



Penny Nuclear lifts its fortunes with F4N

Penny Nuclear, a specialist designer and manufacturer of lifting and mechanical handling systems, is winning new work in decommissioning and targeting new build opportunities after being granted Fit For Nuclear.

Penny Nuclear's parent company, Penny Hydraulics, was founded in 1978 in the coalfields of north-east Derbyshire to repair mining equipment. The company diversified into hydraulic lifting equipment for commercial vehicles and the beer trade, and has continued to expand into new applications and markets.

"We've always undertaken bespoke projects," says Simon Pykett, general manager for Penny Nuclear. *"We designed and manufactured a radioactive waste retrieval system for Dungeness in 2004 as a special project. That went extremely well, so we quickly realised we could offer something to the nuclear industry."*

As head of the new Nuclear division, Pykett soon secured a direct contract with Sellafield Ltd for three lifting beams. Sellafield and Magnox are now among the group's largest customers for its lifting and mechanical handling solutions and high-end fabrication work.

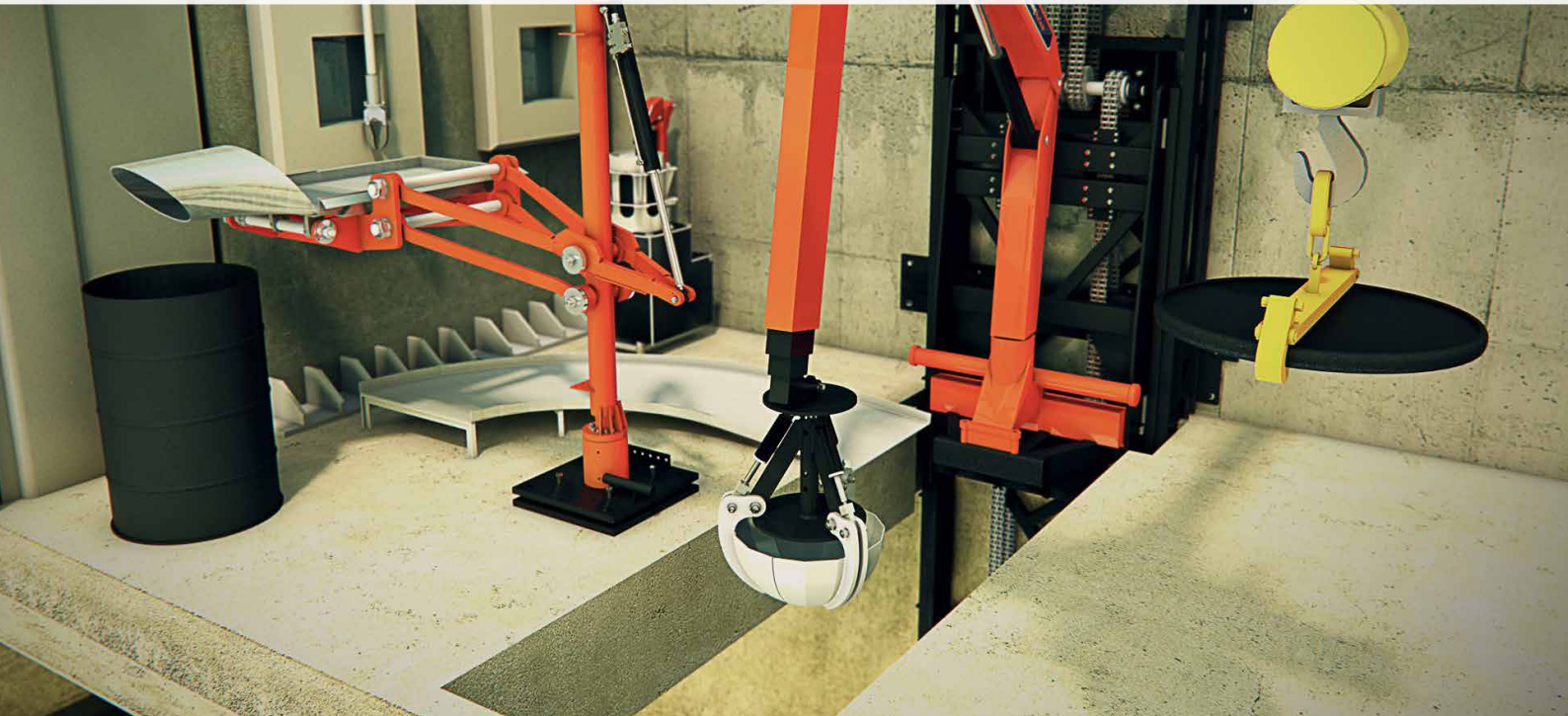
The company entered the Fit For Nuclear programme in 2015, to gain additional support as it pursued opportunities in the new build programme at Hinkley Point.

The initial F4N assessment identified some areas for development – ironically, Pykett recalls, the report came in within days of a significant purchase order from Sellafield. *"Some of the gaps on our assessment, such as visual communication on the shopfloor, seemed to be requisites for tier two customers, but not necessarily the tier ones,"* he says. *"Since then, we've ticked all the boxes, and now have the in-house capabilities and tools to tackle the other areas. The process has taken longer than we expected, because we were busy delivering nuclear projects."*

With support from F4N industrial advisor Kevin Ross, Pykett focused on formalising the firm's continuous improvement and lean manufacturing processes. *"We always embraced continuous improvement, but it was never truly structured or formalised,"* he notes.

"We enrolled everyone on a half-day introductory course, then seven of us went through yellow belt training on six sigma and lean. When we first proposed it, there was a bit of resistance from the shopfloor but, after the half-day training, they started to actually appreciate how small improvements can make a big difference."

"We were subjected to a major audit by a contractor. Because of the process we'd been through with F4N, we were able to pass that with flying colours."



Penny Nuclear was granted F4N status in December 2018, and is already reaping the benefits of the journey. *"After formalising and completing the initial action plan, we were subjected to quite a major audit by a large tier two contractor,"* Pykett says. *"Because of the process we'd been through with F4N we were able to pass that with flying colours. That led to a contract which we're delivering at the moment. It has opened the doors, and we are looking at more work in new build and in defence."*

Penny Nuclear now has around £2 million turnover, and a growing team of 15 full-time employees. The wider Penny Hydraulics business has also invested in growth, opening a new £2 million facility on its site in Clowne in October 2017 – and, more recently, building a new storage facility to mitigate the risks posed by Brexit.

Decommissioning remains the biggest opportunity for growth, and the company is increasingly working with major tier two suppliers including Cavendish Nuclear, Graham Engineering and Nuvia as well as the site licence companies.

"That's where we can offer something to the marketplace

that perhaps others can't – we pride ourselves on being a one-stop shop, including in-house design and manufacturing," Pykett says. *"We've always been a bit under the radar because of working directly with Sellafield and Magnox, but as more framework arrangements come through to market we want to work more with the larger tier twos to offer them the solutions we have."*

www.pennynuclear.com

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