. Son of the boss or not, he had to start at the bottom of the ladder just like everyone else.
Harrie (Snr) had inherited many of his father's traits, but he was of course from another generation. He was much more dynamic and, what's more, he wanted the business to expand and run like a factory, on a site where he had more space than in the shadow of the town centre and the railway yard. After careful consideration, Harrie decided to build new premises on the first official industrial area on the Venlo side of the River Maas: the Veegtes.
The name Veegtes means something along the lines of a heap of contaminated sand.
It was not without reason that this name was selected, because a good deal of the ground was covered with sand drifts before it was developed. The buildings consisted only of a few farmhouses, shabby emergency homes that the people referred to as De Twaalf Apostelen (The Twelve Apostles), and one small factory: Arends Schoolmeubelen, a school furniture business. In addition, the Veegtes was home to an old horse cemetery.

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Self-build Harrie spotted a plot of land on Laurens Janszoon Costerstraat, which was owned by Stoomwasserij de Maas, i.e. the well-known local figure *De roëje van Zaeye* (the red man of Zaeyen). Initially Harrie wanted to buy

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Accident *- Just prior to the move to the Veegtes one of the few work-related accidents in the history of Kusters occurred. Construction henchmen Jeu de Swart and Jan Willemsen got trapped between iron bars whilst unloading a railway wagon. The two had to be cut free by the fire brigade using cutting equipment and were taken to hospital. Jan had broken his lower leg in a number of places. Jeu's foot had been crushed and was, as he recalls soberly, "a little bit shorter than it used to be". Jeu and Jan did not sustain any permanent injuries as a result of their accident. After a couple of weeks off sick they were able to return to work.* [15]

3,000 m² of land, but later on he asked for - and got - as much as 4,500 m², at a price of fl. 1.50 per m², a fraction of the over € 200 that would have to be paid nowadays. Once he had the land, Harrie gave the go-ahead for the construction of a factory measuring 1,000 m². His motto was: do as much as you can yourself. A building contractor was enlisted to cast the floor. Harrie's own people then built the structure; the steel girders required for this were custom-made in their own workshop. Following this the contractor did the masonry and installed the glass. After around six months the job was complete and it was possible to proceed with the move.

The old workshop on the Zuidsingel was renovated and rented out. About ten years ago it was demolished to make way for luxury flats.[14]

Consecration On 16 June 1951 the official opening was held. According to good Catholic tradition, the new complex was consecrated by a priest; Father Handerie Seelen (better known as *Golden Handerie*) of their 'own' Onze Lieve Vrouwe (Church of Our Lady) parish. After the consecratory ceremony there was a party. A party in a surreal setting. After all, the factory floors were still totally barren. A few wooden benches had been put in for guests, as well as a large coal-fired heater to make things a bit cosier.

The drink flowed liberally. The entertainer Martien Berbers (stage name Martini Berberini), well-known throughout Venlo, sang merry songs, accompanying himself on the accordion, and quickly won over the audience. Cyclists passing the new factory whilst on a carnival race unintentionally added an extra festive touch to the opening.
In the weeks following the party the new factory was fitted out with modern machinery. The employees of Kusters, who were not yet used to this kind of thing, could scarcely believe their eyes. Jeu de Swart remembers that more than anything he was enthusiastic about "a machine that enabled you to punch a hole in a piece of steel at the touch of a button".

First director's car *- At the start of the 1950s Kusters got the first 'directior's car': a Hillman. The number plate of Kusters' director's car was P 1144, with the 'P' standing for Limburg. The Kusters family used the car on Sundays for family outings. Outings to Valkenburg, the German Monschau or other popular, touristy destinations, and with eight of them crammed into one car - anything was possible in those days. Not long after the first director's car came, the first lorry was purchased, from the army surplus store - a scrapped American army truck, which was lacking a floor.*

[25] Examples of decorative ironwork. Many landmark buildings in the town bore - and still bear - Kusters' signature.

Kusters' signature In the first few years at the Veegtes Kusters primarily 'did' large-scale construction work. Steel windows and doors were also produced.
Many landmark buildings in the town bore - or still bear - Kusters' signature: café-restaurant 't National on the corner of Spoorstraat and Keulsepoort (destroyed in a fire in 1971), the Onze Lieve Vrouwekerk (Church of Our Lady) on Sinselveldstraat (the cross and the cockerel), the shopfronts for heater specialist Arends on Kaldenkerkerweg, Favatex (menswear) and Van Dam (sewing machine dealer) on the Parade, V & D (department store) and 'Ex Damesmode' (womenswear) on Vleesstraat and Geerlings (department store) on Klaasstraat. Hotel de Bovenste Molen and the present café Baer de Woers on Steenstraat also bore Kusters' signature.

Reconstruction Never in Venlo was there so much built in such a relatively short space of time as there was between 1945 and 1970.[16] The builders from the neighbourhood were nowhere near to keeping up with demand. For that reason, help was enlisted from to the north of the big rivers.
After the war damage had been repaired, further building work was carried out on extensions to the town. It was predicted that the number of residents of Venlo would increase dramatically. A population of 90,000 was calculated for the year 1990.

Stories about 'Father' *- Even though he was no longer the boss, even after the move Handerie continued to visit the business on an almost daily basis. He would show up on his bike, come rain or shine, to tinker around on his own workbench. He often felt that he still had to get involved in matters. This occasionally led to crazy situations, recalls Martien Nissen, who worked at Kusters from 1955 until 2001: "At the back of the yard was the red lead sprayer. One day the spraying unit wasn't working. 'Father' asked what was up with it. When we said that we didn't know, he shook his head indignantly and started pulling at the unit. "There you go", he said a bit later. "Try switching it on now." A fraction of a second later 'Father' was covered from head to toe in red lead. My brother/colleague pulled him out of his clothes. He had to cut the trousers off. Later that day, 'Father' had to welcome a customer together with Harrie whilst wearing shorts."*

In order to provide these new residents with accommodation, a 'Development Plan for the Built-up Area' was drafted. The fundamental principle of this was that there would have to be two centres of roughly equal size on both sides of the River Maas. New, large-scale districts would have to be rapidly built in these centres, each for around five thousand inhabitants. Districts with hundreds of homes (or flats) and communal facilities like churches, shops and schools. In line with the Extension Plan, industrial companies, which until that point had been dotted here and there across the city, would be concentrated in large industrial areas, including the Veegtes, where Kusters had been one of the first to settle. In those years it seemed as though the whole of Venlo was one big construction site.

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Tops, for top quality *- Piet Tops (1903-2004) is one of the big guns from the history of Kusters. Tops was a genius with numbers. The construction drawings he produced for Kusters from 1957 onwards were almost frighteningly precise. Handerie always dismissed Tops' work as 'messing around with paper'. Harrie Snr had a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards his designer. On the one hand he realized that he would be nothing without Tops, but on the other hand he repeatedly made it clear to him that everything could be a good deal less thorough, and therefore cheaper. Despite the occasionally harsh criticism, when it came to his bosses Tops always stuck to his guns. True to his name, he was a fan of top quality. Tops worked at Kusters until the age of seventy and lived until the ripe old age of 101. Three years before he passed away, he was still driving laps round the karting track in Swalmen with a nurse, something that made the regional newspaper.*

2.2 Construction line

[26] Piet Tops, Head of Technical Drawing, produced fantastically precise drawings.

[27] Tops' first design to be implemented was for a builder's hoist in 1959: the wheeled Hercules, (400-800 kg).

Kusters, which had officially been operating under the name N.V. Constructiewerkplaats v/h A.H. Kusters en Zn. since 1957, was quick to capitalize on the boom in construction and launched a wide-ranging line of new 'building materials', such as hoists, steel struts (stays), construction masts, cement silos (for road-builder Klos in Arcen), scaffolding trestles, column clamps and fencing - all from Kusters' own factory. Because workers like Jeu Bil were becoming increasingly rare and because health and safety legislation was becoming ever tighter, Kusters developed another series of (wheeled) construction lifts. Head of Technical Drawing Piet Tops designed it, in all shapes and sizes. After an initial two-year research period, Tops launched the first wheeled Hercules (lifting capacity 400-800 kg) in 1959. The construction lift met with great acclaim. It soon came to be referred to in the industry as 'the Mercedes of construction lifts'. Following the Hercules came the Baby Construction Lift with a lifting capacity of 400 kg, the Hercules Construction Lift Jnr (600 kg), the Hercules Snr (1,000 kg) and the Hercules Construction Crane with swivelling arm. Kusters did not supply his building materials to private individuals, but only to building contractors, as well as through the wholesale businesses Hebo in Utrecht and Meerman in Vlaardingen. Kusters did not have much competition in the world of construction. Apart from Hek in Oirschot, Kusters was the only manufacturer of construction lifts in the Netherlands. The Venlo-based company was faring well as a result.

Modernization The Kusters factory grew rapidly. As early as 1957 two extra factory floors were added and there were even more to come. However, the operational management could not keep pace

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[28] Cement silos for road builder Klos in Arcen.

[29] The catch-up drive that had been initiated by Van Haren (photo) proved successful.

[30] The Hercules steel strut which, according to its own advertisers, was “the most practical invention in the construction world!” Patent for the steel strut. One of the first patents taken out by Kusters.

with this rapid expansion. It could even be called downright old-fashioned. Everything at Kusters was geared towards hard work and earning as much money as possible. Scant attention was paid to the internal organization.

It wasn't until 1955 that a full-time bookkeeper was taken on. This bookkeeper, Jos van Haren, went on to produce a schematic overview of the company's structure (organogram) on his own initiative. The organogram showed at a glance who was the boss of whom and what department fell under what group. In the end, the organization was arranged according to this organogram, but it wasn't until 1960 that this was actioned. There then came a bona fide office, with an Odhner Bookkeeping Machine, which enabled wages to be processed in one hour a week and made card and archive systems possible. In a booklet of organizational tips published by office designer Ahrend in 1963, the revamped Kusters is cited as an example for the Dutch business world.

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Blessing in disguise *- At the start of the 1960s Vick Lankes, for decades a full-time lorry driver for Kusters, criss-crossed the country on a daily basis delivering builder's hoists. The road network was not what it is today. When Vick drove onto the new A12, one of the first motorways in the Netherlands, he couldn't resist the temptation to drive flat out. While he was having a nice chat with the fitter who was accompanying him, he saw his lorry being ‘overtaken’ by a … wheel. Vick shouted: “Somebody's lost that”. Because he wasn't entirely certain, he pulled up on the hard shoulder. The wheel turned out to have come from the builder's hoist behind his lorry. A blessing in disguise.*

[31] The Kusters factory grew rapidly. As early as 1957 two extra factory floors were added and there were even more to come.


KUSTERS
VOLAUTOMATISCHE LUCHTVERHITTERS

3 The first adventure abroad

3.1 Construkta

[32] Venlo Warenhuis

Kusters didn't just produce building materials; it also continued to make greenhouses. In a brochure from just after the Second World War, two types are praised: the low *'Wanderkasten'* (greenhouses from Ariëns in Straelen, Germany, that could be dismantled), for which Kusters had import rights for the Netherlands, and the Venlo 'crisis greenhouses', a revamped version of the old, tried-and-trusted Venlo Warenhuis.

Germany Nonetheless, the competition was now hotting up, so much so that it was no longer lucrative for Kusters to continue producing the greenhouses themselves. For that reason, Kusters decided to buy them in as a do-it-yourself kit from specialist firms. Kusters did continue to put up the greenhouses himself. The foreman of the assembly workers was the old blacksmith Jo van Tulder.

Kusters still continued to predominantly supply market gardeners in Venlo's agricultural neighbourhoods of 't Ven and Boekend, but he realized that there was more money to be made on the other side of the border. With the aid of countless Marshall Plan dollars from the United States, (West) Germany was rapidly recovering from the immense damage inflicted by the war. After years of deep misery, prosperity gradually began to rear its head once more. Once again people had a bit more money, not only for life's essentials but also for things that were a nice-to-have rather than a need-to-have. Major farmsteads capitalized on this by starting to cultivate flowers as well as vegetables: carnations, freesias and, later on, roses too. In particular, the Saarland - the region round Salzgitter (past Hanover) - and the area around Heinsberg developed to become important flower-growing centres.

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'People's assessment' *- The Kusters firm brought a mobile greenhouse to market that satisfied all set requirements. The structure is sound, the greenhouse is easy to dismantle, is absolutely airtight and has the greatest possible level of light ingression. […] The mobile greenhouse probably has its origins in the growing of vegetables, but will equally be used for the cultivation of flowers and decorative plants, because it is being sold at very reasonable prices. (Loosely translated from the German industry publications.)*

[33] Harrie (left) visiting Borschemich, Germany.

[34] "The new construction offers the grower unprecedented benefits." The 'greenhouse brochure', which was issued shortly after the move to the Veegtes. A German version too was published soon after.

The German market was very tricky at that time. For instance, the Germans were adamant that they wanted to do business with fellow Germans. Consequently, Harrie Kusters set up a German subsidiary on Hauptstrasse in Borschemich (a borough of Erkelenz in North Rhine-Westphalia) in 1955: Construkta Stahlbau GmbH. Construkta started selling do-it-yourself kits for Kusters from world market leaders Voskamp and Vrijland in 's Gravenzande and Kubo in Monster. Kusters himself supplied the teams with assembly workers (5-20 men). A team such as this took on work by the square metre. Assembling Kusters' greenhouses went as follows... First a concrete foundation was poured. The standards were positioned in this foundation. The props would then be fitted on these standards. Building a greenhouse did sometimes take a fortnight.

In such cases, the workers would stay in a local bed & breakfast or hotel. Once the builders were done, the glaziers would come - likewise from Holland - to put the finishing touches to the greenhouse.

Sieben & Kusters In order to promote the sale of greenhouses in West Germany, Kusters teamed up with local flower grower Sieben in Borschemich to erect a prestigious trial greenhouse which, with an area of 10,000 m^2, was immediately the largest greenhouse in the federal state. Kusters built the greenhouse and supplied the heating equipment. Sieben took care of the operational management. The firm Sieben & Kusters was dissolved at the start of the 1960s following a serious commercial dispute. This didn't have any effect on the trade in greenhouses.

