

MARKET TIMES

PAGE 2-4
NEWS BITES

PAGE 6-7
CHANGING TRADITION

PAGE 10-11
HALLEY MERRY

PAGE 14-15
HOT FROM CHILE



Everyone in this photo has worked at NCGM for 30 years or more - pages 8-9



Editor's Message



Next year, we'll mark half a century since this Market relocated from WC2 to SW8 and more details of how we're going to do that will emerge over the next few months. The centre page spread of this issue of Market Times is a moment-in-time photo that captures 68 people who have worked at NCGM for more than 30 years and it felt like a real occasion when they all congregated in Buyers Walk mid-July. Some of them worked in or have memories of the old Covent Garden and we'll certainly be evoking those memories in the next 18 months or so. Our heritage is an important part of who and what we are and it will be both poignant and fun to look back at what the traders here have achieved across 50 years in Nine Elms.

Of course, in the last quarter, we've been marking the Coronation of a new King and Queen and sharing our celebrations with the local community wherever possible. The Crowning Glory competition run by the Flower Market received some great entries and a very worthy winning entry, while two installations on Merchants Way shined a light on both the Flower and Fruit & Veg Markets.

The Market hosted an event run by Capel Manor College in May, which looked to find out from employees where the main skills gaps in the floristry industry are. It was a different way of looking at what is a burning issue for the wholesale industry. On a similar front, on pages 6-7 we feature three women who have made quite an impact since joining Green & Bloom and ask whether they represent the beginning of a changing dynamic in the Market.

We always loves to hear from a happy customer and Max Halley, the UK's widely heralded King of Sandwiches tells us about the role his relationship with Rushton's the Chef's Greengrocer has played in his menu development. We love our suppliers too, of course, and Fruits from Chile gives us the first of two features on their industry, focusing on the upcoming berry season.

Also inside, you can read how our traders supported Food Exchange based charity FoodCycle as it raised more than £50,000 at its annual fundraising gala, while we find out how another Food Exchange business Planted is trying to change the world – bite by bite. Raj Patel, NCGM's fabled postmaster tells us about an external role he's taken on to represent and support colleagues in his industry.

Mission Kitchen is always busy and Community Manager Amy Win organises a series of talks to inspire anyone in the food and drink industry. Amy recruits the UK's leading voices to tell how they built their food businesses and share valuable lessons learned along the way. They are open sessions for aspiring food founders and entrepreneurs and participants are encouraged to ask questions and apply ideas to their own projects and businesses. The next talk features two tenants of the Market, Oppo Bros and Momo Kombucha – go to the missionkitchen.org to find out more.

Tommy

Tommy Leighton, Market Press Officer

Waste effort recognised with awards shortlisting



The Market's partnership with Bio collectors was a finalist at the prestigious 2023 Awards for Excellence in Recycling and Waste Management in the Retail, Commercial & Public Sector category. This recognition bore testament to a joint effort and commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility.

Bio collectors makes daily collections of waste from the Market on a bulk trailer, which is transported on specialist CNG trucks powered by bio-gas produced by the food waste collected from customers, including NCGM. Between March 2022 and February this year, 4,543 tonnes of food waste from the Market was processed at Bio collectors' Anaerobic Digestion facility in Mitcham – eight miles away – reducing congestion and pollution in central London by limiting the distance the waste had to travel.

The use of CNG vehicles has helped to significantly reduce Bio collectors' carbon footprint and reliance on fossil fuels, making its collections one of the most sustainable and unique in the business. The bio-gas produced

from recycling the food waste is fed directly to the National Grid and used by local homes and businesses, which also helps to reduce the UK's reliance on less sustainable sources. It also creates electricity which is used to power the Bio Collectors plant and AD process, creating a prime example of the circular economy.

The process also produces a nutrient rich fertiliser, called Digestate, which is spread on local farms in Surrey. Between March '22 and February '23, 3,453t of digestate was spread on 284 acres of farmers' land. By providing this to farmers, Bio Collectors helps to rejuvenate the soil and improve the quality of crops without the need for potentially damaging and environment-unfriendly, chemical alternatives.

Colin Corderoy, CGMA's Operations Manager, said: "We have an excellent working relationship with Bio collectors. They are local, their HGVs run on biogas generated from waste from the Market and they are also able to use our waste to pump gas back into the network – all of these things are good for our sustainability credentials, which is very important to us.

"It is also a big win for our tenants, who benefit from minimised costs for the disposal of organic waste, which represents a large percentage of their waste cost. They are also able to illustrate to their customers that they are actively engaged with and improving their own ESG performance."

Celebrating the Coronation of King Charles III on Merchants Way



From Wednesday 3rd May and across the Bank Holiday weekend, we celebrated the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla on Merchants Way, the public thoroughfare that connects Wandsworth Road with the US Embassy Quarter and passes through the Market.

Two brilliant installations were created by floral designers Sophie Hanna and Michelle Rust as a way for the Fruit and Vegetable and Flower Markets to mark the crowning of our new King with the local Nine Elms and Vauxhall community we have been part of for 49 years.

Each installation, in two separate alcoves on Merchants Way, featured three crowns adorned with wonderful, sustainably sourced products from our respective markets. One alcove was decorated with seasonal fresh fruit and vegetables, sourced from all corners of the globe, while the



other was adorned with fresh and faux flowers and plants.

Within the fruit and vegetable display, the three very regal crowns were laden with chili peppers, fennel, garlic, radishes, garlic, carrots, baby turnips and string beans and we also displayed small crates of watermelons, asparagus, limes, courgettes, Scotch Bonnets and more.

For the flower installation, Sophie and Michelle decorated the three golden crowns with roses, cornflowers, hydrangeas and blossom and the vases featured a glorious selection of ranunculus, lilies, hydrangeas, sweet peas and delphiniums.

In recognition of the beliefs and principles of His Majesty King Charles III and Queen Camilla, the products used were fairly and sustainably sourced. At selected times, CGMA was handing out leaflets to residents about job opportunities in their local market.



The Pantry wins Independent Retailer competition

The winners of the Fruit & Vegetable Market's Independent Retailer competition visited New Covent Garden and met the firms on Buyer's Walk in June, prior to receiving the first prize of £500 of fresh produce for their outlet.

Sisters Nikki Lemon and Kat Short made the early morning trip, to select fresh produce for The Pantry at Wickham Community Centre, near Portsmouth. The pantry provides a helping hand for those who need it. For a £5 donation, shoppers receive around £20

worth of fresh, frozen, and store-cupboard ingredients. It really makes a difference to those struggling with the cost of living. Membership is free, and you only pay when you visit the pantry.

Kat and Nikki (pictured above with Tenants' Association Chairman Gary Marshall) met several wholesalers during their visit and had a good look round the rest of the FV and Flower Markets. Kat explained the ethos and approach of The Pantry and emphasised how much of a difference the produce will make to her customers.

