

# MARKET TIMES

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The Market that always puts a smile on people's faces



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## Editor's Message



Welcome to the final issue of Market Times in 2023. What a rollercoaster ride of weather we've had in September and October – from touching 30°C to biblical flooding in some parts of the country. As it has for centuries, that uncertainty presents challenges to the wholesalers at this Market, but increasingly, it also illustrates meteorological patterns that are becoming far more regular disrupters of their trading lives. It's a good bet we can expect plenty more column inches filled with stories of crop shortages or perhaps gluts in the next few months, but an even better one that the experience and expertise at New Covent Garden Market will help suppliers and customers negotiate them.

Talking of supporting growers, the Fruit and Vegetable Market has been highlighting its relationships with British growers, as an official partner of British Food Fortnight. As you'll see from stories and images within these pages, the two-week celebration of British food gave us the opportunity to put out the bunting and let growers up and down the country know that we love them and what they produce. There's no denying the importance of new-season homegrown product in bringing a buzz and some theatre to Buyers' Walk throughout the year. Wholesale Markets are a vital outlet for the British supply chain and the demand for sustainable, high quality domestically-produced food shows no sign at all of diminishing at NCGM.

Sustainability is never far from the top of the agenda these days and the Market's commitment to its zero-to-landfill waste disposal and recycling work was recognised with a Green Apple Environment Award, which covers environmental best practice around the world. The spotlight that comes with being lauded and rewarded for your efforts should never be underestimated; for the outside world, it focuses on your excellence and separates you from the crowd while internally, it encapsulates the reasons why you work so hard and do things the way you do. It's not essential to win to feel that halo effect, of course - two firms from the Market were also finalists at the recent FPC Fresh Awards. They have been judged to be amongst the very best in their sector, which is something to take great pride in.

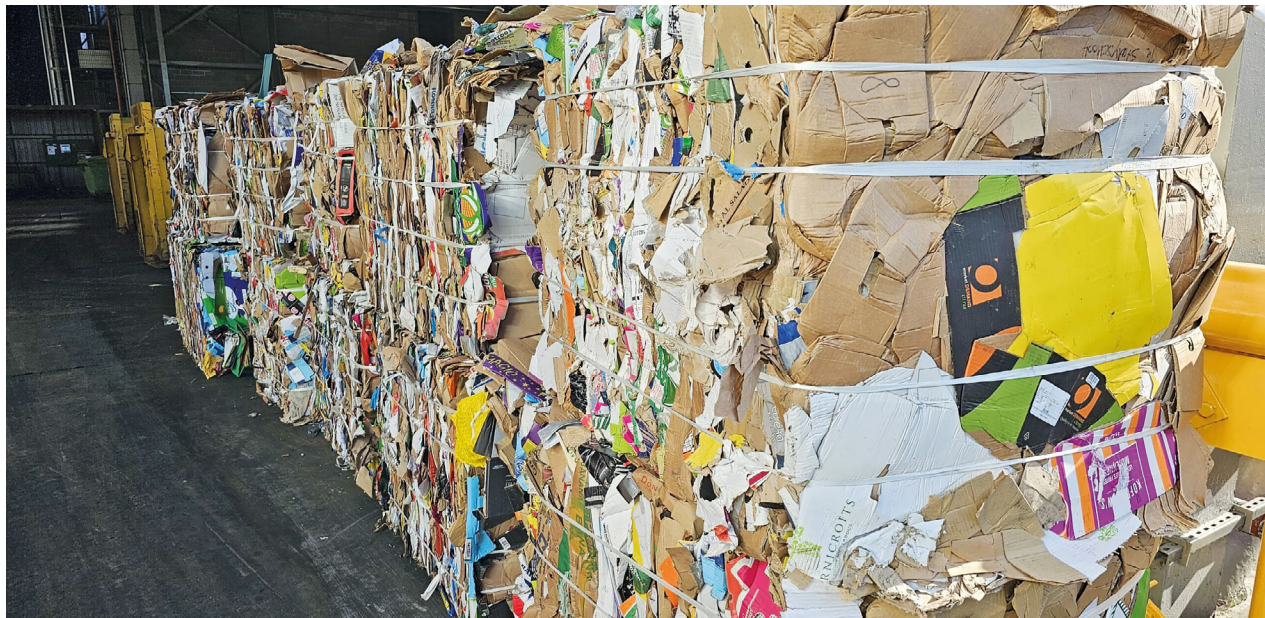
Also inside, you'll find the latest news from the Market and a series of fascinating features. Dean Knight of Quality Plants tells us how a cruel injury cut short his fledgling football career, but paved the way to a very successful career in the Flower Market. With Christmas on the horizon, we talk to Brady Lavender about the hot products this year and his own obsession with the festive period. We also take another look at Chilean fruit, as the country's season kicks off in earnest and talk to Wickham Pantry, a brilliant community charity initiative in Hampshire which won the Market's Independent Retailer competition. Meanwhile, at Mission Kitchen, the husband and wife behind CHA DONG are starting a Hong Kong tea revolution from the Market.

