



Richard Hammersley Heenan: engineer and industrial magnate

Richard Heenan was born in Parsonstown, County Offaly, Ireland in 1847, the third eldest son of George Heenan and Belinda Hammersley. His paternal grandfather John Heenan was a doctor in Parsonstown.

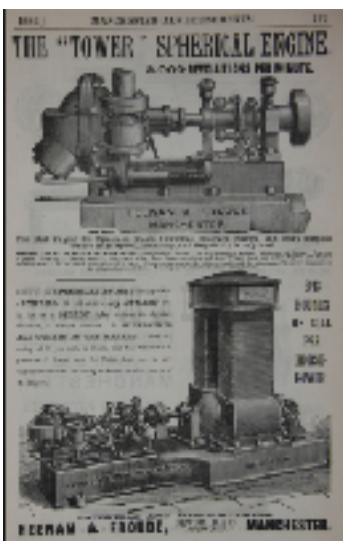
He appears to have been a model schoolboy. In the *Kings County Chronicle*¹ in 1862 he was highlighted as a young man who had "achieved high distinctions in the Model National School at the last examination where his intelligent answering in most difficult scientific and mathematical problems pleased and gratified a numerous assemblage."

Key Facts

Born: 1847, Parsonstown, Ireland
Married: Ada Drummond in Rathdown, Ireland 1884
Children: Richard Edward Hammersley Heenan, John Nelson Dundas Heenan, Olivia Beresford Hammersley Heenan, Kathleen Ada Heenan, Robert Lawrence Hammersley Heenan.
Died: 1920 at Kensington, London
Family group: 1003IRL

At the age of 17 Richard Heenan left Ireland to work as an engineer on state owned railways and other public projects in India². In 1879 he was appointed chief engineer to the public works department of the state of India Bawlfhore but ill health prevented him from continuing in that post beyond a year.

Steering a Business Empire

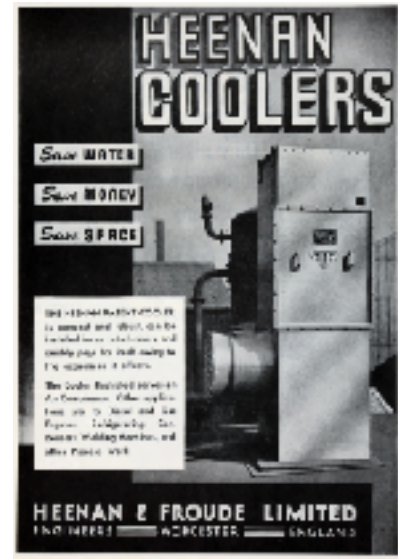


By 1880 he was back in the UK and purchasing Woodhouse & Co, a small-size engineering company in the Newton Heath district of Manchester, Lancashire. Richard Froude, a friend from his India days, joined him to form a new company under the name of Heenan and Froude.³

Together the pair expanded their business by acquiring new manufacturing operations in Aston, Birmingham. They commercialised the hydraulic (water brake) dynamometer invented by Froude's father to test engines for large naval ships. The company gradually extended its product portfolio to include tests on ship engines, cars and aircraft and began to focus on bridge building.⁴ The breakthrough for the company came however with a patent for a spherical engine which, for many years was the smallest engine on the market for the amount of power generated.

A period of rapid expansion ensued and the company's reputation grew worldwide. With the turn of the new century, a new chapter began as Heenan and Froude became a private limited company capitalised at £200,000. Richard Hammersley Heenan, as he became in deference apparently to his mother's maiden name, was named as chairman and managing director.

By the time the company reached its 25th anniversary, it employed more than 1,100 people in Newton Heath and Worcester with another 1,000 employed on projects overseas. Further growth was generated when The "Heenan" patented Refuse Destructor was introduced around 1901 with the promise that it could handle waste products without smell or dust. It was taken up by numerous urban authorities in England as well as Wellington in New Zealand and Brussels in Belgium.⁵



Key projects

- Cornbrook Viaduct near Manchester (one of the heaviest in England)
- Exchange Station Approach, Liverpool
- Great Central line from London to Nottingham
- Coastal railway, Isle of Man
- Folkestone Pier, Kent, England
- Wembley Tower, London
- Bridges for the Cordova Central Railway, Buenos Aires
- Jetties, Rangoon, India

Blackpool Tower

Blackpool Tower is perhaps the most recognisable project in which Richard Heenan's business empire was involved. Inspired by The Eiffel Tower in Paris it was opened to the public in May 1894. At 158 metres high it dominated the sea front in the town of Blackpool. Today it ranks as the 135th tallest freestanding tower in the world.⁶

Heenan & Froude of Worcester were appointed structural engineers, supplying and constructing both the tower, the electric lighting and the steel front pieces for the aquariums within the complex.



A Public Servant

A staunch supporter of the Conservative party, Richard Hammersley Heenan took a keen interest in local government affairs. In 1902 after a robust campaign he was elected as a member of Manchester City Council, with a large body of support coming from his own workers. Moving to North Wales a few years later he continued his political involvement with a seat on Colwyn Bay District Council⁷. In 1906 he was selected as a magistrate for Denbeighshire, Wales.⁸

He commented regularly on business and economic issues. In one contribution in 1890 he wrote a letter to *The Standard* setting out a scheme for destroying the proposed Channel Tunnel 'in the case of necessity', so as to overcome the objections to its construction from the Military. He claimed to have shown the plans to the heads of the War Office, Lord Wolseley, and Lord Charles Beresford, who did not refute its feasibility.⁹ Having joined the board of Marconi Wireless Telegraph Co in 1909, he spoke at the AGM about the greater importance of know-how versus patents.¹⁰

At the age of 71, Richard Hammersley Heenan retired from his role as Chairman and Managing Director of Heenan and Froude in 1918. He died in London in 1920, leaving his wife Ada and five children.

This profile is part of the Heenan One Name Study - a project registered with the Guild of One Name Studies. The idea is to understand the origins of the surname and how it is distributed worldwide. As part of this research I am collecting all references to the surname HEENAN wherever they occur in the world.

If you have any Heenans in your ancestry and want to know more about this surname do visit the blog site www.heenan.one-name.net

New contributions are always welcome so you have information please contact heenan@one-name.org.

¹ *Kings County Chronicle* Dec 24, 1862

² *Manchester Courier*, July 3, 1906

³ *Manchester Courier*, July 3, 1906

⁴ <http://froudedyno.com>

⁵ *Manchester Courier*, July 3, 1906

⁶ www.skyscrapercenter.com. Retrieved March 2018.

⁷ *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* February 20, 1902

⁸ *Landudno Advertiser*, July 7, 1906

⁹ *The Standard*, 1 April 1890. Letter signed R. Hammersley Heenan, M. Inst C.E., Newton-heath Ironworks, Manchester and dated 31 March

¹⁰ *The Times*, 2 July 1909