In the next issue of Market Times, we'll feature The Pantry and the incredible work the volunteers do for their local community.

Flower market to feature in new Channel 4 gameshow

A Channel 4 crew was in the Flower Market in early July to shoot an episode of brand new gameshow Double The Money.

Sue Perkins is to host the show which sees pairs of "ordinary" people being challenged over several weeks to go out in the real world and double their money in a race to win a hefty cash sum.

Contestants receive a modest starting pot of seed money and as soon as the clock starts ticking, they must devise smart strategies, bold hustles and ingenious ideas to turn their initial sum into a substantial fortune.

In this episode the two contestants had decided the best way of achieving their goal was flower-arranging (despite having no experience/training in



this very specialised area). Our valiant traders distributed as much sage advice and support as they could and the contestants ended up buying flowers from Green & Bloom (helped by Fiona) and foliage from Bryan at Porters (pictured), who generously chucked in a couple of buckets to help the guys along.

You'll have to wait for a while to see the outcome as Double The Money won't be broadcast until Spring/Summer 2024 – the Market features in Episode 1.

Sophie's design is her crowning glory

Sophie Powell of Unidentified Floral Object (UFLO) was the winner of the Crowning Glory competition at New Covent Garden Flower Market.

Customers of the Flower Market were asked to work with a wholesaler to create a floral crown to mark and celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla. In recognition of their Majesties commitment to all things sustainable, competition judge Caroline Marshall Foster, Editor of The Florist Trade Magazine was looking for entries that highlighted sustainable principles and practices.



Pictured: Graeme Diplock of Green & Bloom, judge Caroline Marshall Foster and Jo Breare of CGMA present Sophie, holding her winning entry, with her prize

Sophie won £500 to spend in the Market with her sustainably created crown, the frame of which she made using recycled wire and branches wrapped with Salim twigs and Bird's Nest Fern. To give it an even more regal feel, Sophie used royal purple Aquilegia and "because it reminded me of Tudor Trousers", she topped it off with Fritilaria.

UFLO worked with products bought from Green & Bloom and Porters Foliage. Judge Caroline said: "I absolutely loved this design. It ticked all the sustainability boxes and the use of relatively few stems had so much impact. As the renowned "Queen of Headdresses", Sophie proved her skills brilliantly once again."

In second place was Linda Cottee Flowers, winning £250, and in third was Peter Allan Bodnar, florist at Westminster Abbey, who won £150, also to spend in the Market.

What is fat's future?

An event at Mission Kitchen in June invited a diverse panel of expert speakers to talk about and debate the future for fat.

Fat is a building block of flavour, but still widely misunderstood. Present in practically every kitchen, is fat good, bad, ugly, tasty, a nutrient, an ingredient or an insult?

The full-day symposium of talks, workshops and eating experiences, brought together food founders, chefs, innovators, and pioneers under one roof to discover the new ideas that will transform how we consume and think about it.

The event introduced the latest game-changers in fat-based technologies and allowed attendees to learn from chefs and tastemakers on why fat is a key component of all things delicious, as well as widening the discussion to what fat does to our brains, bodies, body image, and our landscapes.



Capel Manor at Market to fine-tune student skills sets



Capel Manor College (CMC) held its first Floristry Employer Roundtable Event at New Covent Garden Market on 16th May, as part of its ongoing commitment to future-proof its students by providing them with the right skill sets to go out and make an impact in the business world.

Head of School Floristry and Event Styling Louise Quigley told attendees: “We want to make sure our Level 1-5 floristry courses are equipped to drive florists into the industry. This event is to help us understand how the industry is evolving – the trends and changes. Is there something missing, are there skills gaps that we as a college can take on board?”

All of the employers present were asked to fill in a form explaining the structure of their business and detailing the types of skills they felt would be most relevant to them.

Freddie Heathcote, a Director of Green & Bloom at New Covent Garden Flower Market, gave a talk about his business and the market, and Bryan Porter, Managing Director of Porters Foliage, underlined the importance of making training as relevant as possible and preparing students for the reality of the workplace. “There is a need to set people’s expectations of the job they are going to end up doing,” he said. “There is a view that floristry is a glamorous job – some of it can be, but however successful or famous you might become, it’s not all glamour, it’s hard, it’s difficult. We need students to have experience of as diverse a cross-section of the industry as possible – it’s not just about making a bouquet or a hand-tie.”

Pictured: Four Capel Manor ambassadors were also on hand to talk about the college



First English flat peaches on the Market

Customers of the Market were given exclusive access to the first English-grown flat peaches in July, courtesy of Mockbeggar Farms from Rochester, Kent.

The flat peaches, along with nectarines, apricots and regular peaches, were brought into Buyers Walk by Bevington Salads and distributed to retail customers, as well as foodservice clients across the South East by several of the Market’s catering suppliers.

George and Gary Marshall caused quite a social media stir with their reels and pictures of a visit to Mockbeggar, showcasing the first commercial crop of flat peaches and labelling them “astonishing” and “fabulous” while introducing grower John Myatt. “The colour, the consistency and the quality of their peaches is beyond anything I’ve seen,” said Gary Marshall. “The question everyone will ask is ‘do they eat?’”, he added, before demonstrating exactly how juicy and delicious the fruit was on film!



Nature’s Choice supporting next generation of roaring Lionesses

As the current generation of England’s Lionesses takes on all-comers in Australia and New Zealand, one NCGM trader is playing a part in hopefully helping the talented girls at Surbiton High School become the Lionesses that grace future World Cups.

Surbiton High, a private independent school for girls, has one of the country’s most successful football programmes for youngsters. Across the 2022/23 season, its A teams lost only a handful of nearly 200 games played, winning the year nine and year 10 English Independent Schools Football Association (ISFA) national titles and finishing runners up in the year 13 competition. The school also made history in winning a clean sweep of Surrey Schools Football Association titles, U12-U18, becoming the first school in either the boys and girls game to do so.

Martin Dykes of Nature’s Choice has doubled as dad/ supporter and unofficial sponsor – he supplies fruit and water for every team when they play in tournaments around the country. His daughter Ruby has just left sixth form having been part of the school’s trailblazing team.

Martin puts the success down to Zak Elbekri, the school’s Head of Football. “Zak has put so much effort into it and he really inspires the girls. He works so hard – his drive and dedication to the girls has been incredible,” said Martin. “He has unearthed lots of local talent and transformed the image of girls’ football in the area. His teams love him to bits.”

It can’t be that long before one of the Surbiton High players progresses to play for a high-profile senior team, a professional Women’s Super League outfit and who knows, to represent the Lionesses. “Each year we’re getting more and more really talented players and I think that’s because they are seeing the potential,” said Zak. “It’s definitely become one of the aims for us to see someone go on and play professionally. If they were to go on and represent their country too, that would be unbelievable.”

Obituary

Roy Swain

Roy Swain, a much-valued customer at New Covent Garden Market for 55 years, has died aged 85.