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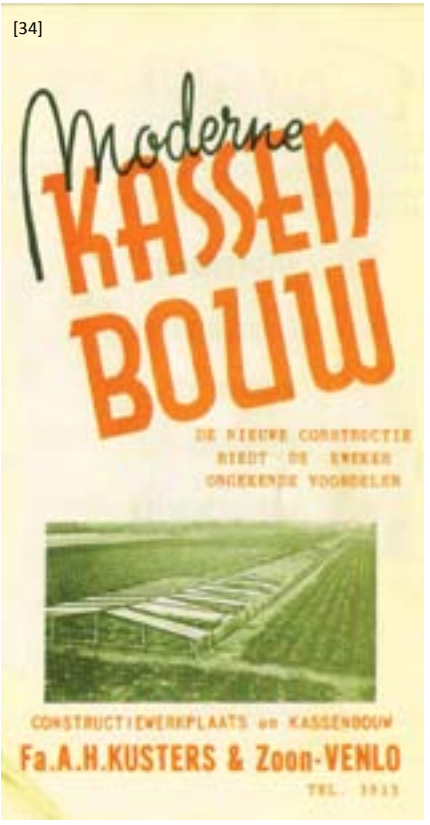

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3.2 Gold mine

[35] Market gardening letterhead.

[36] The heating was swiftly delivered.

[37] Company van of German subsidiary Construkta Stahlbau GmbH..

The Saarland in particular proved to be a gold mine for Construkta. Following a referendum on 1 January 1957 the region, which had been the subject of a dispute between France and Germany for decades, had become a definitive part of Germany. The federal government was doing its utmost to put the Saarland back on the map. Millions of Deutschmarks were pumped into the new federal estate's economy. Through the Landwirtschaftskammer, a kind of professional body for the agricultural sector, subsidies were issued for the building of steel-frame greenhouses for market gardening. Kusters made the most of this.

'Learned a lot' Theo Blanken from Doveren near Hückelhoven in Germany, who was a representative of Construkta for around a decade from the mid 1950s, brought in order after order. Orders for greenhouses measuring from 500 to 2,500 m^2, and totalling in excess of one million DM.
Blanken stayed in the Saarland for weeks. During the day he prepared his business dealings, and then in the evening he would negotiate with interested farmers. If necessary, Harrie Kusters Snr would come over from Venlo to give him a hand. Blanken, who is now nearly 90 years old but still in excellent shape, is full of praise for his former employer: "I learned a lot from Mr Kusters", he says with admiration. "Being from the west of the Netherlands, Mr Kusters negotiated that little bit harder than we were used to."
Construkta, which would go on to construct swimming pools as well (more on this in section 4.4), was in existence until the mid 1970s. Harrie Kusters ceased this just prior to the energy crisis manifesting itself, thus signalling the end of the Venlo-based company's first great adventure abroad.

***Good Friday** - Kusters continued to pay in cash for quite some time. The money was collected from the bank on Friday mornings. This always ran smoothly. Except for one time... Though a pious Catholic, the 'collecting clerk' hadn't considered that it was Good Friday; he got to the bank the company used on Nieuwstraat only to find it was shut. Harrie Kusters was furious. Many of his staff were short of money and had to settle their weekly account with the shopkeepers. Harrie felt that he couldn't leave them in the lurch, so he called the Director of the bank on his home number and managed to get him to come out specially for him.*


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4 Air heaters and season extenders

4.1 Golden inspiration

[38] Medaille d'Argent which Kusters was awarded in 1962 at the International Inventors' Trade Show in Brussels.

[39/40] The production of large steam-powered boilers took up a great deal of space.

Things were the way they had always been at Kusters. One activity would lead nigh on automatically to the next. This was primarily down to the unrelenting energy of the director. The economic situation started to decline gradually. There was less and less construction work. Harrie Kusters racked his brains for new activities he might engage in to keep his employees (who now numbered more than fifty) working. Harrie's motto was "foresight is the essence of leadership". He followed new developments closely.

It drove the people around him crazy. Hardly a week went by without some invention or other seething away in the boss's brain. His ideas were nearly always original. Sometimes they didn't turn out to be practicable; sometimes they proved to be inspired. Without doubt the fully automatic air heater that he developed at the end of the 1950s belonged to the latter category.

Year-round growing Harrie Kusters Snr realized that growing all year and harvesting several times would be something of great interest to market gardeners. Year-round growing is only possible where greenhouses are properly heated. If greenhouses were heated at all in those days, then it was done with the aid of fairly primitive coal-fired heaters. These heaters had the disadvantage of having to be stoked at night too. What's more, they only gave off heat in the immediate environment of the 'source'. The air heaters that Harrie Kusters had devised did not suffer these disadvantages. They were fully automatic and blew the hot air to all parts of a space.

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Rave reviews Responses from professionals were extraordinarily full of praise. In 1962, Kusters even won the Medaille d'Argent (Silver Medal) at the International Inventors' Trade Show in Brussels with his air heater. Four years later the authoritative Instituut voor Tuinbouwtechniek (Institute for Market Gardening Technology, or ITT) in Wageningen tested the K125 (a type with a capacity of 125,000 kcal. The machine was awarded 'good' on all components. Obviously it was wonderful to receive such praise, but much more importantly the market turned out to be interested. In particular, greenhouse market gardeners in the Westland region and surrounding area came looking for Kusters.
Interest was so considerable that Kusters was able to start producing increasingly large numbers and more and more types. In total many tens of thousands of air heaters were sold. Units that

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[41] Kusters was advertising fervently as early as the 1960s.

varied in capacity from 9,000 to 300,000 kcal. In order to be able to build the large steam-powered boilers, the factory floors had to be extended considerably and the production process had to be professionalized.
Kusters was now going all out in terms of marketing too. Adverts abounded in national and foreign newspapers. Kusters had great-looking stands at trade shows, such as the Wehate in Naaldwijk, the Jaarbeurs van het Oosten in Zutphen and the 'Modern bouwen' ('Modern Construction') show in the Eurohal in Valkenburg. At this last trade show in 1962, Kusters made available a number of high-capacity air heaters free of charge to get the foyer to the desired temperature. In return for this kind gesture, Kusters was thanked in the trade show catalogue with a call to visitors to make sure they didn't miss Kusters' stand, stand 81.

Record turnover The air heaters were primarily supplied to customers through middlemen. The most important intermediary was Handelsfirma Hebo in Utrecht, which had also sold construction lifts from Kusters in the past. Hebo had a couple of extremely big customers, including building contractors from Hoog-Catherijne and De Meern. In 1964 Hebo sold in excess of one million guilders' worth of Kusters' products. Exceeding the historical turnover barrier was something both directorates celebrated with a dinner at the renowned restaurant Auberge De Grote Waaij in Well.
In 1965 Harrie Kusters himself landed a big fish: he sold 150 fully automatic air heaters to the Ministry of Defence for the purposes of heating large army tents. In order to guarantee that the heated air was free of bacteria and had the right humidity level, the heaters were supplied with air filtration units.

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Vostermans *- The success of a great many companies in the Venlo region is partly down to Kusters, even including the innovative Vostermans Companies in Blerick (current turnover 42 million Euros, exporting to 100 countries, 264 staff). Toon Vostermans, father of the current Director, tendered his resignation in 1952 and - with starting capital of fl. 32.50 - set up his own model-making company and not long after a small machine factory and foundry in the shed behind his house. Toon took on everything he could to keep the work coming in - from staircases to wooden toys, he made it all. When Harrie Kusters Snr asked him to start producing fans for his air heaters, Toon threw himself headlong at this challenge too. The fan became Vostermans' primary (and highly successful) activity.*

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[42] Kusters was present at a great many trade shows.

[43] Thanks to the mobile air heaters supplied by Kusters, it was possible to continue working in the building trade during the winter.

Other applications Kusters' air heaters proved to be ideal for not only greenhouses and army tents but also for garages, hangars, industrial warehouses and drying sheds. In Amsterdam Kusters supplied the heating for the immense St. Nicolaaskerk (the 'Cathedral on the River IJ') as well as the Nieuwe Kerk. Other major customers in those days included Johnson Wax (cleaning products) in Utrecht, Nutricia Voedingsmiddelen (foodstuffs) in Zoetermeer and the PNEM power station in Buggenum. The air heaters were installed in situ by Kusters employees, which often entailed several days' work. The last significant buyer was the construction industry, which used the mobile air heaters supplied by Kusters to be able to continue working in the winter period as well.

4.2 Respectable and reliable

In no time at all, stationary and mobile air heaters, steam-powered boilers (for concrete factories, dairy factories and suchlike) and other derivative machines went on to become Kusters' core business. Kusters was doing well out of all this, in part due to the fact that industrial competition was thin on the ground.
Initially only two types of air heater (the K125 and K250) were offered. Their capacity was huge, but their design was not sophisticated. In fact, the only technology they contained was an on and off switch. The temperature of the boilers couldn't be controlled, but the users did not perceive this to be a problem. After all, in those days energy was still dirt cheap. If it was too cold in a space, then additional heating was installed; if it was too warm, then they just opened the door for a while.

Still operational Kusters' machines were still being made of ultra-reliable 3mm-thick steel sheeting (now 0.5 mm-thick stainless steel, which is even stronger), which was supplied by Venlo-based firm Geurts-Janssen. A large Geurts-Janssen trailer would turn up at Kusters' gate virtually on a daily basis. Ready-made boilers were delivered to the customer by Kusters themselves using a lorry with mounted crane.
Kusters air heaters stood out because of their respectability and reliability. Some boilers from those early days are still 'operational' today, more than half a century after being supplied.

Seasonal products Air heaters were typical seasonal products. They had to be manufactured in the summer for sale in the winter. If subsequently the winter was disappointingly mild, stocks of air heaters would accumulate in the company's warehouses.
In order to spread the risk, Harrie Kusters Snr started selling other kinds of equipment, which he bought in from elsewhere. Equipment such as steam cleaners (Wedco) and high-pressure cleaners (Cleanomat), which were procured through the European importer, Wilms in Reydt.

Garages in particular showed an initial interest in the high-pressure jet sprayer, which at that time was quite a new concept in Europe. Cars coming out of the factory were fitted with a protective wax layer, which was difficult to remove by hand. With a high-pressure jet sprayer and hot water the job was fairly easy. The Cleanomats had four programmes: wash, rinse, dry and degrease. Detergents and cleaning agents from the same brand were supplied.
Following the garages, car importers, oil companies, transport firms, camping sites, cleaning companies, public works departments, abattoirs and butchers registered their interest in the high-pressure jet sprayers.

Thank you Kusters! - February 1961. It's freezing cold. In the South Holland region of Westland there is a great deal of excitement in the air. Not only because people can get plenty of ice skating in, but also in particular because Queen Juliana is coming to visit. In the local auction hall 500 children will be staging a specially written play for Her Majesty. However, the organization has no idea as to how they are going to get the >40,000 m^2 complex up to an acceptable temperature.
Then someone mentions the name “Kusters”. They call the Venlo-based company and a couple of hours later Kusters delivers nine cylindrical automatic air heaters complete with operators. The huge heaters burn throughout the night and all the next morning. And… the miracle occurs: it gets nice and warm in the halls. Kusters later receives a long thank-you letter from the burgomaster and aldermen of Westland.

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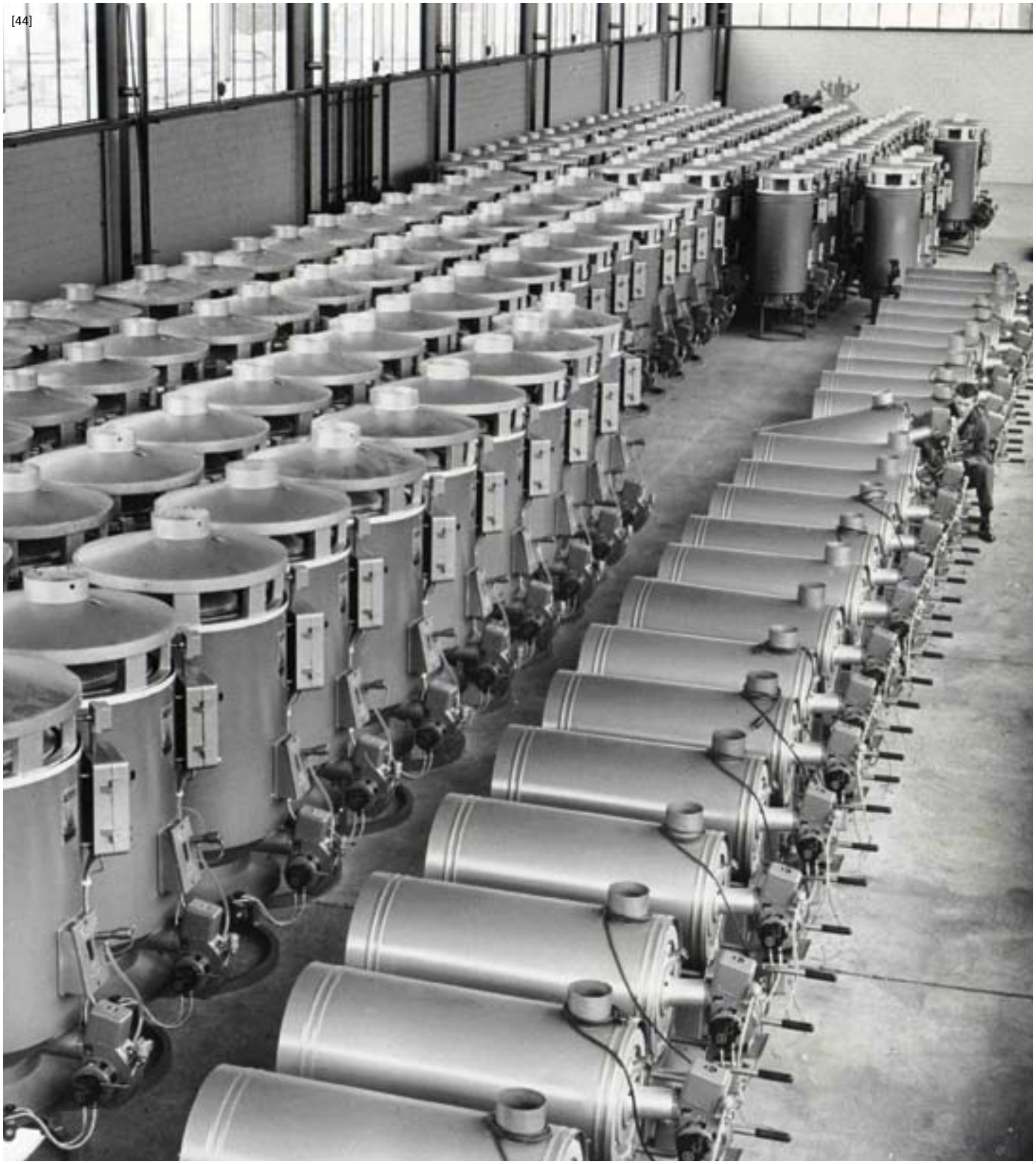

[44] If a winter was disappointingly mild, stocks of air heaters would accumulate in the company's warehouses.

