

# Seaking Electrical



HMS *Queen Elizabeth*,  
pictured here at Portsmouth

Seaking Electrical Ltd was incorporated on April 21, 2001, to provide maintenance and project work for the marine and industrial sectors. Directors David Gillam, Eric King, Martin Sealeaf and Chris Dahill formed the company to provide opportunities in support of commercial shipping, ferries, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, the Royal Navy, cruise ships and superyachts. Primarily an electrical contractor, Seaking employs 71 people and is consistently able to supply a flexible and responsive service for its clients. Martin expands on the state of the marine sector and discusses the issues it faces going forward.

Our main client is Cammell Laird, a famous shipbuilding, refurbishment and conversion company based in Birkenhead. We support their operations with electrical design and installation, control panel manufacture and general refurbishment work.

As the prime electrical contractor for Cammell Laird, we have grown alongside them and consequently have had to develop complex internal infrastructure and processes to support them appropriately. The success of this relationship has ensured similar security, growth and stability for us – we've had to create more office space, for example, as we've taken on more staff to accommodate such a significant amount of work. This has ultimately equipped us to work at a higher standard across other projects.

## Supporting major maritime projects

As part of our contracts with Cammell Laird, we have worked on the flight decks of sections of both *Queen Elizabeth*-class aircraft carriers. In September 2017, we also

### FACTS ABOUT SEAKING ELECTRICAL

- » Directors: David Gillam, Eric King, Martin Sealeaf, Chris Dahill
- » Incorporated in 2001
- » Based in Birkenhead
- » Services: Marine and industrial electrical design, installations and refurbishments alongside the manufacture and installation of control panels
- » No. of employees: 71
- » Certified to ISO 9001 and ISO 14001
- » [www.seakinggroup.co.uk](http://www.seakinggroup.co.uk)

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began work on installing a completely new bridge on the RFA *Fort Victoria*, which we completed in October last year.

We also have a broad client base which requires us to travel to other shipyards, both in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, covering other market segments of the marine sector – in 2018 alone, we completed projects on 26 superyachts.

To ensure we provide only the highest quality of works across these projects, we have adopted a culture of continuous development and set in place stringent internal management systems. By improving project management skills, we have been able to focus on de-risking projects.

As a result of this dedication to internal consistency, we transitioned our ISO certifications to the 2015 standards for 14001 and 9001 last year.

### Low oil prices and regulations in the commercial shipping sector

Over the last five or six years, low oil prices have affected all shipping areas – be it commercial or leisure. Charter rates are lower than usual, and ships are being taken off routes before being stored or scrapped.

Across the board, belts are tightening – owners and ship management companies are feeling the pressure because of environmental targets and International Marine Organization regulations. We want to be as sustainable as we possibly can – it’s a big part of what we do. That said, however, new IMO regulations mean that owners and companies will have to install new systems to reduce emissions.

Some companies are already abreast of such developments, having bought into sustainability initiatives suitably early. We have installed such systems on several commercial ships and have technical agreements in place with a manufacturer to take advantage of this change in the market. While we understand that such a dramatic regulatory change does make things difficult in some capacity, we believe that embracing such a change as early as possible will be beneficial for both our operations and our clients.

### A new strategy – diversifying into the superyacht sector

In recent years, we have refined our online presence to attract new clients in line with our growth alongside Cammell Laird. We have developed a new website to better reflect our services and composed a dedicated digital marketing strategy involving the use of targeted news stories.

Over the last six or seven years, we have looked more towards working on superyacht contracts and have slowly developed a rewarding presence in the sector.

While RFA and commercial shipping remain the bulk of what we do, this diversification is incredibly beneficial for Seaking. As such, our contracts in this market segment take us all across the globe.

RFA *Fort Victoria*





## A growing shortage of young, skilled staff

Some 14 years ago at Seaking, we identified a growing concern with our workforce. Although experienced, staff were ageing, and we recognised that we would somehow have to retain their considerable base of knowledge before many of them retired. In effect, we ask our apprentices to shadow the experienced engineers, thus learning on the job by observation and gaining installation experience.

We employ at least four new apprentices every year. To date, we've taken 44 through the process from start to finish – now they are fully qualified for electrical work in the maritime sector. We also have been able to tap into the resettlement of skilled military personnel and attract a number of experienced naval electrical engineers.

## A changing European situation

With the leaving date set for March 29, 2019, Brexit is on the horizon. The uncertainty surrounding the consequences of such a deal could potentially be of critical importance for our business – considering the international nature of commercial shipping, we could encounter difficulties. If passport control becomes more rigorous or we have to apply for visas, processes which usually take moments could be delayed.

Additionally, while we don't export to Europe, Seaking staff do work within the EU on vessels. Foreign tax laws may prove to be another difficulty – as will travel prices if they rise as a consequence. Finally, one of our equipment suppliers, Schneider, is based in France – if their prices rise after we leave, that will affect our cost base and productivity.



We employ at least four apprentices every year, and they shadow senior engineers to gain practical experience

As an agile and forward-thinking company, we are dedicated to innovating to survive going forwards, and while we are confident that we'll be fine, uncertainty is never good in any business situation – further guidance from government would be more than welcome at this difficult juncture.

## Staying afloat – the future looks prosperous

Cammell Laird's future over the next ten years has been secured by way of their winning through life support contracts for nine RFA vessels and four Tide-class tankers, plus five naval frigates as a part of the Type 45 Power Improvement Project.

We look forward to supporting them over the next decade and beyond but also want to focus on diversification into other market segments. A good third of our business already comes from other contracts and different areas of the market – and considering that we're one of the few English electrical companies in the marine sector that have the flexibility, resources and technical ability to consistently impress across the board, we're confident this trend will continue for a long time to come.

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