When Roy was born in Paddington in 1937, his father Charlie was already in the fruit game and buying from the old Covent Garden for his barrows in Edgware. Roy’s brother Johnny went into the trade too, working at Spitalfields, but Roy was a Covent Garden man from the first day working with his dad, aged 10.



Leaving Edgware Road, the family ran a successful greengrocery store in Burnt Oak for many years, before selling that up and moving into the markets. Having taken the business on from Charlie, Roy ran Blackbush market in Surrey, which was at the time the biggest Sunday market in Europe, and with son Mark now in the business, they worked markets across the south east through the week.

Roy’s lorry was a fixture at NCGM six days a week and he became one of the largest customers on Buyers Walk, liked and respected by everyone he did business with. Even after retirement at 65, he was involved in the business virtually every day, turning out to help Mark and the team wherever they were.

“The fruit game is a way of life, as it always has been for families like us who’ve been in it for decades,” said Mark Swain. “My Dad was my hero. I’ve looked up to him every day of my life and I’ve always aspired to be like him. I could not be a prouder son, or had a better Dad.”

Roy met his wife of the last 35 years at the Market. Lynn was also a fruit and veg market trader, on Portobello Road. Roy’s step daughter Gemma was also in the trade for a while.

The condolences of everyone at NCGM who knew Roy go to them and the rest of his family. May he rest in peace.

Roy’s funeral took place at St Peter’s Church in Chalfont St Peter’s at on 31st July.

Traders combine to support Market-based charity

Some of the UK's top chefs donated their time to cook up a meal for more than 100 diners at FoodCycle's annual fundraising gala, which raised more than £50,000. Several of our traders provided produce for the occasion

The gala evening was an opportunity to bring supporters and corporate partners together to share a meal and raise vital funds to help national food charity FoodCycle, which is based in the Food Exchange at the Market, to open Projects in more disadvantaged communities.

The select diners were a mix of FoodCycle friends and supporters - from volunteers to members of the FoodCycle team from around the country to corporate partners, patrons and many companies and individuals that have supported the charity in the past year.

In line with the charity's efforts to reduce food waste, Covent Garden Market Authority and Market tenants – The Menu Partners; D.D.P Ltd, Harwoods of London, S Thorogood & Sons; London Dairies and The London Herb Company – donated fruit and vegetables. San Pietro a Pettine donated



The evening was expertly hosted by food and drinks broadcaster, Nigel Barden with appearances from FoodCycle CEO, Mary McGrath MBE and FoodCycle volunteers, Robyn and Mark who spoke about the importance of FoodCycle community meals and what it means to volunteer.

Victoria Meier, Head of Fundraising at FoodCycle, said: "It was an absolute pleasure to see so many of our supporters coming together to share a delicious meal and support us in our aim to open FoodCycle meals in more communities across the country. We are incredibly grateful to the talented chefs and the various companies and corporate partners who donated either time, food, money or prizes to help make the event such a success. A huge thank you to each and every person involved."

What is FoodCycle?

FoodCycle opened its doors in 2009 with one London Project and since then has opened 71 Projects across England and

Wales. Its numbers are rising all the time, particularly since the cost-of-living crisis kicked in – for example in April 2023, the charity served a total of 7,034 meals to guests and volunteers compared to 4,416 guests and volunteers last year (a 59% increase). In the first half of this year, FoodCycle had served an amazing 46,568 community meals. The aim is to reach 100 Projects by 2025, but ultimately the vision is to make food poverty, loneliness and food waste a thing of the past for every community.

FoodCycle connects communities by bringing people together to share food and conversation. Week in, week out, thousands of volunteers across the country transform surplus food into healthy, delicious meals for anyone who needs them, no questions asked. Food poverty and loneliness are growing issues. By offering a safe, welcoming space to enjoy a free meal and company, FoodCycle brings people from all backgrounds and walks of life together, improving mental wellbeing and strengthening community spirit.

FoodCycle also runs a free Check-in and Chat telephone service, where volunteers make weekly calls to anyone in need of a natter.

How can you help?

There are plenty of ways to support FoodCycle – from becoming a corporate partner to helping with surplus food supply to individual and group fundraising to encouraging employees to volunteer at their local Project. All the information on how to support can be found on the FoodCycle website.

Website: foodcycle.org.uk
Instagram: @foodcyclehq
Facebook: @foodcycle
Twitter: @foodcycle

truffles for the pasta course and Crumbs Brewing supplied the beer selection.

The event was also supported by FoodCycle partner Just Eat and The Fishmongers' Company, who kindly gifted the use of their livery hall, their staff to help with the running of the event and the fish course.

Former royal Sous-Chef, Lorenzo Salami created the Amuse Bouche; Luke Tipping, Chef Director at Michelin-starred Simpsons in Birmingham was in charge of the Entrée; FoodCycle Patron and former Head Chef at The Italian Embassy, Danilo Cortellini, served up a freshly made pasta course; Fishmongers' Head Chef Stefan Pini was in charge of the fish course; and Ben Tish created a dessert incorporating surplus coffee grounds.

Above:
Danilo Cortellini and Stefan Pini
Right:
Victoria Meier
Top right:
Luke Tipping



Green & Bloom women could be changing the traditional order

Around 20 months since its formation through the merger of Zest Flowers and Arnott & Mason, Green & Bloom (G&B) remains firmly committed to its Nine Elms base. In the last 12 months, the introduction of three women to its sales team has not only provided the business with valuable new skills and a new perspective, but also promises to shake up the dynamic at the traditionally male-dominated Market.

The introduction of Account/Sales Managers Brogan McGuinness, 30, Lara Richens, 31, and Fiona Christensen, 32, was an important part of the project for G&B Managing Directors Graeme Diplock and Freddie Heathcote. To find out more, we talked to the ground-breaking trio

G&B are the first flower and plant trader in the Market to employ multiple women as salespeople and account managers. It's a significant change of direction and a real line in the sand moment for the Market – why do you think they have done that?

Fiona: I think Graeme and Freddie are progressive in the sense that they are always looking to evolve and take things in the direction that serves our customers best. The Zest/Arnott & Mason merger, the development of online sales and the modernising of our business structure have shown that in the last 18 months or so. When they brought the three of us in, it's clearly not been just because we're women, but I think they know that it was an important part of the equation.

Brogan: They saw that the business and the Market environment were ready for change. They didn't just want women to come and work here – they wanted women who had skills and knowledge that would add value to what Green & Bloom does.

Fiona: It's quite a brave thing to take on – to change the way you work in a market that has been doing it this way for so long.

Lara: No-one else has done it yet, but there's no doubt everyone has been watching what's happening here with interest. A lot of the old ideas about women working in the wholesale market and working these hours will hopefully be changing.

“ No-one else has done it yet, but there's no doubt that everyone has been watching with interest



What points of difference do you think the three of you bring to the trading floor?