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4.3 Subsidiaries

[45] The boilerhouse was also supplied.

[46] Promotional mail shots…

[47] Eurosport showpiece.

Harrie Kusters continued to develop more and more side activities and subsumed these to separate subsidiaries. The subsidiary 'Kadoline', for example, produced shampoo and decalcifier for high-pressure cleaners. Another subsidiary, 'Luciet', named after Harrie Snr's wife Lucie, traded in winterproof industrial clothing. And on top of all this, Harrie had set up his own investment company in real estate: Kusters Beheer. This owned the requisite properties, particularly in the centre of Venlo and on the Veegtes industrial area, including the aforementioned City Theater in Venlo's most exclusive shopping street, Vleesstraat.

4.4 Swimming pools

In addition, Harrie continued to launch new products produced in his own workshop from time to time. In the mid 1960s he came up with something completely different. He started building… *swimming pools*.
Harrie Snr had read in regional newspaper Dagblad voor Noord-Limburg that the government wanted all local authorities to start offering swimming for schools. There were rich pickings to be had, as virtually none of the boroughs had a suitable pool for swimming lessons. This gave Harrie Snr the idea of starting to produce factory-made (prefab) swimming pools. Swimming pools that could be built relatively cheaply, that were efficient in terms of usage and that required
little maintenance.
The pool that Harrie Snr had in mind had to be cast out of one block, so that it wouldn't spring a leak.

[46]

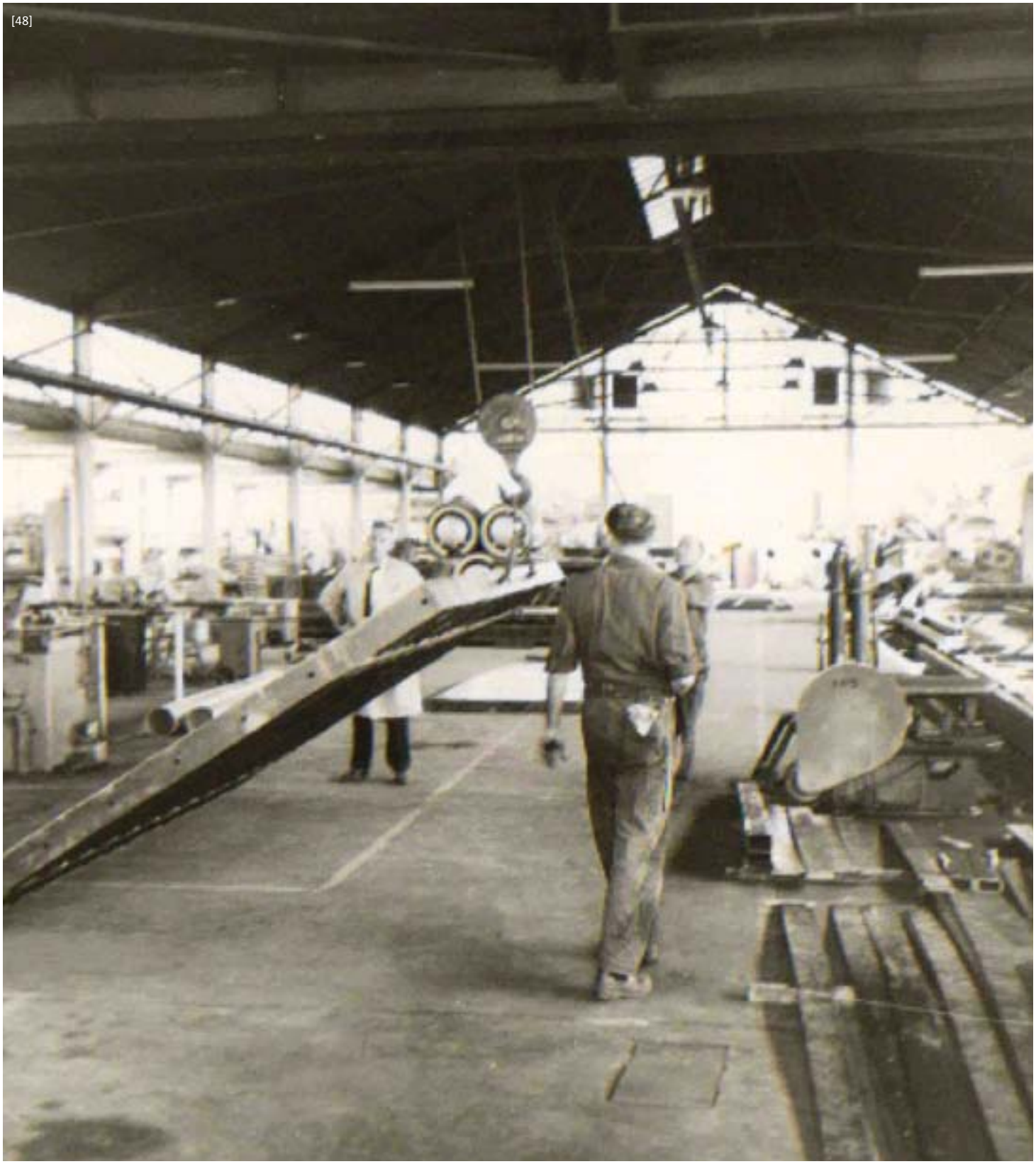
Eurosport BV Because the buyers thought it strange that a *construction* firm was selling a fully-fitted indoor swimming pool, Harrie Kusters subsumed his swimming pool activities to two separate subsidiaries: one new company, Eurosport BV in Venlo (for the Netherlands), and one existing company,

[47]

Construkta (Construkta Europa Hallenbad - Fertigbau) in Borschemich (for the rest of Europe). The subsidiaries' target was to install four swimming pools a year. Eurosport was given a beautiful office on Van Leeuwenhoekstraat, round the corner from the head office of Kusters, and quickly had around ten employees, including an architect, a salesman, a foreman, construction workers and architectural draughtsmen.
Even Geert Kusters, fourth son of Harrie Snr, who had just graduated from business school, joined the team. Geert immediately set to work professionally. For the first time in the history of Kusters he had a feasibility study (for prefab swimming pools) carried out. When the results of this were positive, he started to bombard the market with promotional mail shots.

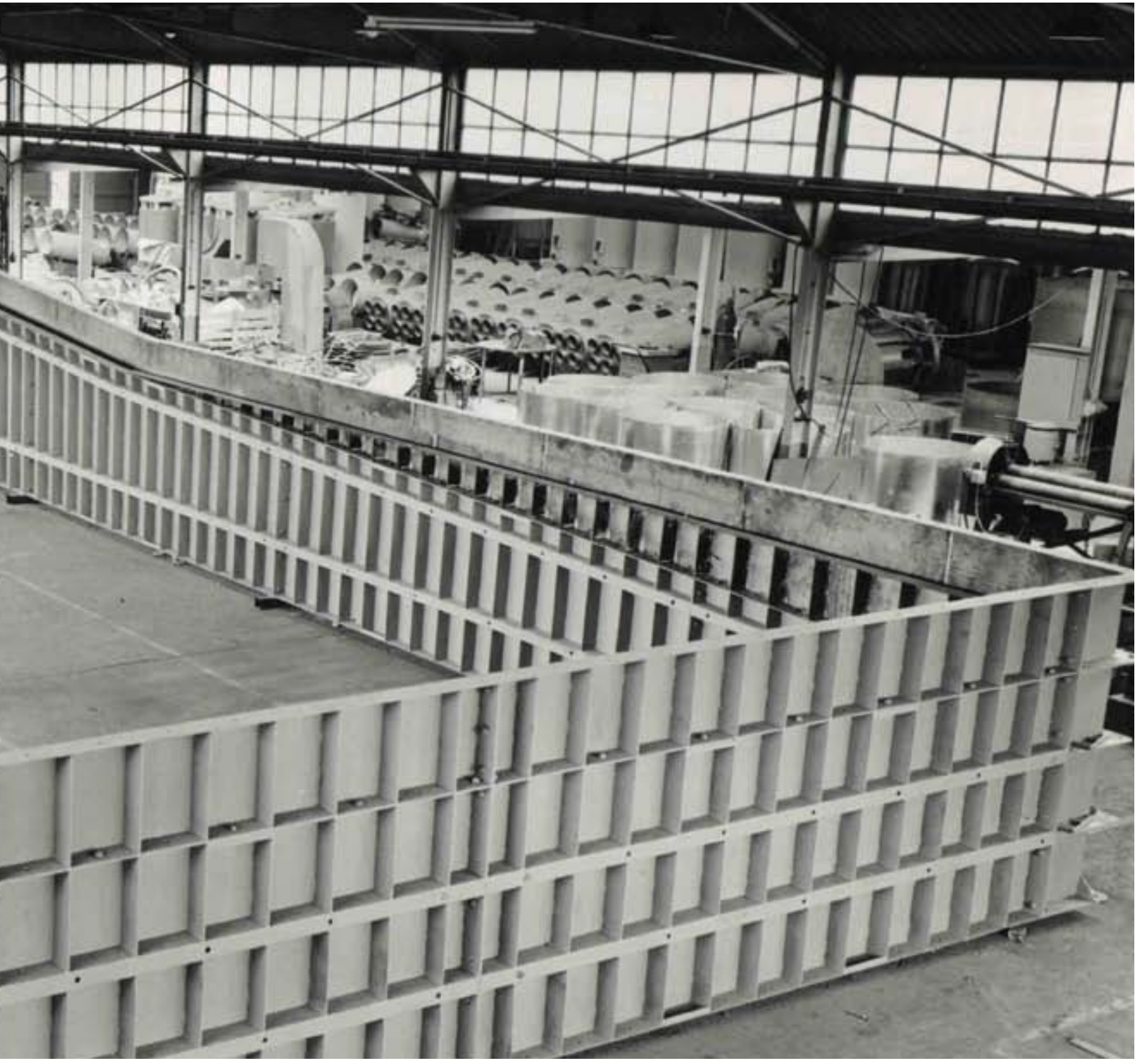
Total concept The concept that Eurosport and Construkta offered was a total concept. The Kusters subsidiaries supplied everything, right down to the last coat hook, including, of course, fully automatic 75,000-400,000 kcal warm water and steam units (Kusters' speciality after all) for the purposes of heating the pool water, the showers and the washbasins.
Kusters had thought of everything. The routing of the baths was chosen in such a way that a minimum number of employees would suffice. In order to keep noise to a minimum, noise-dampening material was used as much as possible. Indeed, there was even a very tight (standard) building schedule in place.

Formwork Before the first client came forward, Harrie Kusters had some huge steel formwork built in his factory in the Veegtes. After all, who would buy a complete swimming pool if you have nothing to show? As an entrepreneur you have to dare to take risks, he thought. Kusters' steel framework was something entirely new; formwork was normally made of wood. When building a swimming pool. the formwork would be dismantled and custom-built on-site again. Concrete would then be poured into the formwork, after which the 'mould' would be removed. The formwork cost nearly 100,000 guilders. Friend and foe alike declared Harrie Kusters mad... until the first assignment came in.



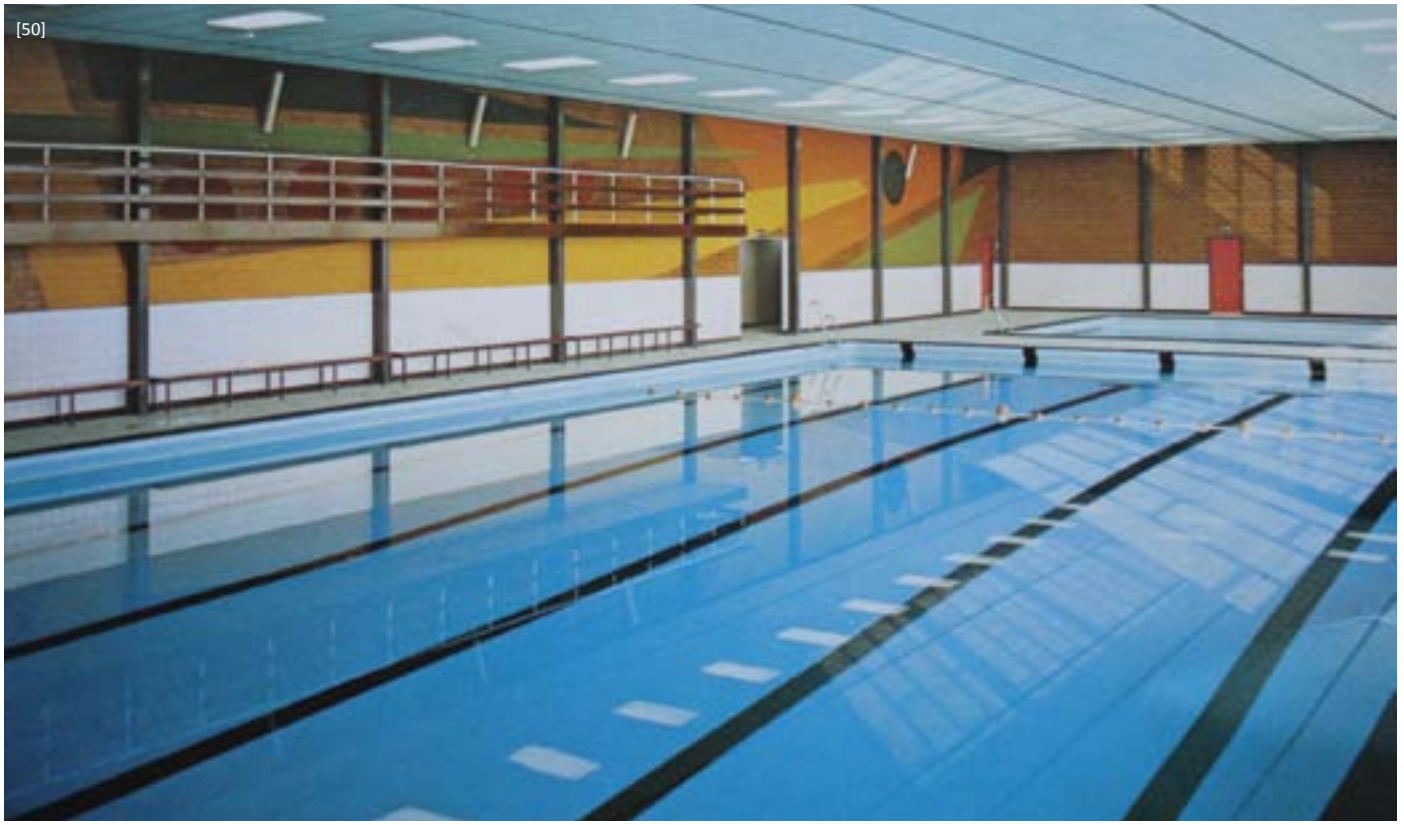
[48] The formwork in the making.