It's all happening here! Enjoy the read.

**Tommy**

Tommy Leighton, Market Press Officer

# Top award recognises sustainable approach



New Covent Garden Market has won a prestigious accolade at the annual Green Apple Environment Awards, recognising, rewarding, and promoting environmental best practice around the world.

The Green Apple – to be presented during a ceremony at the Houses of Parliament in November – recognises the Market's important work in promoting sustainability and 100 per cent recycling across the estate.

Celebrating the market's ongoing relationship with our waste management partner Bio collectors, the award is Green Apple's environmental improvement prize for 'Cultivating a Circular Economy: Bio collectors and New Covent Garden Market powering towards a greener future together.'

Previous Green Apple Award winners have subsequently won European and World Awards, taking on the status of International Green World Ambassadors by helping others to help the environment by demonstrating what can be achieved.

"As the landlord and management company of the Market, we have an excellent working relationship with Bio collectors," explains Colin Corderoy, Senior Operations Manager for the Market. "Bio collectors 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."

The Market recycles 100 per cent of its organic waste, which is transferred to an anaerobic digestion facility. All other waste - paper, wood, plastic, glass, and metal - is recycled (95%) with the remaining 5% converted as waste to energy. Nothing goes to landfill.

The Market has also been shortlisted with Bio collectors in two categories at the National Recycling Awards, known within the trade as the 'Oscars of the waste management world'.

The winners of the 'Energy Innovation' and 'Food Waste initiative' categories will be revealed on November 16th.

## Sable Capital acquires Apex 1 at east end of Market

UK real estate firm Sable Capital has acquired Apex 1, a residential development site at the east end of the Market.

Using capital from its recently raised UK BTR fund, which has £255m of equity commitments, Sable has purchased the freehold of Apex 1, a "desirable zone 1 location" from VINCI St Modwen (VSM), which is a 50:50 JV between VINCI UK Developments and St Modwen Developments — and Covent Garden Market Authority.

The site has detailed planning consent for a 26-storey tower incorporating 201 private homes, as well as 5,242 sq ft of ground-floor retail space and 27,631 sq ft of amenity space, including a podium garden.

Situated next to New Covent Garden Market, it is 150 metres from the Nine Elms Underground station. Galliard Construction will deliver the project under a turnkey contract. Hugo Black, partner at Sable Capital, said: "This is a fantastic site in a rapidly evolving area close to the iconic Battersea Power Station.

"We are looking forward to working with Covent Garden Market Authority and VINCI St Modwen to deliver new public realm connecting the US Embassy to the new Nine Elms station, as well as delivering 201 new homes for renters in zone 1."







## Nine Elms kids take English apple Tastebud Challenge

Schoolchildren at St. George's Primary School in Nine Elms taste-tested four varieties of English apples, as part of the Market's support of British Food Fortnight (BFF) in September.

More than 400 Kent-grown apples from HG Walker were delivered to the school for the children to enjoy. The Market also created a teaching pack - a digital deck of 13 slides - called 'The Tastebud Challenge' which described the different varieties of apples and set simple interactive tasks.

The four varieties were: Royal Gala - offering a sweet, mild flavour, a crisp

texture, and a blushed, often striped reddish appearance; Cox - the most famous British-grown variety that originated in the 19th Century and is known for having a lovely balance of sweetness and acidity; Worcester - a lovely apple with a crisp texture and satisfying crunch; and Red Windsor - firmly textured and richly aromatic, with a sweet and honeyed flavour.

"The children really enjoyed taking part and discovering all of the differences in taste and texture between the varieties," said Headteacher Sarah Collymore. "There were some apples left over so we bagged them up and sent them home with the families to enjoy their own 'Tastebud Challenge' over the weekend. Thanks to everyone at the Market for organising the event - it was great fun."

## BBC films floral Maestro Simon

A crew from BBC Maestro filmed Simon Lycett in the Flower Market, as part of a course to inspire the next generation of florists and give them the tools to make an impression in the profession.

BBC Maestro works in close collaboration with BBC Studios and is on a mission to enable people to discover and hone their passions with help from the most credible talent in the world. The BBC Maestro offer is an extensive series of educational and inspirational video courses taught by the world's most experienced creators, each one a 'Maestro' in their field.



Simon, whose firm Simon J Lycett Ltd creates fabulous floral decorations for occasions ranging from stunning yet modest parties to decadent dinners and magical weddings, is of course a Maestro in the world of floristry. He was filmed talking about his art in the Market and chatting to one or two of the wholesalers. He described the Market as "the best shop window" and a "Haribo sweetie paradise!" for florists and said that the everyday seasonality in the Market "makes all the difference to what you sell and what we create".

Simon told Graeme Diplock of Green & Bloom: "You make me look better! That's what I love about being able to come into a wholesale market and exploit your experience."

## Saudis visit on fact-finding tour



Learning from Britain's biggest and best wholesale market was the aim when a group from Saudi Arabia's Riyadh Development Company visited New Covent Garden in October.