Lara: There are a lot more smaller businesses and non-trade customers who come in these days. The regular, long-term customers don't need to ask as many questions – like 'how long will these last, upside down and out of water?' The boys who have worked here for years are hugely knowledgeable, but probably not ideal for answering some of the more specific floristry questions, which Fi and I can.

Fiona: They will know far better than we do where the best version of a particular variety of rose comes from at a given time of the year and lots of other stuff, so we complement each other brilliantly.

Brogan: With our different areas of expertise, I think we cover all bases now. Customers definitely seem to like that.

You all knew the Flower Market pretty well before you came to work for G&B. Do you think you and other women working here might be changing the feel and the dynamic of the Market?

Fiona: We obviously don't think about it every day, but there probably has been a change. It's true that to a customer, particularly new and particularly female, the Market could appear intimidating, loud or overwhelming. And to some people, that can be daunting.

Lara: I think the presence of more women possibly softens the edges a bit for some customers.

Brogan: [laughing] Don't mess with us though, we're not pushovers!

Lara: What Green & Bloom have done reflects the evolving Market and creative industry. The people we serve are no longer just florists, gardeners or vendors – we are also finding we have an influx of customers such as production companies, fashion houses and interior designers.

Brogan: It's the same with plants – when I started here, most of my customers would be men, largely market stallholders and increasingly now, I'm serving more people

with shops or working from home, especially with our online service which makes buying from home for collection so much easier and allows them to escape the early morning.

Has the experience of working in the Market lived up to your expectations?

Fiona: Previously I'd spent plenty of time in the Market as a customer and so I was aware of the job I was taking on. It is a lot more running around than I anticipated but it is always such fun and there's lots of banter.

Brogan: I think the banter and laughs is what makes the job what it is. It's what we enjoy and what makes the Market such a unique place.

Lara: Maybe it's luck and maybe they saw it in us, but I think we were the right type of people to start this process. We are all different characters and have different attributes and personalities that each bring something unique to the stand.

Fiona: One of the most important things about the Market is there is always room to just be 'you'. When there are tough moments, and everything is going at a million miles an hour, Graeme will always crack a joke that just lightens the mood and you forget that you were even rushed off your feet.

Brogan: The people are definitely the best thing about working here. I love the flowers and the plants, but 100% it's the people.

Lara: Someone asked me what I'd done at work the other day. I couldn't really remember the specifics, but I did know that I'd spent the whole day laughing. Not every day is like that, but lots of them are. Something I wasn't expecting was how you might walk in to work when it's dark outside, it could be hammering it down with rain, but walk in and you forget it's the middle of the night.

Fiona: It's a nice environment to be in – you're not in a horrible location looking at a computer screen, you're surrounded by people you like and beautiful flowers and plants.



Brogan: And if you're ever having a tough day, there is always someone here to give you a cuddle. Not just your colleagues - your good customers are your friends. You certainly see them more than your friends out of work!

How have the men in the firm responded to you being there?

Lara: The boys welcomed us into the family straight away and it might sound like a cliché, but it really is like a family.
Brogan: Yes, sometimes they're like annoying brothers!

Fiona: They do look out for us though – not in a chauvinistic way, more because they care and know we'd do the same for them.
Brogan: We're all able to take a joke and give as good as we get and we all put the work in. That might alter a few old-fashioned expectations.
Lara: So many people work from home these days, I don't think getting up at 12.30am would suit everybody. This probably isn't the right job for every woman by any means, just as it wouldn't be the right job for every man.

To get the management view on the thinking behind the impact the three women have made and how they came to employ them, we asked Graeme Diplock. He said: "We needed to change things around, both at Green & Bloom and in the Market. We wanted to up our game and make sure that we were delivering exactly what our customers needed and desired, but more than that, we wanted to change the perspective that people had of us as a business and of the Market generally.
"A lot of the customers here are women and while the majority were happy to be served by men, it's still important to be mindful of anyone who would feel more comfortable with there being more women around," Graeme added. "I think from a business point of view too, it can make things a bit more relaxed and balanced sometimes. Obviously this is nothing against men, but maybe at times there has been a bit too much testosterone flying about!
"Fiona, Lara and Brogan have been great. They are still relatively new to the Market – it certainly took me a long time to get completely bedded in when I started all those years ago, but they knew the industry before they came to Green & Bloom and they were used to the hours and the environment to a certain extent. The impact they have already made is fantastic and will stand us and them in good stead for the future.
"I think some of the other firms in the Market are looking at the girls on our team and asking themselves whether they can do the same. That can't be a bad thing, can it? There are far more women in the Market than there used to be and it's already changed the dynamic – we'll certainly employ more women if we can and it won't surprise me at all if we see a lot more women coming into the Market during the next couple of years. We are flying as a firm; we'll definitely need more people."

Above, left to right: Fiona, Brogan and Lara
Below: Freddie and Graeme



In Profile

Brogan
I worked on my uncle's stand at Colombia Road Flower Market for a while and then in hospitality – bars and events. My uncle, John Sait, also worked at New Covent Garden Market and he got me in as a Saturday girl at the Plant Stand. I loved it and almost immediately, I was working more days, although I was also packing fruit at New Spitalfields Market and working in hospitality at the same time. I've always been busy - I also had a spell as a teaching assistant and a few months as a football coach for kids in New York and New Jersey!
I worked with flowers before I worked with plants, but now I guess I've become a bit of a plant specialist. I didn't have any real desire to work in the flower industry or in markets, like most things in my life so far, it was just the way it went. The Plant Stand isn't in the market any longer and Freddie asked me whether I fancied coming and working for him. Of course I did and now I've been at Green & Bloom for about 15 or 16 months. I love it!

Lara
I studied Fine Art at university and although I enjoyed it, I realised that there wasn't going to be much money in it for me. So I went to Merrist Wood and did a floristry qualification as well as working in a local shop as florist. I later became a Lead Creative for contracts at a top florist in East London. Part of the role involved buying from the Market so I knew the environment already, and I was also often at my hotel clients before they opened up in the morning, so I was used to the early hours too.
I worked with Fiona and when she was offered the role at Green & Bloom, I was going through a tough time in the job. I handed my notice in soon afterwards and Graeme called and said 'why don't you come and work for me?' My family ran TA Miller Ltd, a company in old Covent Garden and the previous flower market at New Covent Garden. My mum and dad actually met through it – she was the granddaughter of the owner and he worked for the business. My parents (and I) were delighted to know that I was moving back into the wholesale flower industry because I think they felt like I was in some way returning to our family's home.