[49] The formwork, ready to be dismantled and to be used for the construction of a (prefab) swimming pool.



[50] The first order for Eurosport BV: an indoor pool for swimming lessons in Panningen.

Panningen Helden borough council commissioned Kusters to build an indoor swimming pool for swimming lessons on Wilhelminastraat in Panningen, for which they would pay nigh on one million guilders. On 28 August 1969 the pool was officially opened. It was the first swimming pool in the province with a moveable floor - yet another of Kusters' inventions - which allowed children to progress more gradually from shallow to deep water. What's more, it was the first pool in which swimming lessons were given (for young children aged three to five). In 1970 Kusters added another, outdoor pool to the complex for fl. 360,000.[17]
More assignments followed 'Panningen'. For Eurosport there were projects in Heythuysen and Dokkum, and for Construkta Europa Hallenbad - Fertigbau there were projects in Aalten, Stadtlohn and Schoppingen; Aalten even had a swimming pool built with adjoining sports hall and restaurant. Talks were held with numerous other interested officials from Dutch and German local authorities. Kusters Snr had them come to Venlo for demonstrations and saw to it that they were given a hospitable welcome. For Dudweiler (Saarland) a huge sports complex was designed with a variety of pools, a sauna, bowling alley and tennis courts, a sports hall, an underground car park and a restaurant with a bar. In the end Kusters didn't manage to seal the deal, which went instead to a (genuine) German firm. After a while the activities of Eurosport and Construkta Europa Hallenbad - Fertigbau were left ticking over. This was in part because Harrie Snr was taking things a little easier after the death of his wife in 1973, which hit him hard, but even more so because of the rising price of oil (and gas). Harrie Kusters realized early on that there was not much of a future in the swimming pool activities and sold his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4.5 Commercial firm

[51-55] The range expands ever further: air conditioners, infrared beamers, hot air cannon, steam units and high-pressure cleaners.

subsidiaries to a large construction firm for a good price. Koops in Tjuchem (Groningen) became the new owner. Koops initially held on to the Eurosport office in Venlo, but did appoint a new director. Geert Kusters was thanked for his services rendered on 1 July 1975, left the company, walked round the corner... and, as though there were nothing amiss, immediately started working for the parent company. Eurosport later relocated to Harderwijk. The company would not last much longer. Evidently local authorities were increasingly putting projects that were a waste of energy (such as swimming pools) on the back burner.
The prefab swimming pools were Kusters' first so-called turnkey projects (where the design, the production, the sale and the on-site installation and completion of an off-the-shelf product is delivered to a customer). There would be many more to come.

Attention was now focused primarily on air heaters and related products. In its heyday, Kusters was making around thirty types of air heater. In industrial economic terms, it was no longer feasible to manufacture these in-house. There was a lack of qualified workers,[18] but even more significantly manufacturing in-house made the company vulnerable. In the event of a mild winter, the warehouses would be packed to the rafters with unsold heaters. The emphasis shifted from production to trade. Air heaters, hot air cannon, warm water and steam units and later air humidifiers, fans, high-pressure cleaners, infrared beamers, air conditioning units (1980s) and even semi-automatic car washes were imported from Germany, France, Belgium and Japan from suppliers who were able to provide quality at competitive rates. Kusters sold the ready-made products in the Netherlands and provided know-how, service and maintenance to boot.

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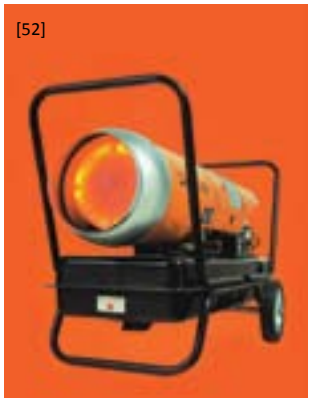

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4.6 Kusters can do anything

[56] The chromate conversion coating baths for DAF.

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Harrie Snr continued to scrutinize everything that went on in the company, but more from the sidelines. In 1973 he handed over control to the third generation. His four eldest sons Harrie Jnr (1944), Wiel (1946), Martien (1947) and then Geert (1949) as well became the directorate.
Each of the brothers was given his only portfolio: Harrie Jnr took over the commercial activities, Martien the technical matters, production and human resources, Wiel the development of new projects and Geert the marketing of these.[19]
Wiel had the same inventor's spirit as his father. Wiel proceeded from the principle: 'Kusters can make anything the customer wants'. A cooling machine for heated cables for Pope, a soundproof cabin for a crane… Nothing was too much of a challenge for Wiel.
Initially his ideas didn't bring in much money, because time after time only a few specimens could be sold, but this would change drastically...

Chromate conversion coating baths for DAF *- On 17 October 1983, three heavy cabs and trailers from Kusters delivered an order of five steel baths weighing c. 30 tons to DAF Special Products in Eindhoven. Together the baths formed a so-called chromate conversion coating unit. DAF intended to use these to provide the bodies of armoured vehicles with anticorrosive treatment and a paint-bonding layer. In total 841 armoured vehicles were treated in the unit.*

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[57] Often Wiel would not leave his lab for days on end.

Wiel(lie) Wortel - *At the age of fourteen, Wiel Kusters bought a load of glass tubes, beakers and chemicals from a pharmacy and set to work on his first experiments in the attic of his parents' home. In particular, Wiel experimented with explosives, and tested what he discovered in the field. He even launched fully fledged rockets. However, he did wear a mask and gloves when doing so - gloves that went right up to the elbow. In fact, things went awry only once, which left him unable to hear for three days.*
Years later, when the family had moved house to a large detached house, Wiel got a professional laboratory paid for by his father, with a worktop, water, electricity, gas and an extractor fan. There he made perfumes from plant extracts and distilled strong alcoholic beverages. He continued to work with explosives too. He made his own fireworks and even produced a genuine underwater bomb with electrical detonator. This bomb was exploded behind the house, in the Rijnbeek watercourse. The water shot metres up into the air.
At Kusters, Wiel succeeded his father as the 'ideas doctor'. Often he would not leave his lab for days on end until he had found what he was looking for. Wiel can officially call himself an inventor; the board of the Nederlandse Orde van Uitvinders (Dutch Association of Inventors) pronounced him a 'certified member' on 21 November 2002. By that time Wiel had already obtained countless patents for Kusters in a large number of countries, including patents for the coin-crusher, the unwrapper and a machine for shredding paper money.


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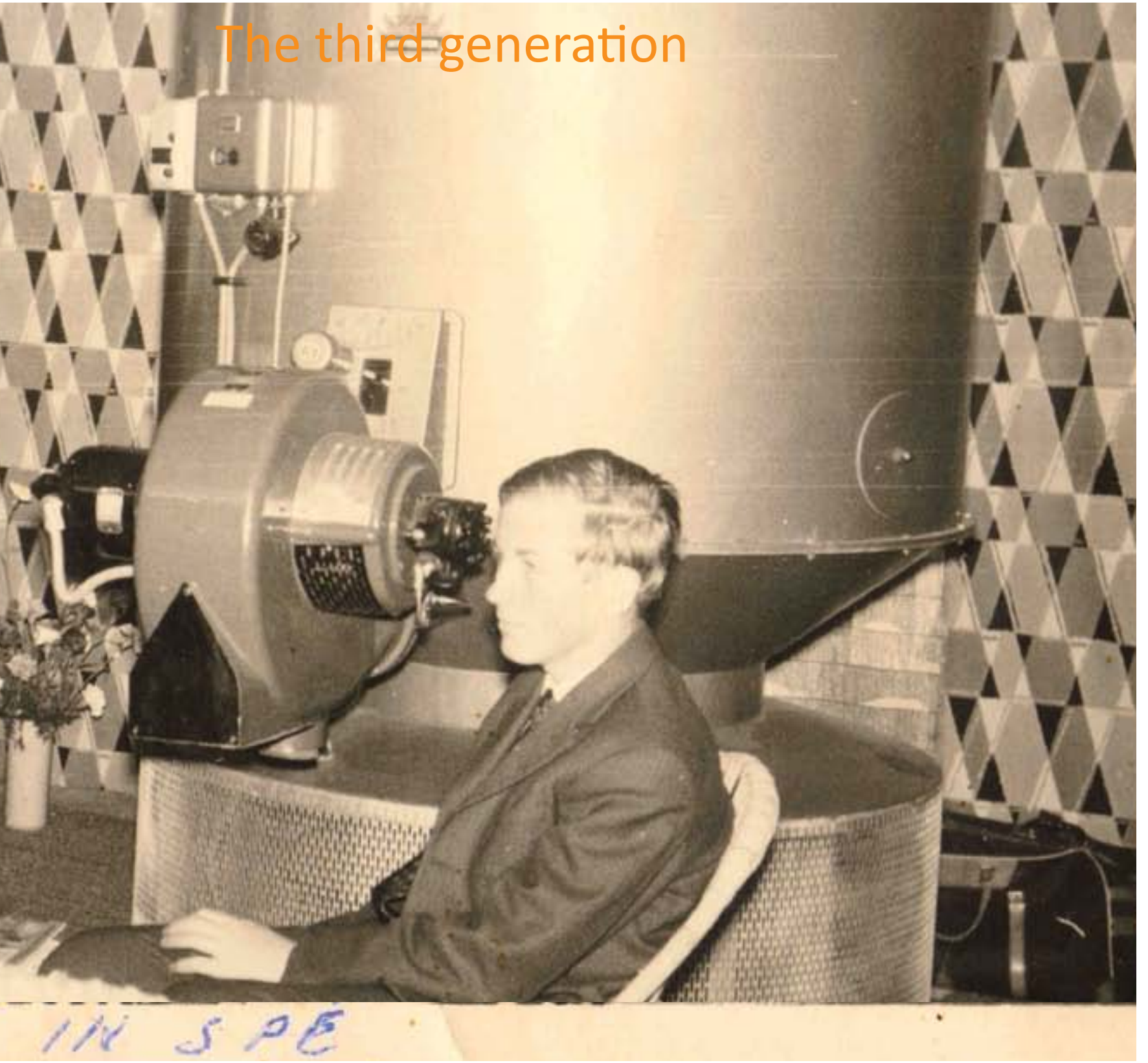
[58] Harrie Kusters allowed his eldest sons to have a crack at the big boys' work at a young age. Why he did so is evident from what he wrote to accompany this photograph: ‘The future directors’.

The third generation



5 Environmental technology

5.1. Waste reducers

[59] The principle is based on two axes turning counter to one another with protruding blades, which are driven by a rotary motor via a reducer with oil tray.

Midway through the 1970s, Wiel and Martien Kusters attended the Hannover Messe (Hanover Fair) together. They loitered around the stand belonging to MOCO Maschinen- und Apparatenbau GmbH & CO. KG from Viernheim (Hesse) with more interest than normal. MOCO was making (and still makes) waste reducers, which in principle can be used for all kinds of materials. The principle is based on two axes turning counter to one another with protruding blades, which are driven by a rotary motor via a reducer with oil tray. The brothers saw how car tyres were thrown into the MOCO waste reducer and fell out the other end into a bin in the form of granules. This machine would drastically reduce the mountain of waste, they realized!
Back in Venlo, Wiel and Martien enthusiastically reported their 'discovery' in the management meeting. The responses varied from lukewarm to even dismissive. ‘Kusters is a heating company and that's not something that will fit here', was the opinion of the majority of those in the meeting. In fact Harrie Snr, who still had plenty of influence, was the only person who did see it fitting. ‘The old boss' said resolutely: “Make an appointment”. So it came to pass that Wiel and his father drove to Viernheim a few weeks later. MOCO turned out to be just a small factory. A factory that had a great deal of expertise in-house, but wasn't working terribly efficiently. “They were making everything themselves, even equipment that they could have bought in from elsewhere much more cheaply”, recalls Wiel.
Nevertheless, the general impression was extremely positive. And so Harrie Snr decided to give Wiel free rein to set up what was to go on to be a new department for Kusters: environmental technology.

Demonstrations For fl. 12,000 an initial unit was purchased from MOCO and this was mounted on a small trailer. Wiel drove out to meet potential customers with it. He demonstrated the unit at dozens of factory and institutions, processing their own operational waste. Kusters' sales team sent out brochures en masse. Kusters also presented the waste reducer at trade shows, such as the first Afvalbeurs in Rotterdam, Afvaltech and Machevo in Utrecht.
Their efforts were not in vain. They were inundated with requests for demonstrations. Requests from small companies as well as major players such as Shell, Philips and Unilever. Orders soon followed too. The first customer that could be cited was the St Joseph Hospital (now VieCuri) in Venlo. The hospital started using the unit for its kitchen waste.

5.2. Customized work

During the first year, Kusters sold one waste reducer, followed by ten in the second year and thirty in the third year. Subsequently the sales volumes shot up through the roof. Kusters supplied customized work. The MOCO machines were modified to the specific requirements of the buyer.
Kusters specialized in reducing, destroying and recycling solid waste materials. A well-oiled engineering department was kitted out to develop highly specialized machines. Here is a small selection of the hundreds of 'products' from this period:

• ***Residual substances*** For the residual substance department of Philips, Kusters developed and built machines to reduce, separate and recycle raw materials from waste derived from electrical and household appliances. The technology used was exceedingly innovative. One thing that was highly unusual was the separation of copper and plastic by means of fast-flowing water.

• ***Gas-discharge lamps*** For the lamp production division of Philips in Roosendaal, a machine was developed to process fluorescent lamps. Fluorescent lamps are categorized as minor chemical waste and contain such substances as liquid and gaseous mercury, copper, glass and fluorine. By means of reduction, separation, filtration and air treatment, all components were re-separated and rendered suitable for use as new raw materials.
A few years later Kuster was even commissioned by the Provinciale Noord-Brabantse Elektriciteits Maatschappij (PNEM) in Den Bosch to build an entire factory for the processing of all lamps in the Netherlands (Lumenex). A factory that had production

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[60] Reduction unit for radioactive waste.

[61] Visiting Dodewaard.

