One hundred years ago four brothers, Ben, Ern, Ted and Bill Gordon began an engineering business at the corner of Ross and Inglis Streets, Port Melbourne with a financial backing of £75. Later three more brothers, Arthur, George and Ed joined the business. The brothers were of German descent and their family name was Gerlach. However during WW1 they found it difficult to find work due to the non-acceptance of Germans, so they changed their name to Gordon.

Two years later in 1919 the business moved to Union St, Brunswick. Initially their factory was a tin shed in a paddock with a single lathe but over time they established a substantial manufacturing and administrative complex. In 1923 the business was incorporated as a company with the name Gordon Brothers Pty Ltd. Later offices were also established in Sydney, Adelaide and Perth.

Gordon Brothers became a pioneer in the development of the refrigeration industry in Australia and in 1922 produced one of the first totally enclosed ammonia compressors mainly for small dairies and butcher shops. In 1931 the company produced its own ‘Jack Frost’ refrigerator and the Jack Frost beer cooler became well known in hotels at the time.
During the Second World War the company’s activities were diverted into the production of equipment for the war effort. This included cordite mixers, bullet-testing ovens, blood bank equipment and portable ice-making machines.

Following the war, Gordon Brothers contributed to the work of the United Nations relief programs in Asia and the Colombo Plan. This involved the manufacture of 40 ice-making plants for China and supplying 60 self-contained refrigerated air-conditioning units to India.

The company continued to develop and manufacture new products and these included reciprocating compressors, evaporative condensers, air coolers, capillary air washers, mortuary cabinets, cool rooms, refrigerated display cabinets, ice tank coils, water chillers, smoke houses, and bakery equipment. The company also entered into a license agreement with Vilter USA to manufacture their reciprocating compressors in Australia and the company also had licensing agreements with Dunham Bush USA and Brunner USA.

Almost from the inception Gordon Brothers developed a close relationship with a major British public company, through its local subsidiary, Baker Perkins Pty Ltd, which specialised in the supply of baking and food processing equipment, including large ovens for major bread baking companies. Gordon Brothers became their principal manufacturing subcontractor for this equipment in Australia and this part of the Gordon Brothers business grew substantially, eventually leading to the building of an additional factory in Reservoir in 1960 specifically for the manufacture of equipment for Baker Perkins.
In the 1980’s Gordon Brothers established a new factory in Bendigo and commenced the manufacture of screw compressor packages, purpose built skid mounted refrigeration packages and large scale automatic plate freezers for the meat industry. It also moved the manufacture of other products such as galvanized fin coil evaporators, pressure vessels and packaged equipment from Brunswick to the Bendigo factory. New offices were also opened in Brisbane, Townsville and Griffith in addition to the existing offices in Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide and Perth.

From as early as 1925, Baker Perkins began acquiring shares in Gordon Brothers and this shareholding gradually increased until in 1969 Gordon Brothers became a fully owned subsidiary of Baker Perkins. Shortly after that time Baker Perkins acquired its own factory and the manufacturing arrangement with Gordon Brothers was terminated, leaving it with just its core refrigeration and air conditioning business.

In the 1970’s Gordon Brothers attempted to expand rapidly into large air conditioning contracting which resulted in substantial losses and this led to a decision by Baker Perkins to institute a major downsizing of the company in 1977. The factories in Union St, Brunswick and Reservoir were sold and the business moved into smaller premises, also in Brunswick, which has continued as the company’s head office to the present time.

In 1981 the then Finance Director of Baker Perkins, Ian Sleeth, was involved in this restructure and he successfully negotiated to buy the Gordon Brothers business from Baker Perkins, which then continued under his ownership for the next 25 years. The company decided to specialise only in industrial refrigeration and from a small base in 1981, Gordon Brothers achieved steady but considerable growth to now become the major company in this field in Australia.

The ability to adapt to changing circumstances has been integral to the company’s longevity. From being a company that manufactured nearly all the products used in its refrigeration systems, Gordon Brothers now have the ability to locally package the best equipment from around the world to provide unique cooling solutions for all our customers. Gordon Brothers continues to manufacture purpose built and custom designed products for a range of industries within a very competitive international market. It has also been in the forefront of embracing new technology that is relevant to its business.

Product and system innovation has always been at the forefront of business operations. In recent times this has included a joint development with the meat industry of a very effective system for the spray chilling of meat. During 2015 Gordon Brothers designed and installed a unique, energy saving mine cooling system which operates on waste heat using the latest absorption refrigeration technology.

Gordon Brothers has also been active outside of Australia and has installed and serviced refrigeration systems in many countries including Malaysia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, UK, Croatia, Thailand, Samoa, Vietnams, New Zealand, Fiji, Cambodia and Russia. At various times Gordon Brothers has also participated in joint ventures in other countries.

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In 2006 Gordon Brothers was purchased by the Hastie Group, an Australian public company. However following the demise of the Hastie Group in 2012 the Gordon Brothers business was purchased by the senior managers of the company and Ian Sleeth. Under this new ownership the company has continue to prosper and expand.

Gordon Brothers provides industrial refrigeration solutions to a wide range of customers in the food, beverage, chemical and mining industries. It is highly likely that a large percentage of frozen or chilled food products appearing in your local supermarket has, at some stage of its processing, been frozen or chilled using Gordon Brothers’ refrigeration equipment. Gordon Brothers refrigeration equipment finds its place some surprising locations. Some of the largest and most innovative mine cooling plants in Australia have been designed and installed by Gordon Brothers.

The company is very proud of its apprentice training programs having employed and trained large numbers of apprentices over the years, including nine at the present time. It has a loyal and highly qualified group of engineers, service technicians and support staff throughout Australia.

Although having achieved this significant milestone Gordon Brothers will continue to focus on its future to enable the company’s ongoing success for many years to come. There are many challenges ahead with important changes occurring in some of the major industries in which Gordon Brothers is involved. To continue to enjoy the confidence of its customers the company is very aware it must remain current and adapt to meet those changing needs and always strive to be a company of excellence and relevance in the way it delivers its products and services.

The company’s philosophy is to ensure engineering peace of mind for all its valuable customers by providing reliable and efficient refrigeration systems with 24 hour 7 day service backup.