Fiona
I grew up on a foliage farm in Nelspruit, South Africa and then moved to London seven years ago after completing my Fine Art degree. I desperately tried to find a job – any job, but the job market in London was so saturated so I really struggled!
My first role was as a matron at a boarding school, where I was responsible for looking after a lot of 7-year-olds, which was an interesting experience but not one I could see myself doing forever. I wanted to move back to my creative and outdoor roots so did a course in floristry at the Flower Appreciation Society. I really wanted to be a florist so started working for a couple of shops whilst freelancing at the same place as Lara in East London, which later became a full-time roll. We worked closely together for about two months in the contracts team and we gelled really well, but they split us up, probably because our skills were valuable across a wider area, and so we didn't work so much together after that.
After what was a miserable Christmas, Graeme called and asked me whether I'd be interested in working for him and I jumped at the chance. I haven't looked back since! It also meant Lara and I finally got to work together again which was an added bonus.

This article has also appeared in The Florist Magazine

The heartbeat of the Market for 30+ years

New Covent Garden Market inspires loyalty, commitment, passion and a sense of community. This photo epitomises all of those things

On July 13th at 5am – at the end of another working night for most of these fellas, 68 people who have traded in the Market for 30 years or more congregated for a ‘team’ photo in the Buyers Walk they will all have trodden many thousands of times.

Most of these guys have worked in the Market for their entire career and they were joined on this happy occasion by several long-standing customers who also made the effort to be there and be part of the commemorative scene.

Many could date their first time at the Market back to the days in the old Covent Garden and one could even just about recall his Market debut as a wide-eyed youngster alongside his father in 1959!

Everyone is captioned with their name, current firm and the number of years they have worked in the Market.

The five inset pictures are people who turned up on the day, but for some reason haven't made it into the main photo.

Everything has to take part at a time and place, of course, and there are plenty of seasoned Market veterans who were unable to be there on this particular day. We're sorry you couldn't be in the picture this time, but salute you and everyone pictured here for your magnificent service to this great Market.





“ Many of these guys can trace their first steps in the Market back to the old Covent Garden

- 1 Simon Collier-Ward, Premier Wholesale, 47 years at NCGM
- 2 Jason Linke, The Menu Partners, 36
- 3 Spencer Cummings, Gilgrove, 47
- 4 John Lennon, Gilgrove, 31
- 5 Fred Hooper, Gilgrove, 54
- 6 Miles Browne, IA Harris, 31
- 7 Terry Woollard, recently retired, 43
- 8 Damian Fowler, Gilgrove, 32
- 9 Richard Harris, IA Harris, 42
- 10 Darren Webb, Yes Chef, 31
- 11 Nick Bagwell, Gilgrove, 32
- 12 Scott Moore, Mushroom Man, 36
- 13 Mark Burley, London Fresh, 35
- 14 Justin Denyer, Covent Garden Supply, 34
- 15 Geoff Lewis, Gilgrove, 32
- 16 Neil Brown, Neil Brown Herbs, 47
- 17 Bart Conway, Supreme Salads, 41
- 18 Martin Dykes, Nature's Choice, 34
- 19 Terry Thoroughgood, self employed, 32
- 20 Simon Greenhill, Greenhill Mushrooms Ltd, 40
- 21 Paul Schofield, Thornicroft, 38
- 22 Iain Furness, French Garden, 40
- 23 Nick O'Mahoney, London Fresh, 46
- 24 Alfie Lay, Lay's of Chelsea, 56
- 25 Wayne Patrick, Bruce White Ltd, 38
- 26 Chris Roach, CSR & Sons, 40
- 27 Michael Jenkins, Covent Garden Supply, 32
- 28 Danny Jenkins, Covent Garden Supply, 35
- 29 Marcus Rowleron, Le Marché, 41
- 30 Eric Carter, Customer, 40
- 31 Bruce White, Bruce White Ltd, 38
- 32 Terry Brock, London Fresh, 45
- 33 Barry Grant, Bevington Salads, 38
- 34 Duncan Easto, Tony's Café, 35
- 35 Paul Murphy, Yes Chef, 33
- 36 Andrew Luff, Allison Risebro, 36
- 37 Tony Glasgow, Nature's Choice, 46
- 38 Grant Stanton, Bar Fruit Supplies, 40
- 39 Steve Darby, Supreme Salads, 32
- 40 Mark James, Mushroom Man, 33
- 41 Andrew Gibbons, Supreme Salads, 41
- 42 Gus Lombardo, Lombardo's Deli, Dunstable, 54
- 43 George Kyrikides, 'The Printing Guy', 35
- 44 Kenny Marshall, IA Harris, 45
- 45 Geoff Fisher, Fisher of Newbury, 53
- 46 Nathan Humphries, French Garden, 31
- 47 Bob King, Le Marché, 50
- 48 Bob Bowers, Side Salads, 42
- 49 Gary Marshall, Bevington Salads, 44
- 50 Danny Murphy, Yes Chef, 59
- 51 Larry Roberts, Covent Garden Supply, 45
- 52 Shiva Yoga, New Covent Garden Post Office, 35
- 53 Dean Purcell, Premier Fruits, 43
- 54 Warren Peaty, Tony's Café, 30
- 55 Martin Wheeler, Yes Chef, 42
- 56 Darren Farragher, Le Marché, 30
- 57 Eddie Barrett, HG Walker, 41
- 58 Derek Pigott, Derek Pigott, 63
- 59 Paul Wise, Gilgrove, 58
- 60 Clive Sparshott, Customer, 61
- 61 David Watkins, 2-Serve, 33
- 62 John Lay, Lay's of Chelsea, 54
- 63 Raj Patel, New Covent Garden Post Office, 34
- 64 Pedro Dea, County Supplies, 35
- 65 Jon Blair, JB Motors, 33
- 66 Steve Gunning, Allied Catering, 39
- 67 Tony Hayward, P&I Fruits, 39
- 68 Ray Layton, Market Trader, 35



King Max of the sandwich

Max Halley is widely recognised as the UK's King of Sandwiches, having revolutionised the outlook of both the public and the industry on how we can imaginatively and mouth-wateringly upgrade the nation's most-eaten, but oft underestimated meal. Since opening Max's Sandwich Shop in Stroud Green in 2014, he has written a Sunday Times top-10 bestselling book on the subject and brought sandwiches to the fore on TV and across the printed media. Max also happens to be a very contented customer of the Market, as we found out when we chatted to him recently

Arguably most famous for its Ham, Egg & Chips sandwich and with Max quoted on its website as saying his Gravy Mayonnaise is what he'll go to his grave most proud of, it would be easy to assume that fresh produce is not front and centre of the menu at Max's Sandwich Shop.

To assume, as they say, makes an ass out of u and me, as this could not be further from the truth. A flick through the menu reveals just how big an influence fruit, vegetables and herbs have on the make-up of Max's incredibly creative concoctions. Everything is jam-packed full of ingredients included deliberately by Max to complement each other and "maximise the deliciousness".

It's fair to say that this isn't your run-of-the-mill sandwich emporium. The quality of the fayre at Max's restaurant is masked a little by a fun façade and a laid back approach, says the man himself. "The truth of my sandwich shop is that because it uses the word 'sandwich' in its name,

everyone underestimates the amount of cooking involved in the creation of those fillings. We're not buying in salsas or sauces, we're not buying in our meat already cooked – we're not a deli, we're a restaurant. Everything is made in-house and if it isn't meat, it is made from stuff supplied by New Covent Garden Market," he says.