[62] Processing coffee pads.

lines for SOX (low-pressure sodium vapour) lamps, fluorescent lamps and energy-saving lamps. A multimillion guilder project and a breakthrough in terms of processing the Netherlands' sizeable flow of waste. Not long after there followed a similar project at Indaver, an extremely large waste processor in the port of Antwerp, Belgium. Unfortunately at that time not all countries considered lamps to be minor chemical waste, which impeded further growth.
In the Netherlands, though, the collection of minor chemical waste was increasingly gaining ground. Kusters also built large machines for processing such things as paint tins and batteries.

• ***Radioactive waste*** By now Kusters had built up an excellent reputation when it came to the design, engineering and construction of complex machines for the destruction and processing of complex waste flows. In 1985 this resulted in an unusual assignment from the Gemeenschappelijke Kernenergiecentrale Nederland (GKN) for a Lava Reduction Unit for processing radioactive waste in the nuclear power plant in Dodewaard. This unit was built entirely under KEMA Certification and was unique in the world. Several more units followed for the purposes of processing radioactive ampoules in teaching hospitals and for shredding maraging tubes at Urenco in Almelo.

• ***Foodstuffs and luxury foods*** The coffee and tobacco industry needed machinery for compacting 'coffee husks', which are created when the coffee beans are roasted, and compactors for compacting waste (filters, papers, tobacco material), which is created during the production of cigarettes. Kusters supplied a large number of briquette tar compactors to companies such as Douwe Egberts and Philip Morris.
As of 2011, Kusters has once again been supplying equipment to Douwe Egberts (and others) for the separation and recycling of coffee pads.

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5.3 Chicken litter

[63] The unit in Bad Bentheim.

[64] Unit for incinerating and generating energy from (chicken litter) briquettes.

• ***Paper shredding*** An entirely different application was the destruction of documents and bank statements for commercial banks such as ABN AMRO and the Kredietbank. These projects signified Kusters' first introduction (in business terms) to the commercial banks and were the forerunners to Kusters' later activities with central banks throughout the world. In time, the destruction of documents was fully outsourced to third parties by the commercial banks, resulting in Kusters losing this market.

• ***Car tyres*** There were high expectations of Tyrec, a plan to start granulating car tyres. Together with the professional body for the manufacturers and importers of road vehicles Rai, the garage owners' union Bovag, tyre supplier Vredestein and cement factory ENCI (which used tyres as additional fuel for its furnaces), Kusters agreed that it would proceed to build large-scale processing units at three sites in the Netherlands. There was a snag at the last minute. The tyre covenant that the government had been wishing to sign with the industry and that contained agreements on the mandatory recycling of car tyres did not come to fruition, the corollary of which was that the Tyrec plan never got off the ground.

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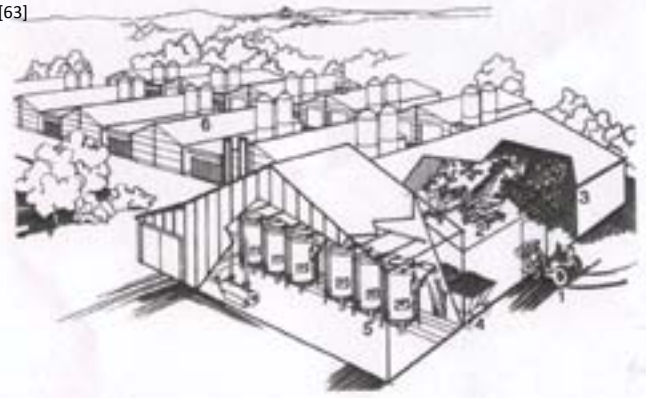

Energie recycling met kuikenmest
1 aanvoer kuikenmest
2 briketteerpers
3 bulkopslag briketten
4 dagbunkers brandstof
5 verwarmingsketels
6 kippenhokken met vloerverwarming
(Mastbetriebe Kuipers/GVB GmbH, Bad Bentheim, West-Duitsland)

Energy from chicken litter Even chicken feedlots approached Kusters. They were battling with two major problems. The first of these was the sky-high heating costs. During the six weeks over which the feeding operations take place, the henhouses required a lot of heating, which was a drain on the feeders' finances. The second problem was the huge excess of chicken litter, dumping of which was no longer permitted by the government due to environmental reasons.
For the feeders Kusters developed both a special machine for compacting the chicken litter to make fuel briquettes and incinerator for incinerating and generating energy from these briquettes. Thus completing the cycle. It was evident from demonstration projects that the machinery enabled chicken feeders to completely fulfil their own energy needs: one problem solved the other.

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[65] Following an appearance on KRO's Brandpunt in de Markt, articles appeared in major papers and professional journals throughout the world.

Kusters participated in the major poultry trade show (VIV) so as to introduce its world first to a wide target group, Dutch newspaper De Telegraaf featured a front-page article on it and Kusters was invited to appear on numerous television programmes. Moreover, following an appearance on channel KRO's show Brandpunt in de Markt,[20] articles appeared in major papers and professional journals throughout the world.

In 1985 the first unit was sold to a chicken feedlot in the German town of Bad Bentheim, a feedlot with a capacity of a million chickens. The total price for the unit, which included two compactors and four large incineration furnaces, came to 1.3 million DM. Until that point the heating costs at Mastbetriebe Kuiper/GVB had come to in excess of seven hundred thousand DM a year. This meant that the unit would potentially pay for itself in less than two years.

Incidentally, 'Bentheim' yielded another interesting saving: due to the improved temperature control in the henhouses, the chickens proved to be less hungry, which saved the feeder three to four percent on feed costs - which worked out at a cool fl. 600,000. And finally, the finished product - the ash - could be simply be used as fertilizer.

Shortly after the unit was put into operation in Bad Bentheim, Kusters once more took part in a major poultry trade show, this time in Atlanta (United States). Here too a great deal of interest in this new invention was shown. [21]

By now, however, Kusters had also penetrated the exclusive market of central banks and was faced with a choice: a future with chicken feeders as customers or one with central banks as customers. In the end they went for the latter.


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[66] Production of incineration units for chicken litter on Kusters' factory floors.

6 Destruction of money

6.1 Joh. Enschedé

[67] 'Fuel' for the banknote destruction machine.

In 1978, Joh. Enschedé, the printer of Dutch postage stamps and banknotes, had gotten in touch with Kusters. The renowned company didn't know how it should it should go about properly destroying its paper waste, such as misprints, test sheets and paper with watermarks. It had tried out all manner of possible methods, but none worked satisfactorily.
In the end Joh. Enschedé had taken the waste to the waste incineration plant in Zaanstad. There the banknotes and postage stamps were tipped into furnace along with other waste. However, it subsequently emerged that they weren't being fully incinerated. Dubious individuals were making off with misprints of postage stamps, which turned a tidy sum among stamp collectors.

Development Kusters invited the company to come and put things to the test at MOCO. An armoured van containing banknotes subsequently drove from Haarlem to the south of Germany. Pieter Burghoorn, Kusters' primary contact at Joh. Enschedé at that point, remembers that the Germans were dumbfounded that money was being disposed of in their reducers at all - let alone in such large quantities. "For each sack of banknotes they were shouting 'that's another Mercedes'. The size of the sack determined whether it was a standard Mercedes or a sports version", laughs Burghoorn. [22]
The management of Joh. Enschedé had nearly 'come round' by the end of the visit to Viernheim. The only thing left for Kusters to do was to come up with a solution for the huge mountain of shredded

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[68] The old money was delivered to Venlo in crates.

paper that was left over after the banknotes had been shredded. As was mentioned earlier, Kusters already had such a solution in-house with the briquette compactor.
Shortly after, Joh. Enschedé decided to go ahead and purchase one. The unit that Kusters built for the Haarlem-based printer in 1979 - two paper shredders and two briquette compactors - would put Kusters on the map. From a modest player on the national market, Kuster developed to become a world market leader.

Old money Prior to 1978, nobody at Kusters realized that banknotes were actually 'everyday' products. Banknotes have a life cycle of a few months to a few years. They are printed by special (usually national) printing works and issued by a country's central bank. The banknotes are then distributed via the commercial banks to the general public, who use them for day-to-day payment transactions, and are recalled once they show signs of wear and tear.
A few times a year the old notes are brought in to the central bank and/or money-sorting centres. Each note is then checked for authenticity - a Euro note, for example, has 26 characteristics that allow its authenticity to be ascertained - and condition (tears, dirt, sticky tape, etc.). All over the world billions of banknotes are sorted in this way each and every day, with the notes that are fit for use being put back into circulation and those that are unfit (10-50%) being destroyed. The destruction is done both online (individual banknotes) and offline (bundles of 1000 notes).

The money market (currency market) is a typical oligopolistic market with only a few suppliers and a few buyers. Sooner or later every note that is printed has to be destroyed. This could be done during the printing process (in the event of misprints) or at the end of the life cycle (unfit notes). The market is thus restricted exclusively to the money printers and central banks. In accordance with the Bank Act, each country has just one central bank authorized to issue and destroy banknotes.
Coins also form part of the payment system. However, the life cycle of coins is far longer than that of bank notes. Coins are usually lost due to being ‘killed off’. Only during production or following currency reform, such as the switch to the Euro, are coins destroyed en masse. Kusters even developed suitable technology for this purpose, but this will be discussed later on.


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6.2. Breakthrough

[69] The Hercules, the RAF's biggest transport aircraft.

[70] The Bank of England was extremely satisfied with how the (unique) test went.

[71] By this point men and women armed with Sten guns had taken up positions on the factory floors at Kusters.

After Joh. Enschedé, Banque de France approached Kusters in 1980 looking for a small machine, but it wasn't until 1986 that Banco de Portugal bought the first genuine machine for the offline destruction of unfit banknotes. Banco de Portugal was followed in quick succession by De Nederlandsche Bank (1987) and the national Bank van België (1988).

Bank of England Geert, who by now had been Commercial Director for several years, then set his sights on the Bank of England. After countless calls to London he succeeded in getting a decision-maker on the line. When Geert explained that Kusters had developed a machine to destroy banknotes, he caught their attention immediately. The decision-maker explained that there were ten large furnaces stood in a huge warehouse next to the Bank of England Printing Works in Debden (Essex) - the type of furnace that was used in brickworks. Thousands of banknotes would be fed into these furnaces by means of a conveyor belt. Because these banknotes sometimes stuck to one another, the furnaces had to be constantly manned by workers who would poke the burning mass with long iron rods.
The ash that ultimately remained was ground up using a kind of millstone, mixed with water and disposed of (in an unpurified state) via the sewerage system on the surface water. The smoke produced during the incineration process passed straight out the chimney (also in an unpurified state). As such, the British method was not particularly environmentally friendly, and neither was it secure, the man conceded. In short, something urgently needed to be done about it…

Mammoth operation The Brits asked whether they could come and try out the machine at Kusters. Naturally they were most welcome. At that time, Kusters' assembly halls contained machines for De Nederlandsche Bank, which could be used for a demonstration. With the cooperation of the British secret service, De Nederlandsche Bank, the Koninklijke Marechaussee (Dutch military police) and the local police, a mammoth operation was set in motion…
The Brits crammed an armoured truck full of a couple of million pounds' worth of rejected banknotes. Because they deemed it too risky to ship the truck across by boat, it was flown over to Eindhoven Airport by Hercules, the Royal Air Force's biggest transport aircraft. From there it was escorted to Venlo along the A67. At the front of the convoy was a car containing an armed military policeman, then a jeep from De Nederlandsche Bank, then the Brits' armoured truck with its precious cargo, then another jeep and finally a policeman on a motorcycle. When the procession drove into Venlo, all the traffic lights went to green, as had been agreed in advance.

Satisfied By this point men and women armed with Sten guns had taken up positions on the factory floors at Kusters. Once the British cohort was 'in', the doors were immediately hermetically sealed and the (secret) testing could begin. The quantity of banknotes was so considerable that the job could not be completed in one day. The armoured truck, with what remained of its content, spent the night on the secured premises of Venlo's police station.

What was in all probability the most expensive test the Bank of England has ever carried out in terms of the destruction of money was to their complete satisfaction. The Brits ordered (their first) two large machines. They were ready to be put into use at the end of the 1980s. The environmental and security problem is now a thing of the past for the Bank of England. The machines are fitted in such a way that once money is fed into them, nobody can get their hands on it any more, meaning "no hands on the banknotes" and "load, lock and leave" have been Kusters' unique selling points ever since.
Landing the deal from the Bank of England was extremely important. Very few doors remain closed to a company that can boast having such an illustrious institution as a customer, as would quickly become evident.

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[72] The ‘secret’ cargo is driven into Kusters' halls.

6.3. New channels

In 1979, Harrie, Martien, Wiel and Geert had become shareholders in ‘Apparatenfabriek Kusters Venlo-Holland B.V.’. Within the company two separate divisions were created, each with its own specific customers and products: the traditional heating division and the new environmental division. Both divisions saw good opportunities for growth. For that reason, in 1989 the brothers decided to split the business into:

- Kusters Engineering B.V. (Wiel, Martien and Geert), with its registered place of business at L.J. Costerstraat 6-12 and
- Kusters Technische Handelsonderneming B.V. (Harrie), at L.J. Costerstraat 4.

7 Conquering the world

7.1. Currency Conference

[73] The first Currency Conference in San Francisco.

The resolve of Kusters Engineering to hone in on the money market in 1995 was a conscious decision to conquer the world and to set up an export-oriented organization. As at 2011, this decision has resulted in exports to some seventy countries, a market share of around seventy percent and the establishment of Kusters offices in India, China, Russia and the United States.
The big breakthrough occurred in San Francisco in 1992, where the first major Currency Conference was held. Geert - known abroad as George Kusters - attended on behalf of Kusters Engineering. At this conference plenty of attention was devoted to the production of banknotes and security measures as well as to the technologies required for these purposes at the banknote printing works and central banks. A new world opened up to Geert. It was soon evident from many conversations with participants that everyone was focused on the production and issuance of banknotes, but nobody specialized in their destruction. By now it had become clear to Geert that a banknote was essentially a product just like any other, with the differences being that everyone wants to have as many of them as possible and that the waste had to be destroyed in another way. At a certain point Geert got talking to the Chief General Manager of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The Indian asked Geert why he was at the conference. Geert told him that his company was focused on designing and building equipment for the destruction of old banknotes in a secure and environmentally friendly way.