Five representatives from the development company toured the market estate, visiting the Flower Market and seeing the new Fruit and Vegetable Market units. They were also particularly keen to find out more about activities away from the selling side - specifically the recycling operation and the shared kitchen spaces at Mission Kitchen.

“...here to share knowledge and find collaboration opportunities

“We wanted to see the role of New Covent Garden Market in the entire food value chain,” says Mohammed Qahwaji, Director of Value Chain Development. “This was our final visit after trips to markets across Europe to see best practice, share knowledge, and find collaboration opportunities.”

The Riyadh Development Company owns and runs well-known markets in Riyadh, including Uteiqah Markets, AlTameer Wholesale Market, and AlAziziah Central Market. AlAziziah Central Market is the largest central market in the Middle East, serving a large portion of the population and businesses within the capital, as well as many other cities in Saudi Arabia.

## Market firms selected amongst the best in their fields

Two New Covent Garden Market firms received accolades at the recent FPC Fresh Awards 2023.

Both Quality Plants Exterior Ornamentals and County Supplies were runners up in their respective categories at the ceremony on September 29th, at Grosvenor House on Park Lane.

Quality Plants was recognised in the Wholesale Floral / Plant Supplier. A firm favourite with event florists, party organisers, garden designers and florists, Quality Plants is a specialist in supplying top-quality plants for indoor landscaping and city gardens. For an interview with the company's Dean Knight, go to pages 8-9.

Building on the success of winning Foodservice Supplier of the Year in 2022, County Supplies was again in the running in that same category, having enjoyed another busy year of growth while supporting the hospitality industry, as well as trying to do its bit for the wider community. The innovative catering supplier was also shortlisted in the Marketing Campaign of the Year category for its social media campaign that highlights British chefs, fresh produce and growers and has reached more than 110,000 people in the last 12 months.

Even though they didn't lift a trophy on the evening, both firms were delighted to be recognised as leaders amongst their industry peers.



# Market photo raises funds for three very worthy causes

### 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 19th at 5pm - at the end of another working night for most of these folks, 46 people who have traded in the Market for 30 years or more congregated for a 'group photo' in the Bayan Walk. They will all have traded more than 10,000 of their wares.

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 of the old Covent Garden and one could even go as far as to say his Market debut as a wide-eyed youngster was at the Market in 1969.

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

The five best pictures are people who turned up on the day but for some reason haven't made it into the group 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 very much hope you could be in the picture this time, but until you and everyone present 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, West, Premier Wholesale, 47 years at NCGM  
2 Simon Laid, The Moss Pattern, 36  
3 Simon Laid, The Moss Pattern, 36  
4 John Linton, Gilgoss, 31  
5 Paul Rogers, Gilgoss, 34  
6 Mike Brown, 15 Harris, 31  
7 Tony Woodhead, second-hand, 43  
8 Duncan Forster, Gilgoss, 32  
9 Richard Smith, 15 Harris, 31  
10 Duncan Webb, 15 Harris, 31  
11 Paul Rogers, Gilgoss, 34  
12 Scott Moore, Mallowman Man, 36  
13 Mark Smith, London Fresh, 30  
14 Mark Smith, Covent Garden Supply, 34  
15 Geoff Lewis, Gilgoss, 32  
16 Neil Brown, 15 Harris, 31  
17 Ben Carter, Supreme Supply, 35  
18 Martin Jones, Supreme Supply, 35  
19 Terry Thompson, self-employed, 32  
20 Paul Schindler, The Market, 30  
21 Paul Schindler, The Market, 30  
22 Nick O'Sullivan, London Fresh, 34  
23 Nick O'Sullivan, London Fresh, 34  
24 Nick O'Sullivan, London Fresh, 34  
25 Wayne Smith, 15 Harris, 31  
26 Nick O'Sullivan, London Fresh, 34  
27 Michael Smith, Covent Garden Supply, 32  
28 David Smith, Covent Garden Supply, 35  
29 Martin Jones, Supreme Supply, 35  
30 Ben Carter, Supreme Supply, 35  
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The Market community has combined to raise money for three great charities.

Prints of the photo featured in the last issue of people who had worked in the Market for 30+ years were sold to generous traders who wished to donate.

One of the charities that benefited was Trinity Hospice in Clapham, through an event called Jake Fest, in Epsom on September 23rd. It was held in memory of Jake Hetherington, whose wife Emily and family have raised huge amounts of money for Trinity since Jake's tragic death in 2008, aged just 29.

Jake's mum Carole said school and footballing friends of Jake, as well as family and people from the local community came from all over the country to Jake Fest, the latest annual event held in memory of Jake. "We've held a football tournament for years," Carole said, "but everyone's getting a bit

older and we decided to do something different this year. It was great fun; we put on loads of things for the kids and had a casino and raffle in the evening.

"We've always supported Trinity Hospice as they looked after Jake so well and I know the Market has been very supportive of Trinity too. Thank you to everyone who donated – it's very much appreciated."

The CGTA has also long been a supporter of the Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust and a proportion of the funds has been donated to that worthy cause. A third donation was made to the British Heart Foundation, as a mark of respect for Gus Lombardo, who appears in the photo above just weeks before his untimely death.