The sandwiches are driven by deliciousness first and only then is every other factor taken into account, he adds.

"All of our meat glazes are the same standard you would have in a high-end restaurant and they all involve fruit and veg from the market. We make our own chips and crisps, so we buy a vast amount of potatoes. We use cassava to make crisps too. I love cassava – it has double the starch content of a potato, so it makes an extraordinarily crunchy crisp.

"Our most popular vegetarian sandwich contains pickled spring rolls, which means we buy an enormous number of carrots, chilis, cucumbers and beansprouts. We make a huge amount of pickles for 90% of our meat glazes, for which we buy loads more carrots and cucumbers, as well as onions and celery but then we also have a lasagne sandwich for which we pickle mirepoix."

Max's sandwiches involve plenty of herbs too. "The shop may only have 28 seats, but it's doing more than a thousand

covers a week," he explains. "So we are buying parsley, mint and dill in enormous quantities, to provide the herby salad element to the sandwiches.

"We buy masses and masses of vegetables of all varieties," adds Max. "Cassava and potato make up the majority of our crisps, there are herbs in nearly all of our sandwiches and obviously lettuce. I think it's an abomination when people say that lettuce is the crunchy element of a sandwich – that's rubbish. Lettuce provides freshness, not crunch. Crisps are crunchy. We buy lettuce for freshness, herbs for aromatics and potatoes for crunchiness."

Prior to opening his own north London restaurant, Max had had a working relationship with New Covent Garden Market for a decade, through working in other people's restaurants. He worked at LeCoq, a rotisserie chicken restaurant in Islington, and for the Salt Yard Group for several years, who he said "would I imagine



Happy Customer

★★★★★

Ham, egg & chips at the casino

On June 1, the Hippodrome Casino in Leicester Square added Max's sandwich menu into its food offer, spreading the Max's Sandwich Shop brand to a different audience. "It's a great, fun place to be involved with," says Max. "It's not my kitchen, but I've designed the menu and I go in there and tell them 'you're not putting enough mayonnaise in that'.

"You do not have to gamble to go there for a sandwich. You can just go there and have a drink and a sandwich. I think it's nice for people to know they don't have to go and play roulette, they can just go and play sandwich roulette!"

at that time have bought more courgette flowers from NCGM than any other customer!" He also worked for Arbutus, in Soho, for Anthony Demetre and Will Smith.

"I was a mixture of front-of-house and kitchen and I didn't go to the Market to buy at that time, I just unpacked the vegetables out of the boxes we had delivered," Max says.

However, that built an understanding of the breadth and quality of the offer in Nine Elms and, as soon as he could, Max made himself familiar with NCGM and his own business a customer. "The Market is vast; I've never been anywhere that compares to New Covent Garden Market," he says. "I couldn't get credit immediately as a new operator, but as soon as I'd built the business up a little bit, I was straight in.

"I buy from Rushton's The Chefs' Greengrocers (part of the Thorogoods Group). Basically, I will buy from wherever Ben Canning works because in my opinion he is an absolute hero. He has been brilliant for us and I'll do anything that he says.

"Please quote me on that! He's the nicest man in the world and he is the most thoughtful, accommodating, brilliant account manager I have ever encountered. He also brings his kids to my sandwich shop, which is so cool.

"Rushton's provides all of our fresh produce and Ben even sources our flour. Even though that's not something you



might generally expect to source from the Market, we trust Rushton's to source the best for us. We make all of our own bread too – we don't have a sign up telling everyone that because we're quite a serious restaurant masquerading as a silly sandwich shop and I'm quite happy with that.

"We get a delivery five days a week. I do occasionally come to the Market, most often to look for watermelons because I absolutely love watermelons. In fact, I've had many meetings with Ben when what we've mainly done is discuss the world's best watermelons, which in my opinion are from Sorrento in Italy, just so you know!"

Max Halley has done large-scale media (and social media) campaigns for brands as diverse as, Tabasco, Monkey 47, Gaviscon and Branston Pickle, made a series called 'The Sandwich Show' for VICE/Munchies, in which he travelled the UK to find inspiration for a new sandwich to put on his menu. He is also the sandwich and condiment expert on Channel 4's popular Sunday Brunch.

<https://www.maxssandwichshop.com>

Max's hero

At Rushton's The Chefs' Greengrocer, Ben Canning has been dealing with Max for some years now. He says Max is "challenging and demanding in what he expects and requires and he takes quality, humble ingredients and creates meals that are much more than the sum of their individual parts".

The products that Rushton's sources are very much driven by customer requirements and the business has evolved its offer to meet the challenges and demands of customers like Max. "Most of the products we sell have a story behind them," explains Ben. "Either a specific customer wants it and we find it, or we think a specific customer will want it, so we source it.

"I love working with Max, as well as Tom, Dre and James in his team. They are very consistent with their ordering and they're one of our many customers that orders pretty much everything fresh, dry store, chilled and frozen from us. On top of that though, they are always looking for new products to improve their sandwiches. We began buying Shipton Mill Organic No. 4 flour specifically for Max's bread, for example, and now we have several more customers who buy that from us. That's also true for the brands of gherkins, preserved black beans and Gochujang Korean bean paste he prefers.

"The bottom line is that we're here for our customers when they need something. We've looked at some products for Max as part of his menu development too and while some of the products he has asked us to source for him are no longer on his menu, we still stock them for other customers."

If Ben is Max's hero at Rushton's, then the compliment is well and truly returned when Ben talks about the sandwich shop. "Max might call it a 'silly sandwich shop', but I can assure everyone that what you get is more than a sandwich, it's a full meal. My boys love it and it has totally changed their perception of sandwiches. They now look for the optimum combination of flavours in their sandwiches and build in Max's six crucial elements – hot, cold, sweet, sour, soft and crunchy. If I ever go there in the evening, I can't go home without a sandwich for everyone and if I have customers coming to look around the market, I have to order Max's sandwiches in because they provide a real wow factor."



Changing the world – bite by bite

planted.

Planted is the latest food company to join the growing community of small to medium-sized enterprises based at the Market's Food Exchange building. With a core business based on (you guessed it) plant-based food, Planted is always topical. Market Times caught up with the company's Customer Development Manager Claudia Thompson to find out more about how the business got started, what makes it unique in a crowded market, and how its vision drives everything the organisation does

STAT ATTACK

1,312,779 chickens had been saved to the date of writing through the consumption of Planted's meat-alternative products.

Product carbon and water footprint labels on packaging reveal up to 87% less CO₂ emissions and 90% less water usage compared to animal-based counterparts.

The Planted glasshouse production facility in Switzerland has welcomed more than 2,500 visitors, promoting transparency and community engagement.

Planted's Original Chicken contains 24g of protein per 100g.