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Historic *- The second contract with China can justifiably be called 'historic'. The Netherlands and China had agreed that several contracts, including the Kusters contract, would be signed during a Dutch trade delegation's visit to China. Shortly before the delegation's departure, Minister of Foreign Affairs Hans van Mierlo accused China in the European Parliament of violating human rights in Tibet. In response to this, Beijing froze diplomatic relations and all promised orders from Dutch businesses were suspended. In order to salvage what could be salvaged, Geert jumped on a plane immediately. In the end he managed to sort out the situation such that the Kusters contract would be the only one that would still get signed. Sober, without ceremony, but still…*

[74] 1997: signing a mega order in China.

[75] Geert with his Chinese agent and friend.

When he showed photos of the equipment at the Bank of England, his discussion partner grew interested. He advised Geert to pay a visit to RBI in India. It wasn't only the Chief General Manager of the Reserve Bank of India but also representatives of other central banks that showed interest. After the end of the conference, Geert received a second invitation, from a high-ranking delegation from the People's Bank of China.

First contract Two years and many discussions later, the first contract was signed with India in 1994. A contract for four major Currency Disintegration Systems. There are now around 32 machines in operation at the RBI in India. The Indian contract was followed in 1996 by the People's Bank of China (which until then had been using chemicals to destroy its banknotes before dumping them in Chinese rivers), who signed an initial contract and one year later a contract for eighteen large units. This mega order involved a sum of over 63 million guilders - three to four times Kusters' annual turnover in 1996. The Chinese order landed Kusters the 1997 Export Award from employers' association FME-CWM. China now has 76 large units, spread across nigh on all branch offices.
Due to its well-stocked order portfolio, Kusters Engineering was in a position to undergo controlled growth. Nothing was done with undue haste. However busy the company was, the management were careful to ensure that growth was not at the expense of quality. The utmost care was taken in communication with customers. Anyone crossing the threshold at Kusters was given an exceedingly hospitable welcome. More time and money were spent on marketing than ever before.

Money trade show In May 1995 Kusters Engineering organized the Currency Industry Suppliers (CIS) Exhibition in-house. The CIS is a trade show that allows companies involved in some way or another in the life cycle of the banknote to present themselves. The CIS was deliberately planned for the month of May. This enabled it to serve as a satellite trade show for the Drupa in Düsseldorf, the biggest printers' trade show, attended by the world's central banks and banknote printing works. In order to make the first CIS something special, there was no scrimping in terms of costs or effort. The hosts from Kusters had the privilege of welcoming representatives from a large number of central banks. The trade show was such a success that it was decided to announce a second edition.
Kusters spared no expense during the second trade show in 2000. A new factory floor measuring 1600 m^2 was magically converted into an Amsterdam scene complete with shops, a restaurant, an old Dutch bar and - most importantly - stands for fifteen suppliers from the money industry. The official opening was performed by the then Minister of Economic Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister Annemarie Jorritsma. During the daily lunch of asparagus, short presentations were given by representatives from central banks from ten countries. In total the trade show was attended by visitors from 57 countries.
The event cost Kusters Engineering a small fortune, but ultimately brought in a sizeable number of orders. For this reason it was decided to hold a repeat of the CIS every four years.[23]

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[76] **CIS 2000**
Kusters spared no expense during the two CIS events in 2000. A new factory floor was magically converted into an Amsterdam scene complete with shops, a restaurant, an old Dutch bar and stands for fifteen suppliers from the money industry. The official opening was performed by Minister of Economic Affairs Annemarie Jorritsma. Short presentations were provided by representatives of central banks. The CIS attracted visitors from 57 countries.


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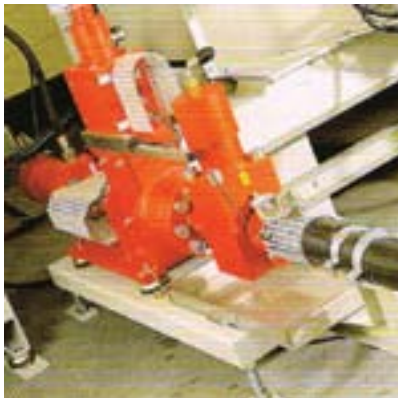
[77] The destruction of unfit banknotes summarized (briefly) in a photo strip.



[78] Sitting with President-Director of the De Nederlandsche Bank Nout Wellink on Kusters' 'paper' bench.

[79] 'Useful' applications: a nesting box and an attaché case.

Derivative industry The destruction of banknotes produces a huge mountain of shredded paper. Kusters' machines compact these shreds into briquettes, which can be used as fuel. However, Kusters thought up plenty more uses for these. Thus the shredded paper has been compressed to form floorboards for sports halls. It has also been used to make attaché cases, CD boxes, files, nesting boxes, beauty cases, notebook and champagne cases. Novelties, chiefly because the banknotes, even when shredded, can still be identified by their colours.
The shredded paper has also been used for artistic purposes. Venlo-based sculptor Fons Schobbers was commissioned by De Nederlandsche Bank to make six abstract sculptures from the shreds. The undisputed highlight of this derivative industry, which received a mention in all Dutch newspapers, was 'De Nederlandsche Bank' (a pun on the word 'bank', which is Dutch for both bench and bank) by Wiel Kusters, a garden bench made of banknotes with a total value of around 35 million guilders.[24]

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7.2. The Euro

[80] Spontaneous thank-you letters from visitors.

[81] Mr Blue, made of old ten guilder notes.

Capitalizing on what is current has always been one of Kusters' strong qualities. In the second half of the 1990s it was announced that the Euro would be replacing the existing national currencies in the countries of the European Union on 1 January 2002. Thirteen billion banknotes and seventy billion coins would have to be destroyed. In terms of coins, this scale of destruction was unprecedented. After all, coins don't wear away and are normally only replaced if some are lost. As such, nobody had ever given any thought to the notion of a coin destruction unit.
Kusters smelled his opportunity and set up a separate subsidiary for the Euro operation - Eurec (EURoRECycling). Eurec devised a complete Euro line which boasted machinery not only for destroying banknotes *and* coins but also for processing the 'waste' created during processing.

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EUROPEAN CENTRAL BANK

At the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Geert Kusters presented the Euro line to a select gathering of representatives of all countries in the Euro. The responses were extremely positive. Even when Geert then approached the countries once more individually there was nothing but praise. But it didn't get any further than that. No orders were placed. Clearly the central banks were setting other priorities. At that point they were preoccupied with the matter of how to issue the new notes and coins as smoothly as possible. Kusters was jumping the gun.

Coin-crusher As it happened, the coin-crusher Geert had been talking about within the framework of Eurec didn't yet exist at that point. A whole new concept had to be developed for this. Coins cannot be compared with banknotes. After they have been destroyed, there is considerable residual value: the actual price of the nickel and bronze means their accumulated worth is immense. And so a machine was required that would damage the coins in such a way that they could no longer be used but could be readily traded as scrap metal. After months of experimenting, Kusters came up with the coin-crusher - a machine with two toothed rollers. These rolls steamroller the coins over two runs. If need be, they do so with such pressure that it even becomes impossible to see that they used to be coins.

In the end, billions of Dutch and Belgian coins were destroyed by Kusters coin-crushers after the switch from the guilder/Belgian franc to the Euro, yielding 150 million Euros for the Dutch treasury! These days machines are still sold occasionally for the purposes of destroying misprints in mints or destroying exchanged, tarnished rejects.

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[82] Bird's-eye view of the coin-crusher in action. The result: crushed coins.






7.3 World market leader

[83] Delivery of unit. The People's Bank of China.

The head office of Kusters Engineering in Venlo is not all that far removed from a museum. It is full of art and artefacts from all four corners of the globe, collected by Geert on his many foreign trips. Geert gets around. It is not without reason that in 2011 Kusters Engineering is undisputed market leader in the field of the destruction of money. The company has now supplied some 350 large and smaller systems to central banks and producers of banknotes and coins in around 70 countries.

Unique client base Kusters Engineering has a unique and highly illustrious client base, including such organizations as: De Nederlandsche Bank, the Bank of England, the Deutsche Bundesbank, the Federal Reserve Bank (FED), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the People's Bank of China (PBoC), the Bank Indonesia and the Central Bank of Russia (CBR). There is even a lot of equipment and machinery from the Venlo-based company in countries such as Bolivia, Bulgaria, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Estonia, Hong Kong, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Lithuania, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Nigeria, Syria, Thailand, Trinidad, Uruguay and South Africa.

Kusters Engineering is the only company in the world to be fully specialized in money destruction technology. Within this field it claims a market share of 65 percent, with the other 35 percent being claimed by the most significant competitor, the firm Giesecke & Devrient from Germany, as well as a few minor market players. Kusters Engineering has obtained scores of patents and is well-known as an exceedingly innovative company. Kusters Engineering

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[84] Trade connects people.

[85] Opening Currency Processing Centre of the Central Bank of Russia in St Petersburg.

has been awarded the aforementioned Dutch Export Award, the China Trader Award (from the Chinese airline Cathay Pacific), the Prix d'Asperge (from Venlo town council, for exceptional services in developing northern and central Limburg as an economic region) and the Innovation Diamond (from the Limburg Development and Investment Company, or LIOF).

Reputation Kusters Engineering is now a well-known quantity in central banks throughout the world. The company's reputation is down to the exceptional quality and reliability (in excess of 99 percent) of its products.
Some Kusters machines have been in use for over twenty-five years now. Sooner or later, all the clients come back looking to place further orders. The goodwill Kusters has acquired in recent years will serve the company and its staff well, as the objectives for the near future are extremely ambitious!

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Manpower costs next to nothing *- Kusters Engineering now has dozens of money destruction units installed in branches of the Central Bank of India. The installation and assembly of such colossal machines takes quite some doing in Asian countries. This is evident from video clips made in the metropolis Calcutta (Kolkaat) by Kusters engineers years ago.*

On a relatively quiet Sunday morning a lorry drops off a six-ton container on the doorstep of a bank. The container has to go up three stairs three times. Technical tools are not available. Everything has to be done by hand. The cheapest workmen are enlisted for the job, untouchables from the very lowest caste that the Indians look down upon.
These day labourers position two wooden planks with metal strips against the stairs, secure steel cables to the container and, with the aid of a winch, pull it to the first 'landing'.
They then push steel tubes under the container and 'roll' it to the next set of stairs. The job ends up taking the best part of a day.
That doesn't matter. After all, manpower in India costs next to nothing.

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[86, 87] The destruction of highly confidential documents (Intelligent Disintegrators). New activity for Kusters Engineering. The target group is composed of the Kremlins and Pentagons of this world.

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Hari Sankar - 'The heart and soul of Kusters India' (1969-2010)

India is one of the first projects that Kusters Engineering landed outside of Europe. The Indian Hari Sankar played a crucial role here right from the start.

At the start of the 1990s, banknotes in India were still a source of infection. The Indian government had had enough of this, wanted clean money and decided to build two hypermodern printing works - one in the south and one in the north of this immense country. At that point Kusters already had an agent in India. Through his contacts in high places, he managed to arrange things such that the Venlo-based company would be allowed to install two money destruction units in each of the printing works - the biggest machines that Kusters had supplied up till that point in time. For the purposes of maintaining the equipment, an Indian electrical engineer and mechanic were required. The agent selected two technical types who had recently graduated from the Technical University: Hari Sankar and Jose Philip. They were sent to Venlo for an apprenticeship.

Hari and Jose had never set foot outside of their own country, but the arrival of the young Indians was a unique experience for Kusters too. Hari and Jose were each given a room at the home of a Kusters employee in Well. And as a kind of citizenship test before such a concept existed, they were dragged along to the café on multiple occasions, they learned to eat herring the Dutch way and they were treated like one of the family by the directorate. After the first work placement, the two continued to return to Venlo a few times a year for further training. They then assembled the first machines in India together with Kusters staff from Venlo.

At the weekends they went on day trips together. And had exciting adventures. Once, whilst riding an elephant, they came face-to-face with a tiger. Another time they ended up in their car in the midst of a herd of pachyderms. When they returned to their hotel room with their knees still trembling, it was full of rats.

Hari Sankar didn't just work for Kusters in India; he also worked for them in China, Indonesia and several other oriental countries. In 2001, Kusters Engineering India was founded following a big order from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). From 2008 onwards, Hari Sankar, now CEO of Kusters Engineering India, expanded the company from being a pure service organization to a high-tech company with innovative hardware and software products for the money market.

Hari was a young Indian with a great deal of ambition and talent for business and innovation. Hari spent plenty of time in the Netherlands and could even speak Venlo dialect. In addition, Hari (together with wife Sunita Harisankar) played a significant role in Kusters' charitable projects in India.

Still diligently working on pushing back the boundaries for Kusters, Hari Sankar passed away on Sunday 5 September 2010 along with four members of his family in a head-on collision with a lorry. He was only 41 years old. Hari was a 'Kusters man' through and through and had a dream, which he expressed in the following terms:

Both his widow and the management of KE India and Syntech International solemnly swore to make Hari's dream a reality. The Hari Sankar Foundation has now been set up in commemoration of the 'heart and soul' of Kusters Engineering India. This fund finances primary education for underprivileged children in the slums of Mumbai and offers young Indian talent the opportunity to develop themselves in their field.

7.4. Innovation strategy

[88] The Pentagon

[89] The Kremlin

Innovation has always been a high priority at Kusters Engineering. Following the period of vigorous growth from 1997 to 2005, it was time to change course. The company settled on two paths:

- Developing new technologies for existing clients (product development)
- Developing new markets for existing (or derivative) technologies (market development)

The first path has led to retrograde integration into the production and marketing chain. Kusters is no longer just involved in the end-of-life phase of a banknote, but is also involved in technology related to the counting, the authenticity and the fitness of banknotes. New products have been developed that will make a contribution to the continued growth of the business.

Intelligence market The second path has led to the development of the Intelligence market, focused on the destruction of highly confidential documents (Intelligent Disintegrators). The new target group is composed of the Kremlins and Pentagons of this world. This target group is even more of a closed community than the money market. For that reason Kusters decided to first focus all attention on one specific sub-market: the United States. In 2006 an office was opened in Washington. It took considerable time, money and effort until, in 2010, a breakthrough finally came.
Kusters has now had success not only the United States but also in Europe and Asia. In the next few years the ID market will become a second important pillar under the foundations of Kusters Engineering.


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[90] Kusters is permanent sponsor and member of The Currency Conference, The Banknote Conference, the User Conferences PBC/CBR and The Dutch Currency Association, a select group of companies from the currency industry. The DCA regularly organizes conferences. This group portrait was taken during a session in Mozambique.