Covent Garden Market Authority agreed to match the funds raised and, as a result, both Trinity and Anthony Nolan have received £1,200 and the British Heart Foundation was given £1,000. CGTA Chairman Gary Marshall said: "As always, people in the Market were extraordinarily generous and it was great that the funds raised were matched by the CGMA. These are three wonderful charities and we're always delighted to support such good causes."



# New neighbour Dishoom engages with Market community

Dishoom Battersea is opening in The Power Station soon and as they mark the occasion in the local area, look out for the team from the popular Indian restaurant group, who will be giving out complimentary chai in the Market in the New Year.

They are already familiar with New Covent Garden Market, having held a Dishoom MasterChef event at Mission Kitchen in the Food Exchange earlier this year.

Natalie Poole, Local Marketing Manager at Dishoom, says the business is "a place that has always been home to passionate food enthusiasts, whether they are one of our exceptionally skilled chefs, creating culinary masterpieces in our kitchen, attending to our cherished guests on the restaurant floor, or crafting the magic of Dishoom for our patrons at home".

So the team was given a chance to shine and display their culinary prowess. "We believe that the best way to unite our remarkable team is through the language of food and culinary artistry," says Natalie. "Our Dishoom MasterChef celebration was an unforgettable feast, a symphony of diverse flavours and cultures, from sizzling pans to delectable desserts."

The panel of judges included two previous MasterChef winners who assessed each dish based on taste, presentation, creativity, and the overall dining experience.

# Obituaries

## Reg Chatt

We regret to report the sad death of Reginald (Reg) Leonard Chatt, who passed away recently at the age of 92.

Reg's son David got in touch and said: "Dad spent almost all of his working life in the Market, first as a empties man and then as a Registered Porter in old and New Covent Garden Markets. He started in 1946 aged 15 and retired in 1998, aged 67, after the loss of his wife, Rene.

"He worked for firms such as Morris Springer, Fenn and Hexton and WHA Farmers over a long career. He was a union official and also Chairman of Branch 440 for many years. He oversaw the move from the old Market to Nine Elms back in 1974.

"He was a passionate supporter of workers' rights and making the lives of hard-working porters the best he could. He was also widely respected in the Market community and was a very honourable and decent man," David said.

"I worked myself for 8 years in the Market and know how hard a job being a Porter is, so I am very appreciative of all Porters and my dad was one of them.

Reg is survived by two children David and Tina, five grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

## Gus Lombardo

Agostino (Gus) Lombardo passed away whilst on holiday in Sardinia in September. He was 69.

Gus had been a regular and popular customer at New Covent Garden Market since 1969, starting at the old market when his family took on their first shop in Dunstable. His brother Alex, his son and his nephews have all been regular visitors to the Market over the years to provide support and Gus considered many of the people he dealt with good friends. He was proud to have been in the recent photo with the market community who have been there for 30+ years and loved to reminisce about the history of the market.

Born in Bedford, Gus left school to join the family business 'Lombardo's Continental Foodstore'. By the late 70s, the family had purchased a nursery in Wheathampstead and shortly after acquired the Posthorn Restaurant in Albion Street, Dunstable. Gus also had an ice cream round with the Tonibell company. In the 90s, the family opened the Millefiori Restaurant in Church Street and from 2007-2014, they also ran the Adesso Restaurant. In 1998, Lombardo's Delicatessen moved from High Street North to West Street, where the business remains today.

A hard-working and determined man, Gus cared deeply about his customers and the community in Dunstable. He was a perfectionist and always very fussy and incredibly proud of the deli. He took great pleasure from others enjoying their food - often having samples for his customers.

Gus leaves two children, Louisa and Alexander, and a grandson Freddie. Louisa and Alexander have both worked in the family firm and, over the past year, Alex has been doing the weekly run up to the Market with Gus.

He was adored by his family and the response on Facebook and the hundreds of cards and flowers left for the family showed how loved Gus was by the people of Dunstable, his community, which he had served for 54 years.



# Showing our support for British growers

**British Food**   
Fortnight  
2023

**New Covent Garden Market was an official partner of British Food Fortnight 2023, which ran from September 16th through to October 1st. We threw our weight behind the annual showcase for British Food**



British Food Fortnight (BFF) is organised by Love British Food, to celebrate the diverse and delicious, high-quality food produced by British growers and manufacturers. As an Official Partner the Market, which sells huge volumes of British fruit and vegetables year-round, quite literally put the bunting out and celebrated by highlighting some of the great work our traders do with and to support their British grower partners. The highlights included:

- A local primary school receiving a teaching pack and four different English apples varieties, allowing around 200 children to learn more about apples, health and nutrition and of course their local wholesale market.
- After the summer break, the Market resumed its initiative to supply student chefs at Westminster Kingsway College with a different British fruit or vegetable each month to study and incorporate into the incredible dishes they create for the on-site restaurants.
- Articles written for the Love British Food website featured several NCGM wholesalers and catering suppliers and looked at their relationships with the British supply chain, as well as marketing and promotional efforts to support British fresh produce
- Photos and articles were distributed across trade, local and national media to secure coverage of British Food Fortnight and the Market's role in supporting it.