The company is a proud winner of the prestigious 'Green Business Award Switzerland'.



Tell us a little about your business.

Planted is a recent player in the UK, launching at the end of 2021. We started in Switzerland in 2019 creating delicious meat from plant-based proteins, focusing on the perfect bite and taste. The overarching aim is to reduce the negative impact of the traditional meat industry on our planet while delivering healthy and tasty proteins. All our plant-based meat is made without additives, chemicals, gluten, soy or genetically modified ingredients. This serves our primary goal; to save animal lives by inspiring a shift from animal to plant-based proteins that set a new standard in taste.

How did the business get started?

Planted is here today thanks to our fantastic co-founders – Erik, who works on the science team and is responsible for our extrusion process, Pascal, who looks after international expansion and ensures Planted continues to grow and Chris, who is responsible for brand awareness and helped build with the team our 100% transparent factory in Kempthal, Zurich. Planted is the by-product of a gap in the market recognised by our founders, who found that there was little choice for a clean, high protein meat alternative on the market without an extensive ingredients list. Using extrusion and fermentation using pea protein, Planted's first product, Chicken Original, was born!

What makes Planted stand out in the busy meat-alternative market?

We distinguish ourselves via the fact that we use pea, oat and sunflower protein as the base of our products, rather than soy. Plus our incredibly clean label. The Planted range is made up of essential ingredients you'd find in your kitchen cupboard such as peas, oil, water, herbs and spices. Then we add Vitamin B12 for that extra boost. Like wedding speeches, the best ingredients lists are the shortest.

We're an incredibly sustainable business and transparent about our production methods, with a production facility that is open to the public and situated in a greenhouse, to show we have nothing to hide.

With the continued growth of plant-based diets and particularly the vegan market, have you seen a growing demand for your meals since you launched the business?

We've seen continually growing interest over the last year, whereby more and more people are recognising Planted and have had a chance to try the range, either at trade shows, samplings in supermarkets or at consumer events. Even though there's so much competition in the plant-based meat alternative category in the UK, we've found that there is ever-growing interest around our clean label and minimal ingredients list. Our products hold up well in every type of cuisine, so anywhere you can find chicken, pulled pork or kebab meat, we are able to provide an easy, high-protein substitute.

How do you decide on your flavours / ingredients?

The range is incredibly versatile in that we have plain products (pulled original, chicken original, unbreaded schnitzel), which act as a blank canvas to add your own marinade, which is great for curries, pies, and gyozas. The possibilities are endless. We've also tried to replicate flavours and marinades that aren't readily available but are a twist on a classic, such as pulled pork BBQ, breaded chicken tenders and hoisin duck.





Do you have a best-selling product and why do you think it's so popular?

Our chicken skewers are a firm favourite in the UK, arriving on a skewer ready for the grill/pan. They are the perfect addition to any BBQ or summer dish, complete with a delicious herby marinade. The texture really mimics that of actual meat, so you never feel like you're missing out on anything.

You're based at the Food Exchange. What is your connection to New Covent Garden Market and how did that come about? Are there plans to source ingredients from the market's wholesalers?

We moved to a new office at the Food Exchange earlier this year after a recommendation from one of our colleagues – and we're so happy to be surrounded by so many foodie neighbours!

As our production takes place in Switzerland, for the time being it isn't possible for us to source our ingredients locally from New Covent Garden Market, but all our raw ingredients are sourced in mainland Europe.

Where can the public find Planted products? Do you have a physical shop or plans for that side of the business?

We are available in Morrisons supermarkets and online at Ocado, Planet Organic and Planted's webshop. We're also in David Lloyd gyms across the UK, The Real Greek, Breddos, the Elite Pub Group and several restaurants. We have no plans for a physical shop yet, but you might see our sampling van popping up across the country serving some delicious samples! You can visit our website (www.eatplanted.com) for some delicious recipes, including butter chicken, Caesar-style fajitas, and beetroot ravioli.



How a university study turned into a Europe-wide business

Planted launched in 2019 after founder Pascal Bieri (pictured) spent time working in the USA and became aware of various meat substitutes. Pascal loved the idea of healthy, meat-free food, but was bothered by the many additives. He brought his cousin Lukas Böni on board, who was in the process of completing his doctorate in food process engineering. Through a professor at a Zurich university, the duo linked up with doctoral student Eric Stirnemann, who was particularly familiar with the wet-extrusion process (which uses water and steam to process pea, oat and sunflower protein). The team was completed by Christoph Jenny, a finance expert with experience in the foodservice industry, and Judith Wemmer, an expert in process engineering and product design.



“ We're so happy to be surrounded by so many foodie neighbours at the Food Exchange



Fruits from Chile, from the end of the world to European tables



Chilean fruit grows at the southern tip of Latin America, protected by the unique natural barriers of the Atacama Desert to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the west, the Andes Mountains to the east and the Patagonian ice fields to the south.

Chile is one of the modern-day world leaders in food production. Its agri-food industry represents one of the main sources of national GDP. The country exports more than 100 different species of fruit alone, from apples, blueberries, citrus fruits, cherries and grapes to kiwifruit, oranges, plums and pears.

A big part of the reason Chilean fruit has become so important to the world's consumers is in the origin and, above all, in the people involved, who undeniably have a special relationship with their land and its cultivation.

Chilean fruits are grown across almost the entire Chilean territory and in all its 16 regions, thanks to the work of more than 8,000 producers of all sizes. The industry's activity is guided by strict protocols, which is key to maintaining sustainability, as well as achieving optimum quality in the final product. The export market is vital, so each and every production process adheres to strict international guidelines, ensuring the application of good environmental practices. Worker protection and harmony with the surrounding communities is also to the fore.

The country has created a sector brand "Fruits from Chile" through which it aims to position Chilean fresh fruit in the world. This brand is led by the Chilean Fruit Exporters Association (ASOEX) in collaboration with ProChile - a Chilean agency that promotes the supply of Chilean goods and services across the world - since 2010. The work of Fruits from Chile seeks to highlight and promote the advantage of the origin, the quality of the products and the mettle of Chilean workers, key factors that have allowed Chile to become a world leader in the fruit business.

Europe, a major market for Chilean fruits

Europe is a major marketplace for Chilean fresh fruit: in 2022, 20 European countries received shipments from Chile, with a total value of US\$ 701 million (£545m). The Netherlands - as the main port of entry for the continent, the UK and Spain are the largest destinations.

Among the fresh fruits most exported to Europe are grapes, blueberries, kiwifruit, apples, pears, avocados, cherries, peaches, cranberries and currants.

In the first half of 2023, after China and the USA the Netherlands is the third biggest world destination for Chilean fresh fruit - with shipments of US\$ 166 million (£129m) - and the United Kingdom lies fourth on that list - US\$ 96 million (£75m). Chile supplies about 5% of the fruit consumed here.