7.5. Syntech Master Plan

[91] The Venlo office, now the centre of a global organization. Father Harrie and grandfather/founder Handerie keeping an eye on things.

In 2004, Wiel had sold his shares to Martien and Geert. Martien decided to take things a little easier in 2008. This left Geert thinking it was time once more to reflect upon the strategy for the long term. Geert realized that the company's strongest point is its rock-solid reputation in virtually all central banks. This goodwill is something that can be made the most of in commercial terms, resulting in guaranteed growth and continuity over the long term. In fact, Kusters Engineering was already operating like a small multinational, but was still thinking like the family firm it started out as, with its own branches now in India and America. The office in India had been freehold since 2000 and was ready to start independently developing new products and bringing them to market. Continuing this line of thinking, the 2007-2012 Master Plan and the Syntech Group (SYNergy in TECHnology) were created, both focused on the two most important market segments for Kusters:

- The currency market (central banks, producers of banknotes and coins, commercial banks, transportation of valuable goods, etc.)
- The intelligence market (intelligence services, defence, defence industry, embassies, etc.).

The octopus The octopus was selected as the symbol for the Syntech Group. The octopus is an intelligent marine creature that looks at both market segments the Syntech Group has its eyes on (the currency market and the intelligence market). The eight arms refer to the strategic branches of the Syntech Group (Europe, India, Africa, China, CIS, USA, South East Asia and Latin America). The suckers refer to the strategic partnerships and joint ventures

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[92] The Octopus, symbol of the Syntech Group.

with companies active in the aforementioned market segments throughout the world. Finally, the three hearts of the octopus represent the synergy in technology, commerce and finance on which the Syntech Group's strategy is based.
The organogram below offers a clear picture of the development of the Syntech Group and the state of play as at 2011:

- Kusters Engineering - Venlo
- Kusters Engineering India Pvt.Ltd - Mumbai
  Kusters Technology Incubation Center - Coimbatoire
  Logicash - New Bombay
- Kusters Engineer CIS - Moscow
- Kusters Engineering Africa - Nairobi
- Kusters Engineering Inc. - Washington DC
  Kusters Engineering America Inc. - Washington DC
  Kusters Engineering Security Inc. - Falls Church VA
- Kusters Engineering China - Beijing (in the process of being formed)

In order to be able to finance this development and growth, Particon (a subsidiary of Stichting De Weijerhorst) acquired a 20 percent share in Syntech Holdings B.V. in 2007; a bilateral agreement allows either party to terminate this participation in 2013.

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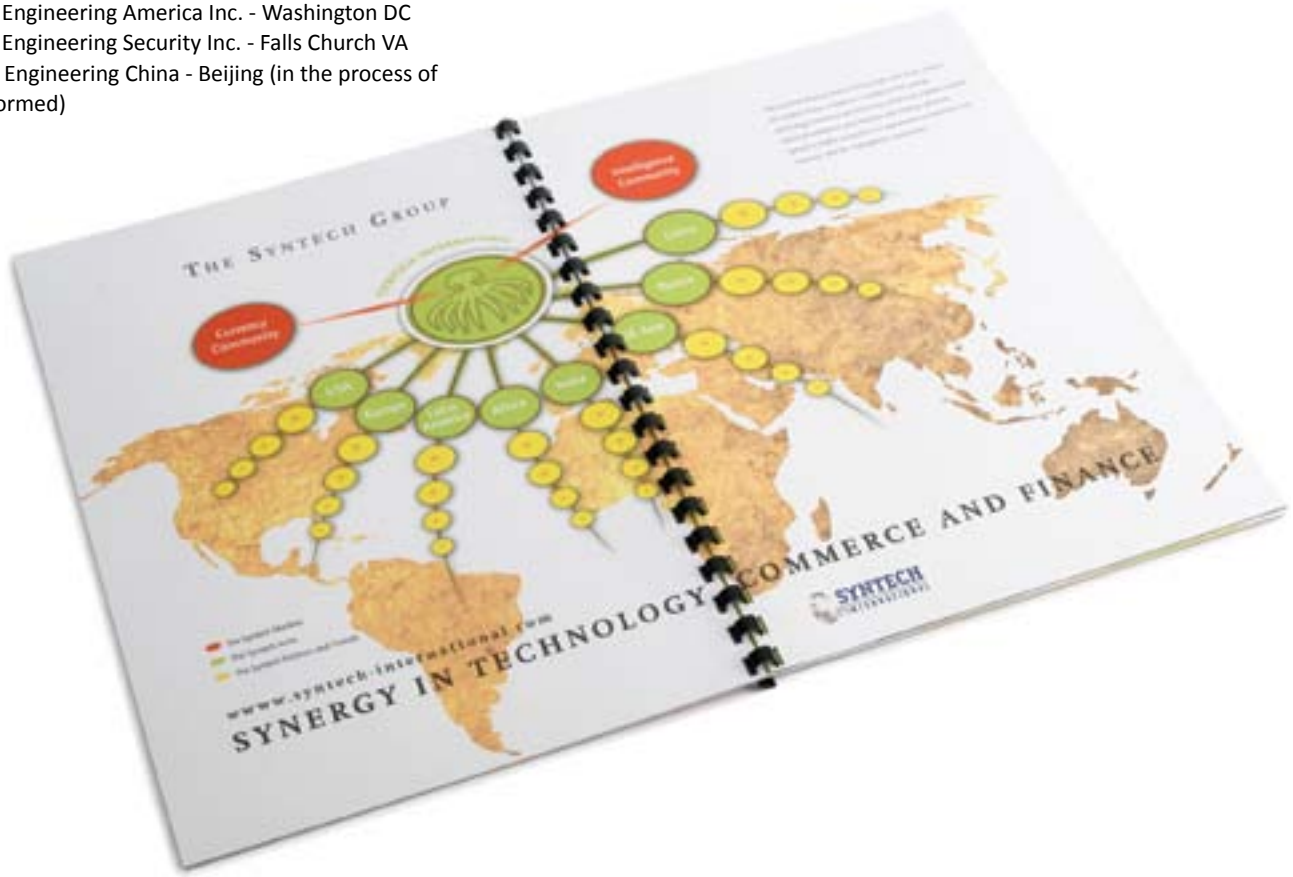

8 Money's not everything...

[93] Open Het Dorp: the first major charitable campaign on Dutch television.

Kusters has always been a company commercial in thought and deed, but in addition it has always been a highly social company that treated its workers fairly and felt a sense of involvement in what was going on in the community. Furthermore, the successive directorates and employees have always been aware of their social responsibility. In its 100-year existence, Kusters has been closely involved in local, national and international projects in relation to disaster control and/or social relief. A selection of these projects is featured below.

Open Het Dorp On 26 and 27 November 1962 the first major charitable campaign was staged on Dutch television. During a nigh on 24-hour broadcast presented by Mies Bouman, money was raised for the Het Drop foundation, a commune for the handicapped in Arnhem. Even Kusters' staff did their bit. They all decided to do one hour's overtime. The directorate made up the fl. 115 thereby earned to fl. 250 and donated it. During their break, staff and directors listened enthusiastically to the radio programme on which the results were being announced. The proceeds came to a total of twelve million guilders, which for the time was an inconceivably high amount.
Since then there have been dozens of social initiatives developed at Kusters. Where initially it had been primarily the staff who took the initiative, the directors have been doing their bit too for the past few years. A fixed amount is structurally set aside in the budget for 'charity'. This money is spent wherever it does the most good. In India in particular, one of the company's most important sales territories, Kusters is financially supporting education for street children.


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Yamuna Pushta In 2000, during a trade mission to India, Geert met a lady from the Dutch embassy who was closely involved in setting up and maintaining schools in Yamuna Pushta in New Delhi. This slum was home to 150,000 people who scarcely had the bare essentials for survival. Dr Kiran Bedi, a well-known Indian policewoman, had set up a 'school project' there. After a visit to the project, Geert was so enthusiastic that he immediately became a sponsor - and later a member of the board - of the Dutch branch of her organization. A great deal of money was raised through such channels as the Lions Club Venlo, of which Geert is a member. Money that enabled a total of around 160 schools to be set up and maintained. In these schools children from four years of age are given food, clothing and primary education.

Asha Deep Balwari Project Mumbai The situation is also harrowing for children in the slums of Mumbai (Bombay). Their uneducated parents are on the go from early in the morning till late in the evening doing dirty jobs in return for a pittance. Children have to look after one another and are not able to attend school. Consequently their future is, like that of their parents, devoid of prospects. In order to bring about change, the non-governmental organization Asha Deep Vikas Kendra has opened schools ('balwadis') in the Aarey Colony area of Mumbai where these children can get free education. Teaching staff from the organization pick the children up from set locations every morning, keep them occupied for several hours (including language lessons) and feed them. The purpose of these (open-air) schools is to get children

[94, 95] The purpose of the (open-air) schools is to get children from the streets to such a level within a maximum of two years that they are capable of following regular education.

from the streets to such a level within a maximum of two years that they are capable of following regular education. Once they are following this regular education, they are helped with their homework and are pushed to pursue further study. Each school set up by Asha Deep Vikas has around fifteen to twenty children. In fact, some pupils are already moving on to further education. Another positive aspect is that some children are brought to school by the parents themselves and that these parents are therefore following the lessons themselves. Every Saturday four employees of Kusters India voluntarily attend the schools to lend a helping hand.
Even staff from Kusters Nederland are lending Mumbai a helping hand. On WereldWerkDag ('WorldLabourDay') they relinquish their pay. The money thus raised is doubled and then this in turn is doubled by the WereldWerkDag organization, resulting in a


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[96] Children from Kusters' schools regularly send drawings to Venlo.

substantial sum being sent to India. As is the occasional container full of clothing and toys collected by Kusters.

Small change campaign In 1998, Geert Kusters started to examine the practical consequences of the introduction of the Euro. He quickly discovered that nearly all Europeans had a few foreign coins lying around in a drawer somewhere, which would probably never be exchanged. A small market analysis revealed that of the 28 billion coins in the eleven Euro countries, only 60 percent would be exchanged and the other 40 percent was doomed to end up on the scrapheap. Geert realized that there was a lot of money to be raised for charity.
In July 2000 he presented a plan to his Lions Club Venlo. The aim of this plan was to collect one percent of the foreign coins in the Netherlands, which would produce a net revenue of 14 million Dutch guilders. The president of the Lions Club Venlo embraced Geert's idea. He then set up a nationwide organization, attracting the participation of more than five hundred service clubs. In the end the mega operation brought in 12 million Euros (26.4 million guilders). This money was subsequently donated to around fifty good causes spread across the globe.
Kusters Engineering not only supports local, national and international aid projects but also endorses the General Business Principles of the Syntech Group, based on the OECD Guidelines for International Enterprises for corporate social responsibility.

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The fourth generation

9 How can my company become one hundred years old?

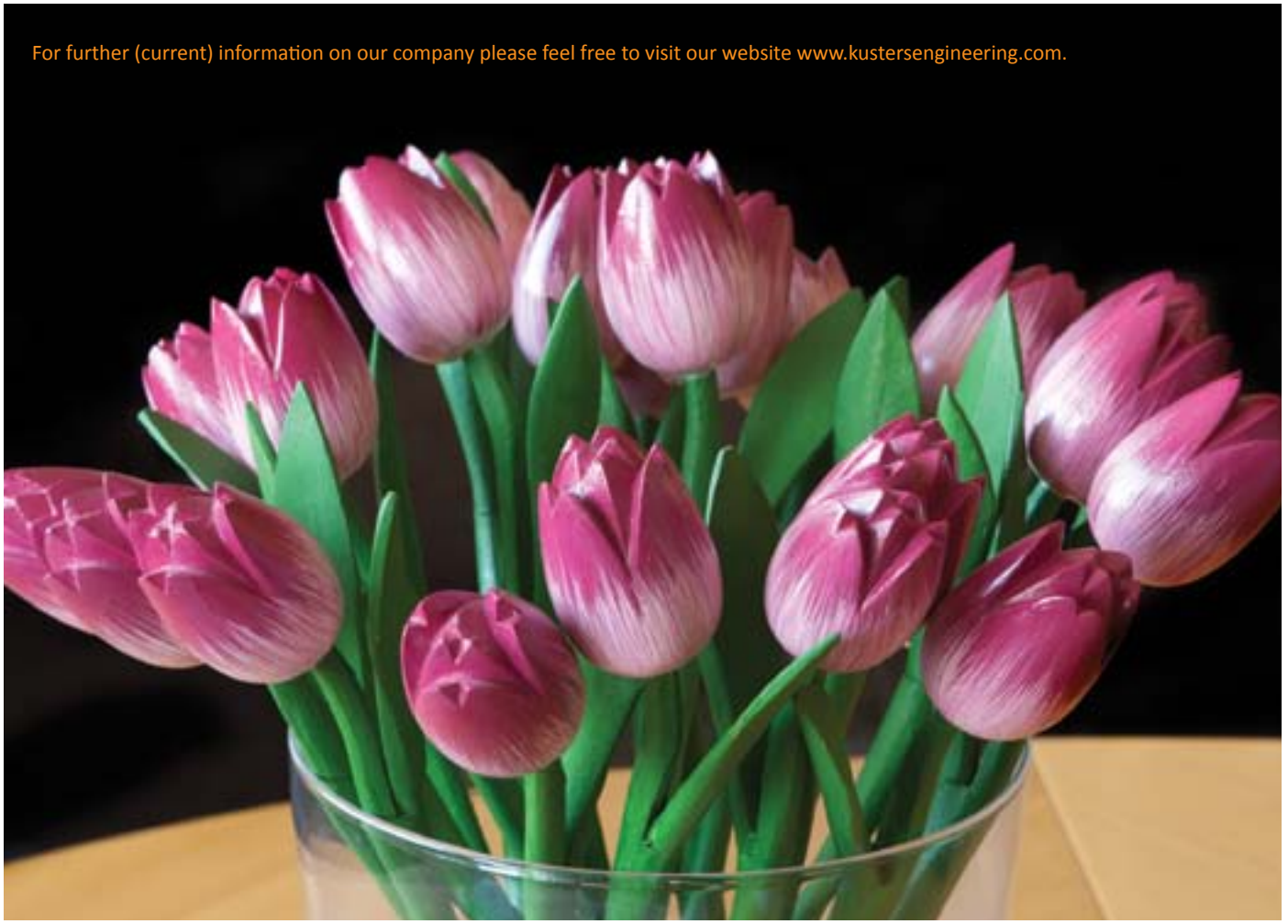
The seven virtues of a centenarian...