"While the traders at New Covent Garden Market of course sell world class, seasonal fresh produce from all corners of the globe, everyone at the market is extremely proud of the relationships we have with British growers," said the Market's Press Officer Tommy Leighton. "Many of the businesses here have been working with the same British suppliers for several decades, through generations of families on both sides, and of course there are also new suppliers selling into the market every year.

"The beginning of the season for any British product generates excitement – there's no doubt that the demand for homegrown fruit and vegetables remains very high across the independent retail, catering and hospitality sectors, because they know that their customers want to buy British too," he added. "The ethos and values of British Food Fortnight reflect our passion for our suppliers and for what we do, and



we're keen to use the fortnight to make British consumers more aware that they can buy top class, affordable British produce from their local, independent businesses."

Alexia Robinson, Founder of Love British Food, was effusive about the support her campaign received: "New Covent Garden Market has for many years been a stalwart and enthusiastic Official Partner of British Food Fortnight and the wider Love British Food campaign," she said.

"Their support this year, and that of their suppliers, was second to none. The market was abuzz throughout the Fortnight, highlighting the wonderful new season fresh British produce. The market and many of its suppliers contributed to the new virtual platform, British Food Fortnight Live, which means that, just as the NCGM is abundant with British produce year-round, so people across the country can experience what the Market does online all year.

"New Covent Garden Market's role in supplying the capital and south-east's retailers and hospitality outlets with fresh fruit and veg is vital. Thank you to everyone involved for your support."

**British Food Fortnight will return for a 23rd year on September 20th to October 6th, 2024.**

**Above:** The Fruit and Vegetable Market celebrated all things British during the annual showcase for homegrown food



# Competition prize supports Wickham Pantry's vital work

All food charities are finding it harder to source good quality product these days, not least Wickham Pantry. So, when the Hampshire charity won the New Covent Garden Fruit & Vegetable Market's Independent Retailer competition earlier this year, the promise of £500 of free fresh produce from Buyers Walk was excellent news for its members. After she received the first of two deliveries from CGTA Chairman Gary Marshall, we talked to Kat Short, Chair and driving force at Wickham Community Association

When some of the UK's supermarkets removed best-before dates from their labelling, there was an immediate knock-on effect on food redistribution charities that relied on a steady supply of perfectly edible food that was unsalable because it had outstayed its welcome on the shelf.

"I totally understand why this was done and that it's probably better for the environment," says Kat, "but it cut off one of our established channels to waste food. Add in the fact that Fareshare sources a lot of food from cruise ships, restaurants and pubs – all sectors that have really suffered with higher energy and staffing costs and the fact that people are going out less – and we've also seen a big reduction in the amount of food coming through those channels."

Wickham Pantry was established during Covid, when it became apparent that an increasing number of local people were finding it harder to make ends meet. Food labelling is far from the only challenge, of course – the cost of living, the pandemic and more have led to food charities being caught in a perfect storm, adds Kat. "Waste is harder to come by and charities therefore receive less donated product, while more people live below the poverty line and the demand for charitable services is higher than ever before," she explains.

In effect, charities are finding themselves competing against each other for the dwindling amount of donations and increasingly having to pay retail prices for the food they offer. "We're not centrally funded; we have to fundraise for every pound we spend," says Kat. "Currently, we're having to raise £50,000 a year to cover our costs, so we are really grateful for whatever support we are given."



Five-hundred families are registered with The Wickham Pantry, the majority located in the area that stretches from Portsmouth to Winchester. They are all living in poverty and membership is free. For the £5 they pay when they visit each Tuesday, they are able to buy £20 of good quality food, which makes a huge difference to their lives.

There is a Food Bank on site on the same day each week. While the two offers may appear to be 'competitive' to the untrained eye, Kat explains the objectives of the charitable initiatives complement each other.

## Stepping stone

"Both are very important," she says. "The food bank is for people who are at rock bottom of the poverty spiral. The people who visit cannot afford to pay anything for their food and are given essentially a bag of tins and left to go away and make something of it. The Pantry is the next stepping stone on the journey to hopefully becoming financially independent again. When someone is able to find the £5 to visit us, they are hopefully beginning to find their way out of hardship. We don't give them a bag of tins – we give them the dignity of a real shopping experience and the opportunity to buy fresh and frozen food and store-cupboard ingredients, from which they can create nutritious meals for all the family."

The organisation receives a weekly donation of food that would have otherwise gone to waste from Fareshare and it also has a community fridge, where local residents

“ 500 families are registered with Wickham Pantry. They are all living in poverty

are encouraged to donate product they are not going to use. "We just don't receive enough donations to feed the number of families we see each week, so the rest of the food is subsidised; bought by us at full retail price," Kat says.

Around 90 families a week visit the Pantry. It's a high volume of food and that represents a big logistical challenge for Kat, our project manager, who needs to co-ordinate all the orders and deliveries, as well as the schedules for the 40 volunteers who are absolutely crucial to everything we do."