Chilean fresh fruit exporters sell their product through various sales channels, including wholesale, retail and e-commerce markets, says Nicolás Poblete, trade commissioner at ProChile in the United Kingdom. He explains: "Wholesale markets are very important for Chilean agri-foods, especially in European countries where this type of space is a fundamental pillar in the management of wholesale sales and distribution of food to customers, given the culture of consumers in these countries. This is particularly true in the UK, which is symbolised by New Covent Garden, its main wholesale market."

“ Wholesale markets are very important to the Chilean agri-food sector, particularly in Europe



“In general, as a country we try to increase business in the wholesale trade by appealing to importers, making the origin of our products visible and selling at a competitive price for customers. The eventual aim of course is to satisfy British consumers, who are demanding in terms of the quality and health benefits offered by the food they choose to eat. Chilean products are also ideal to be sold in retail outlets, such as supermarkets or convenience stores, and of course into the foodservice and catering sectors, which combined are the main sales channels for fresh fruit to the UK’s population,” adds Nicolás.

Chilean berries in the UK

Chile’s supply of berries to Europe includes blueberries, strawberries, raspberries and blackberries.

The sale of berries - both fresh and frozen - has increased significantly over the last few years in the UK, in accordance with the changing habits of British consumers, who tend to over-trend in their purchase of organic products. This is mainly associated with new trends in online shopping and boxed food purchases, according to ProChile.

To the United Kingdom, the shipment of fresh blueberries stands out, where the amounts exported in the first half of 2023 are close to US\$ 27 million (£21m) and frozen blueberries, with shipments of US\$ 3 million (£2.4m).

Blueberries stand out for their nutritional properties; they contain only 80 calories per cup, and are considered a food rich in vitamin C and antioxidants. Although blueberries have only been grown in Chile since the late 1980s, today the country has more than 15,600 cultivated hectares of the fruit planted, making it one of the key producers worldwide of the ever-popular fruit.

The availability window for Chilean blueberries in Europe is between October and April, which is when they are harvested in the country, taking advantage of their counter seasonality to the European crop to offer top-class product to the market at the time when it is most required.



**THE
BEST**
of us



Raj revels in representative role

Raj Patel is a familiar face at New Covent Garden Market, having owned and run the Market’s Post Office for the past 33 years. In May this year Raj took on a new role, becoming one of 12 directors of the National Federation of Sub Post Masters and we asked him more about the challenges ahead

“The National Federation of Sub Post Masters is the equivalent of a trade union and I’m representing colleagues across the entire Greater London area to protect their rights,” explains Raj. It works with Post Office Ltd - a government agency regulating the UK’s Post Offices - and represents Post Office workers across the UK. “I’m lucky that I’ve got five branch secretaries under me and I use them to help me with a lot of the work,” says Raj, highlighting the size of the undertaking he’s committed to.

The biggest issue Raj faces is known as the ‘Post Office scandal’, a now proven miscarriage of justice involving the wrongful civil and criminal prosecutions of an unknown number of sub-postmasters (SPMs) for theft and false accounting, spanning a period of more than 20 years. Currently there has been no resolution to the scandal regarded as the most widespread miscarriage of justice in British legal history. The official government enquiry is ongoing.

« I'm really energised by this role and I'm looking forward to making a difference

“The Post Office scandal is the biggest single issue for our members and that’s taking a lot of my time as a director,” explains Raj. “It goes back years and relates to individual Post Masters across the country who were accused of frauds that were subsequently found to be a result of computer errors.”

The issue has had serious consequences to Post Masters, with jail sentences and even suicides the result of the false charges. “There’s a lot that I can’t say due to ongoing legal issues but it’s a topic I feel very strongly about,” says Raj, who attends meetings most days after he closes the Market’s Post Office and visited the Houses of Parliament in June to lobby on behalf of his colleagues.

“Recently I met with a group of MPs from Richmond and Twickenham to ask for their support and promote our cause. The aim is to get past reparations – compensation –



The background to Raj's biggest challenge

In 2020 the government initiated an independent inquiry into the Post Office scandal, led by retired judge Wyn Williams. It became a public inquiry in June 2021 after two initial hearings. In November 2021 the government held a preliminary ‘List of Issues Hearing’ and in February 2022 started ‘Human Impact Hearings’, investigating whether the Post Office and their software supplier knew about the faults in the IT system.

A number of Sub Post Masters have successfully sued the Post Office. By 2022, 736 prosecutions had been identified, 83 convictions had been overturned and more were expected to be quashed. The government inquiry is still ongoing.

Part of the Market furniture!

After 33 years as New Covent Garden Market’s Post Master, Raj is an intrinsic part of the market. “Growing up, my family were Post Masters and I always helped out as a young boy alongside my brothers. After the first 10 years working here in Nine Elms, I became part of the furniture. Now, after so many years, this is my Market and the guys who work here are my friends and family. I love my customers and will bend over backwards for them, opening early and closing late to help the needs of their businesses. I’ve been to weddings, funerals and have seen generations of people grow up. It’s in my blood.”

The Market’s Post Office has even won a prestigious award after it was selected as 2022’s Post Office of the Year for South London, following a Mystery Shopper visit to all the branches across the region. What’s more, the Market Post Office has become an unofficial information bureau, with Raj always happy to help with people’s questions. “We have people visiting the Market from all over the world and I’m always signposting people to different businesses so they can find what they’re looking for.”

for our members who were affected. We’re also looking for an admission of wrongdoing from the government and for someone to take responsibility for the scandal. We’re fighting for justice for our members, especially as some of them are no longer with us as they took their own lives.”

So how did Raj get involved with supporting the biggest Post Office region in the country with an issue of such importance? “It’s because of my knowledge and experience that I stood for election to the Director role,” he explains. “I was chosen from a field of 18 candidates and had to go through a series of hustings where you convince people to vote for you.”

Finding time for his new role alongside running a busy Post Office isn’t going to be easy, but Raj says he’ll find a way to make it work. “My son originally said he’d help me in the Post Office while I was away. Then he got promoted at work and had to move away, so he’s not available! It’s a huge commitment becoming a director, but I owe it to everyone who voted for me.

“Although I’m working more hours than before, with lots of evening engagements, I’m really energised by this role and I’m looking forward to making a difference. Meeting new people such as MPs and visiting Parliament is a new challenge for me but I’m spurred on by what’s happened in the past.

“The more I become involved, the more I want to achieve a resolution for everyone affected by the scandal. I feel proud and honoured to work with my colleagues to try and achieve our overall goals. I hope that we can get justice.”

Market Times – a sustainable future

Market Times is no longer posted out to subscribers outside the Market. You can still pick up a copy when you are at NCGM, at one of the cafes or from the CGMA office in the Food Exchange. We will continue to email our extensive database and attach a PDF version when each issue is published. If you are not on our mailing list, send your name and email details to hello@cgma.co.uk and if you would prefer not to receive Market Times, you can also unsubscribe. Thank you.