Virtue 1: Balance between preservation and innovation
Virtue 2: Balance between innovation and imitation
Virtue 3: Balance between market-orientation and self-will
Virtue 4: Balance between widening and focus
Virtue 5: Balance between value and values
Virtue 6: Balance between identity and flexibility
Virtue 7: Balance between involvement and autonomy

It is the job of - and the challenge for - the fourth generation to preserve the balance in the organization:

- Be moderate and level-headed
- Ensure balance in the directorate
- Make time for an annual reflection session

(Source: Prof. Dr Ron Meyer – Professor of Business Strategy, University of Tilburg)

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Notes

1 The ‘parent company’ in Arcen was later continued by Toon's son Piet and existed until the 1950s. After this company ceased trading, Piet worked for Harrie Snr for several more years. The building of the (traditional) forge in Arcen is still standing and is now part of hotel/restaurant the Maasparel.

2 In 1921, a mere fifty metres from Handerie's forge, Wim started a wagon-making firm. His company soon went on to specialize in the construction of wooden and later steel coachwork. The company exists to this day under the name VDL Kusters. Like Kusters Engineering, VDL Kusters has been established on the Veegtes industrial area for many years now.

3 More on Caubo's initiative can be found in: Paul Seelen, Venlo. De Stad van Lol en Plezeer, Venlo 2009, pp. 12-13.

4 See: Jan van Lieshout, En de boer..., hij gardeniert voort..., Venlo 1991.

5 Jan Heyn Jr., Mijlpaal 60, 1889-1949 20 maart, Biografie van een bedrijf. Uitgegeven bij het zestigjarig bestaan der N.V. Pope’s draad- en lampenfabrieken te Venlo, Eindhoven 1949.

6 Handelingen Gemeenteraad Venlo 1910-1911, nr. 328. See also: Gemeentearchief Venlo (GAV), archive no. 52, Gemeentesecretarie II en Jaarverslag Kamer van koophandel Venlo 1911, inv. nr. 63.

7 In 1918 and 1922 the policy was amended. In the end the annual premium worked out at fl. 16.46. Business was going well.

8 A comprehensive account of the history of Nedinsco can be found in:
Frans Hermans, ‘Een up-to-date modern gebouw’. The Nedinsco complex at Venlo, Venlo 1996. Incidentally, after the liberation the company was confiscated by the Dutch government and later taken over by the Dutch entrepreneur Geert Beusker. It exists to this day, and is still a highly innovative company.

9 The old watermill still exists, though the mill's wheel is gone. Nonetheless, for older residents of Venlo the name Onderste Molen ('Lowest Mill') will always be associated with the natural baths of the same name, which were closed at the end of the 1980s.

10 For the purposes of the first greenhouse in Venlo the State and the local authority together set aside a subsidy of fl. 800 - a considerable sum of money in those days. Interested parties were able to register their interest. The lucky one was selected by drawing lots.

11 The Venlo Warenhuis was a chain of small roofs 1.80 m high (+ 0.60 m ridge) 2.87 m wide, later 3.20 m.

12 On the 1926 disaster see also: Ad Bogers, De watersnoodramp van 1926 in Venlo en Blerick, in: Venlo’s Mozaïek. Hoofdstukken uit zeven eeuwen stadsgeschiedenis, Maastricht 1990.

13 It was agreed that Handerie would get three quarters and Harrie Snr one quarter of the profit. If a loss had been made, then Handerie would bear that loss alone.

14 The old premises was leased consecutively to the grain trader Peters Van Oyen, a boxing gym, a glazier (De Jong) and a stationery firm.

15 From: Jan Derix and Leo Verheggen, Noord-Limburg weet je nog? 1950-1955, Venlo 1976, p. 34.

16 For an overview of the residential areas completed in this period see: Frans Hermans, Venlo in de Wederopbouwperiode 1945-1970, Venlose Katernen deel 2, Venlo 2005.

17 The swimming pool in Panningen, which is now called the Waterlaot, celebrated its 40-year jubilee in 2009.

18 In those days many labourers went to work in Germany because the wages were higher.

19 The younger brothers Hans and Paul would also go on to join the company.

20 See also: Peter Rijk and Louis A.F. Godschalk, KRO Brandpunt in de markt, 1987.

21 In the years that followed, Kusters' idea would be echoed several times by other manufacturers. The processing of chicken litter has now become standard practice.

22 From a letter to Wiel Kusters from Pieter Burghoorn dated 19 March 2004 on the occasion of Wiel's departure.

23 The next trade show is planned for 2012. It will conclude the centenary festivities.

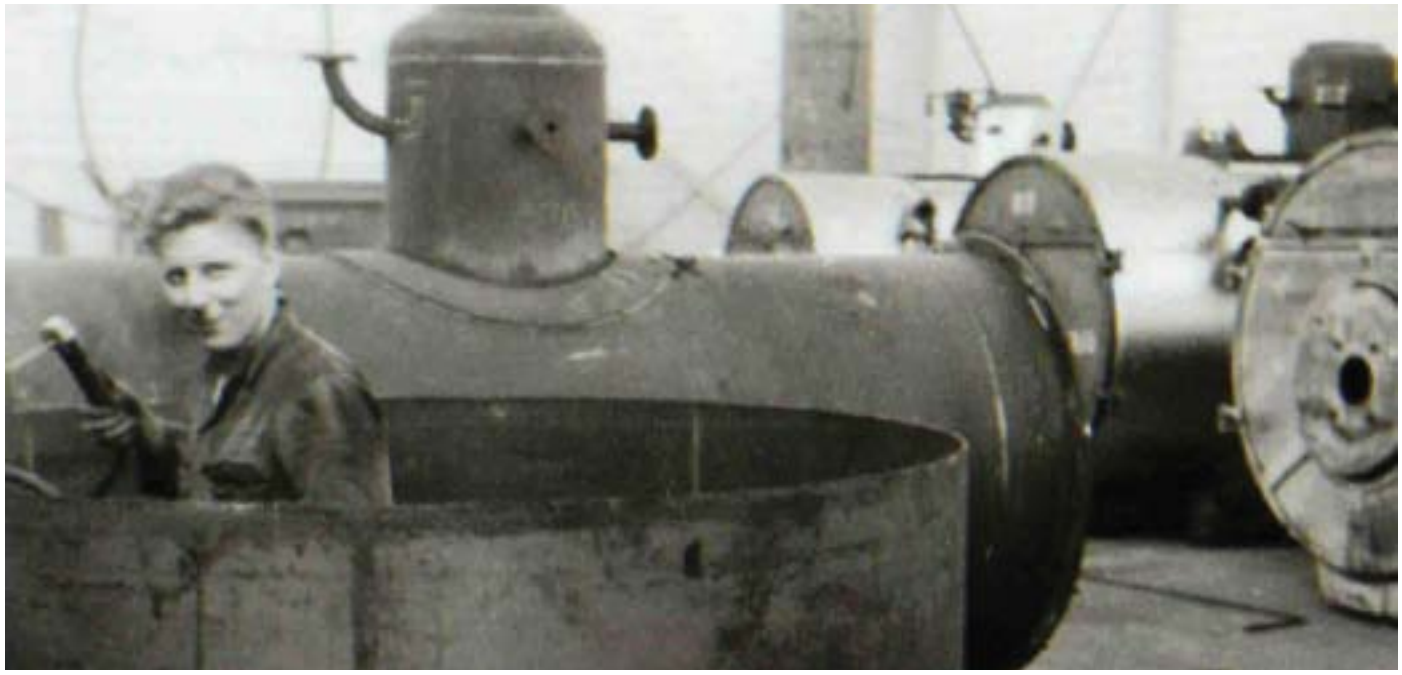
24 A number of these pieces formed part of the ‘Dag Gulden, Hallo Euro’ ('Goodbye Guilder, Hello Euro') exposition in the Limburgs Museum in Venlo in 2001.

[97]

[97] Abstract art made of shredded banknotes by Venlo-based artist Fons Schobbers.

Timeline

1911 (9 June) : Handerie Kusters starts up a forge on the Zuidsingel in Venlo.
1925 : The first Venlo Warenhuis is put into use.
1926 : The River Maas bursts its banks. The forge is flooded by over half a metre of water.
1944 (November) : The company sustains considerable damage due to the hostilities.
1950 : Handerie is succeeded by his son, Harrie (Snr).
1951 (16 June) : Inauguration of a premises for the company in the Veegtes industrial area.
1955 (24 June) : Construkta Stahlbau (Borschemich, Germany) founded for the purposes of selling greenhouses in Germany.
1955 : Production of construction lifts started.
1957 : Change of name: NV Constructiewerkplaats v/h Kusters en Zn.
1959 : Start production of construction lifts.
1969 : Eurosport BV founded; Kusters introduces the prefab swimming pool.
1973 : Third generation takes the helm: Harrie (Jnr), Wiel, Martien and Geert.
1977 : Kusters becomes importer for the Benelux region of MOCO 'waste and tyre reduction machines'.
1978 : Kusters supplies first machine for the destruction of banknotes, postage stamps and suchlike (to Joh. Enschedé in Haarlem).
1982 : First central bank, the Banco de Portugal, buys banknote shredder.



1983 : First (trial) unit for processing chicken litter.
1986 : Harrie Kusters Snr passes away.
1987 : De Nederlandsche Bank and others follow Portugal's example…
1989 : As does the Bank of England.
1989 : One company becomes two: Kusters Engineering, specializing in the destruction of waste; and Kusters THO specializing in air heaters, air conditioning and related products.
1995 : First edition of Kusters' own International Currency Industry Suppliers (CIS) Exposition.
1999 : Kusters concentrates on shredding money and relinquishes the rest of the recycling sector.
2000 : First coin-crusher in use, at De Nederlandsche Bank.
2001 : Kusters India established, the first major office outside of Europe.
2006 : Kusters opens an office in Washington for the Intelligence market.
2008 : Launch of Syntech Master Plan, which is to turn Kusters Engineering into a true multinational.
2011 : Kusters turns 100.

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Photography

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Colophon

Kusters, One Hundred Years of Balance 1911-2011

Text: Paul Seelen (Paul Seelen Productions)

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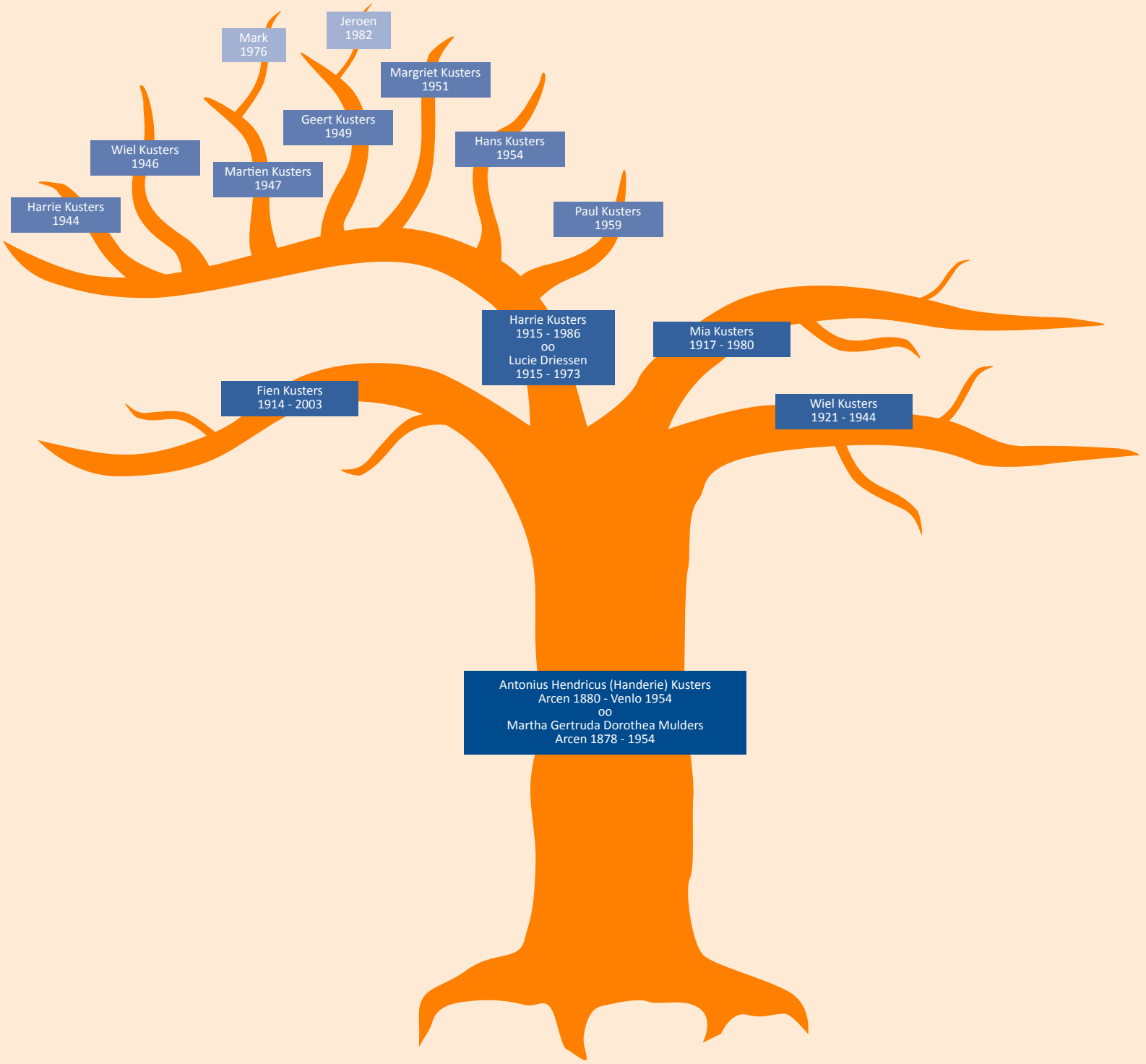
Jeroen
1982
Mark
1976
Margriet Kusters
1951
Geert Kusters
1949
Wiel Kusters
1946
Hans Kusters
1954
Martien Kusters
1947
Harrie Kusters
1944
Paul Kusters
1959
Harrie Kusters
1915 - 1986
oo
Lucie Driessen
1915 - 1973
Mia Kusters
1917 - 1980
Fien Kusters
1914 - 2003
Wiel Kusters
1921 - 1944
Antonius Hendricus (Handerie) Kusters
Arcen 1880 - Venlo 1954
oo
Martha Gertruda Dorothea Mulders
Arcen 1878 - 1954