The Community Centre is a true hub for the local community and offers several services for those in need of support, including a large cohort of Ukrainian refugees. "We have a community garden, which we encourage anyone to come and use and contribute to," Kat says. "We also have a Warm Hub – a place for people to come so they don't need to turn their heating on.

**Left:** Gary Marshall makes the first of two deliveries of free fruit and vegetables to the charity

**Above right:** Kat Short, left, with Gary, centre, and Kat's sister Nikki in Buyers' Walk earlier this year

**Right:** The fantastic local volunteers setting up





The Citizens Advice Bureau is also on site, which is another crucial service for many of the people who come here. The Pantry feeds a lot of local Ukrainian families; many times we have been looking at Google Translate 10 minutes before we opened to find out how to teach them to cook a chicken in Ukrainian!”

### Fresh from the Market

The deliveries of fruit and vegetables from New Covent Garden Market were very well received. “Gary delivered a fantastic range and also much more fresh produce than we expected,” says Kat. “So we had more fruit and veg available than we normally would and also an amazing variety, which is what our members really need above everything.”

The food is priced by a colour-coded system – there are always a couple of higher value meat items and store cupboard essentials. The feminine hygiene products and the fresh fruit and vegetables are labelled as free though, to ensure that they make their way into each family’s basket. “Strategically, we have to label those products as free, otherwise plenty of parents would sacrifice them to buy more store cupboard items for their kids,” Kat explains. “For some of them it’s a case of not being confident that they know how to cook vegetables, while for others it might just come down to convenience. However, for many of the people who come to us, they have simply not been able to afford to buy a wide variety of fruit and vegetables and have

come to see fresh produce as a luxury.”

“If we have fresh pineapples, for example, it causes great excitement as they are seen as a real treat. For children, satsumas, oranges and apples are the real favourites and they are always extremely popular. So when we say that it’s free alongside their essential shopping, it works. We talk to people all the time about eating their 5 A DAY and how to incorporate a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables into their diets. We give them recipes and cooking tips and we always stress the need to have as balanced a diet as possible. But it’s easier said than done when you can’t afford it.”

### Digging deep

Having learned about the ethos and values of Wickham Pantry when Kat and her sister Nikki visited the Market shortly after hearing they had won the prize, Gary and the tenants at the Market dug deep to ensure that the charity received value over and above what was promoted for their competition prize.

“Delivering the product and meeting all of the incredible volunteers was a moving and humbling experience,” Gary says. “We all know that food charities have become so important to communities around the country, but thankfully most of us have had no reason to use the services they offer and until you see the scale of the challenge they face, it’s hard to fully understand it. The selfless efforts of the community in



Wickham to help those less fortunate than themselves really is inspirational and the centre’s joined-up approach to helping people find their way out of poverty can only be a positive.

“There could not have been a more worthy winner of the competition. We consider ourselves lucky to have been able to contribute in our own small way.”

<https://m.facebook.com/thewickhampantry>  
<https://wickhamcommunitycentre.org.uk>





# Knight making all the right moves at Quality Plants

**In Market Times, we like to introduce you to the people who make this great Market tick. So this issue, we chatted to Dean Knight – who runs Quality Plants in the Flower Market – about his background, values and ethos, as well as what it's like working with dad**



Aged 16, Dean Knight became the youngest ever debutant in the Vauxhall Conference, when he played up front for Gravesend & Northfleet against Halifax Town. Two months later, a bad tackle all but ended Dean's dreams of becoming a pro-footballer and after recovering from the initial effects of the injury, he had a decision to make.

He had never considered a career at New Covent Garden Flower Market. His dad, Dave Knight, had bought Quality Plants with colleague Craig Broadley in 1988, so the young Dean was well accustomed to the Market, but as a fledgling number 10, his focus was well and truly on football. Twenty-two years on, it's fair to say he has no regrets about the route he took – from the Vauxhall Conference to Vauxhall to join his dad at Quality Plants.

"I'd worked here for a while when I first left school and I liked it and knew everyone, so it wasn't really that hard a decision, just not what I had planned," says Dean. "I talked to dad and we came up with a plan – we've been moving forward ever since."

From early on, Dean has looked to innovate and add strings to the company's bow at regular intervals, although he admits it took a while to recognise that his long-term future lay at the Market. "I suppose like a lot of youngsters, it took me a few years to settle in and take it totally seriously, but by the time I was 25, I'd realised that this was what I wanted to do and that I'd only get out what I put in," he says.

"We've grown steadily as a business really. There are six of us now – me, my dad, Craig, George, John and Mark. Rather than continuing to do the same things year after year, it's always been my aim to continually create new opportunities to grow through new initiatives."

He started a van round around 15 years ago, which was unusual in the Market at the time and it's still going strong, mainly run by Mark. Dean also began to travel fairly extensively to meet existing suppliers and find new partners, flying quarterly to the Netherlands, Denmark and Italy, as Dave had done previously. More recently, after Brexit, he has also stepped up his efforts to find new British growers to add to the Quality Plants supplier network.

There is no desire to work less with the international supply base, but before being interviewed by the BBC last year about the impact of Brexit on the firm, Dean and Dave made the effort to talk to the Fresh Produce Consortium and also work out the financial implications on their business. "Obviously there is the additional paperwork and administration, but the financial costs were pretty substantial," Dean says. "Most people know it's had an effect, but not many can explain it to you, so we found out for ourselves. I had already started to search for new domestic growers, but when we looked at the figures, it became apparent that we really had to do it."

"My aim was to add two new British suppliers to the fold each year, which we've managed so far," says Dean. "It might not sound a lot and it's not something we've really been advertising much yet, but it requires a fair bit of work visiting nurseries around the country and building relationships that work for both parties. So far, we've got some great suppliers, like plant nurseries Viking in Norfolk, Bridge Nursery in Essex and West Kingston in Wiltshire and for Christmas trees, Cadeby in Warwickshire."

"If anyone reading this would like to supply us, then please get in touch. I'm always pleased to talk."





**Opposite top left:** Dave, Dean, Craig and George on plant parade  
**Left:** The extensive Quality Plants range covers all bases for customers

The other addition to the business that has taken off in the last couple of years is the Quality Plants webshop, which stocks more than 15,000 lines and already accounts for 35-40% of turnover. “Like a lot of people, I had more time on my hands than I would have liked during Covid,” says Dean. “I had been planning the webshop and had talked to people about it, but the enforced break from normal work allowed me to move it forward quickly.”

“We have set up all of the growers we work with on the platform and all of our account customers now have the option to buy online. It has proved very popular and definitely performed above our expectations. It took a lot of my time during the set-up, but now I just look in the morning and the evening to make sure everything’s running smoothly. Everyone here knows how to use it and it’s just about picking up the orders and dealing with them.”

The next thing on the agenda is a nationwide delivery service. “I like to do one thing at a time,” says Dean. “We’ve got a courier who does some London delivery work for us and we have priced up the nationwide service with them. We’ve already got one storage site, in Crayford, Kent, which is adjacent to the M25. The plan would be to have more around the country.”

“It needs proper evaluation before we launch; it looks like it would be worthwhile, but we need to assess the likely returns and what challenges or issues we might encounter.”

One more thing that is imminent will be both a privilege and a rubber stamping of Quality Plants stature and standing as a business. “We’ve had our application accepted for the Royal Warrant,” Dean says. “The process isn’t quite completed and we’re awaiting official confirmation, which is why we’ve not been talking about it, but we have been delivering to Buckingham Palace for the last six months and we’re about to start delivering to Sandringham. We work alongside fellow Royal Warrant holder Shane Connolly and as His Majesty The King is famously very interested in sustainability, our work with British growers is very important to him.”

As reported in the news section of this issue, Quality Plants was also a runner up in the Wholesale Floral / Plant Supplier of the Year category at the FPC Fresh Awards 2023 in late September, placing it firmly amongst the best plant specialists in the UK.

Regal and trade recognition are a feather in the cap, but they also remind you why you get up before the crack of dawn every morning and set such high standards for yourself, every single day, something the Knight family has done at the market since the 1960s. Dean is the third generation of Knights at the Market. “My late grandad Terry Knight worked in the Fruit & Veg Market, both at the old Market and here,” he explains. “He was going to get my dad a job, but a Porter’s job came up at the Flower Market and they were tough to get at the time, so my dad took that. It’s funny how things turn out!”

How has working with dad been for more than two decades? Dean says: “Those who know him will know that he doesn’t beat around the bush! We have had the odd moment, but very few and never anything major. He’s always been open if he’s got a problem with something, but he’s also always let me get on with things and do it my way. If I have an issue, he’ll be helpful, but also often says ‘that’s for you to sort out’ and I think that has been good for both of us long term.”

Dean did continue to play football at a decent level until he was 35 and also had a brief boxing career – “a couple of bouts, then I realised I was getting old!”. Quality Plants is his working passion now though. “So many people who work here would tell you they didn’t plan to end up at the Market,” he says, “but I’ve been here 22 years and so many of the same faces are still here. A lot of people who leave either come back or end up regretting it. It’s an amazing environment to be part of.”





# CHA DONG launches tea from Food Exchange

Two entrepreneurs based at Mission Kitchen have scooped a Great Taste Award for their hand-crafted Hong Kong style milk tea



The humble cup of coffee has experienced a commercial explosion over the past two decades, with coffee shops now ubiquitous on every high street. Now, aiming to raise the profile of coffee's traditional rival – tea – with their company CHA DONG, meet Cassandra Liu and Lawrence Wong. If you've never heard of Hong Kong tea before, prepare to change your view on how tea can taste.

"We produce authentic hand-crafted Hong Kong (HK) style milk tea right here at Mission Kitchen in New Covent Garden Market," says Cassandra. "We source and blend our tea leaves ourselves - reducing the 'middle-man' from HK. This also means that our tea flavour profiles are, while authentic-tasting, unique to us. Local cafes and other bottle brands etc - which produce HK milk teas - would typically import pre-mixed blends from HK. We also use a local supply chain as much as possible. All our bottles and packaging are sourced or manufactured in the UK."

So what's all the fuss about? With two different flavours to choose (alongside a constantly changing seasonal special), CHA DONG is best served chilled, though equally delicious when served warm. Served in attractive 250ml flask bottles, the fragrant tea (made with evaporated milk and sugar) packs a caffeine punch. Both versions contain more caffeine than an equivalent cup of coffee or even a small can of Red Bull. "An espresso coffee will have 30-40 mg of caffeine per 100ml," explains co-owner Lawrence. "Our teas would have





three times the amount.”

The ‘Nostalgic Hong Kong’ flavour has more of a chocolate, nutty taste, recreating the Hong Kong style milk tea found in the 1970s and ‘80s. The ‘Contemporary Classic’ is what you’d find today in Hong Kong. It’s slightly sweeter than the Nostalgic Hong Kong flavour, with a clear floral tone and is considered an easy-drinking tea. With an astonishing 2.7 million cups of tea consumed each day in Hong Kong, Lawrence sees an emerging market in the UK that can only expand. “We’ve found that our teas are already very popular with people from South Asian and Arabic backgrounds, as the flavour is similar to what they’re used to drinking in their home countries,” he explains.

The secret to making such a unique blend of tea is in the brewing process. Each freshly prepared batch is filtered between four and six times per teapot, to extract as much flavour as possible from the tea leaves. A small bottle of CHA DONG (250ml) is three to four times the strength of English tea. CHA DONG achieves this by brewing for longer, adding a lengthy process to strain the tea and capture the full flavour. “We spent six months on the process and setting up the business,” explains Lawrence.

“The actual tea brewing process is recognised by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage, so that the tradition can be carried on by new generations. Whilst our process isn’t unique, our blend of tea leaves is so we need to slightly tweak

the process to ensure that it works for each of our teas. The hard water in London really affects the taste, so to counter that we use up to six different tea leaves to create a special – and very specific – flavour that works with London’s water and our local ingredients.”

Lawrence is proud to be the first HK tea brand to win a ‘Great Taste Award’, scooped earlier this year and now proudly displayed on each bottle. “Our mission is to bring a taste of home to Hong Kong-ers living in the UK,” says Lawrence. “We also want to introduce this authentic tasting HK tea to the rest of the UK.”

Despite still being a new business operating out of a shared kitchen space, CHA DONG has increased its capacity over the last 12-months to become the best-selling HK tea in the UK. “We supply more than 1,000 bottles a week to restaurants, bakeries and supermarkets across London’s Chinatown alone,” says Lawrence, adding that CHA DONG has proved popular with independent grocers and cafes, who see it as a great alternative to coffee. Prestigious London auction house Sotheby’s even have

Cassandra Wong answers our tea-break questions

How did CHA DONG get started and what made you want to pursue your vision?



It was founded by myself and my husband, after living in both Australia and the UK. We found that whilst there are lots of HK cafes and restaurants, we struggled to find an authentic-tasting cup of tea. There are typically five factors to a perfect cup of HK style milk tea: it has to be fragrant, flavourful and smooth on the palate. Although the tea is strong, the traditional brewing process we use, which if performed correctly, ensures the tea isn’t bitter or astringent. A proper cup of Hong Kong style milk tea has more caffeine than a cup of coffee! So it’s not meant to be a weak, steeped tea, or overly sweet.

With coffee shops so prevalent, have you seen a growing demand for tea since you first opened the business?

We do believe that there has been a growing interest, partly due to the increase in Hong Kong migrants who are raising awareness of Hong Kong food culture but predominantly, it’s the growing interest in bubble tea and Asian teas (eg. matcha, chai) which is fuelling this demand and also a willingness to try. I mean, you can now find bubble teas in coffee shop chains and many cafes now stock speciality teas - so who knows!

You’re based here at the Food Exchange. What is your connection to New Covent Garden Market and how did that come about? Do you source ingredients from our Market wholesalers?

We had been looking for a commercial kitchen which carried similar principles to us and Mission Kitchen seemed a good fit for a start-up. What really sold us was the like-minded network of emerging food businesses and the shared principles when it comes to sustainability. Being at the heart of New Covent Garden Market addresses the third point, as we have been able to source some ingredients from businesses on-site which has been fantastic. We also offer limited edition fruit teas so when we have had to do any R&D, it meant we could just pop downstairs to the local wholesalers and have a chat and see what fruits they have in season!

How do you decide on your flavours / ingredients?

We only have two flavours but do create limited editions - we look for whatever is in season and source locally. We aren’t here to replicate a HK cafe like-for-like but more the flavours and essence, which is part of our brand.

Where can Market Times readers find CHA DONG products? Do you have a physical shop or plans for that side of the business?

We are mainly B-to-B and currently at most leading Asian supermarkets (SeeWoo, Tian Tian), independent grocers/cafes and restaurants (Poon’s, Three Uncles) in London, as well as across the UK. We want to encourage people to enjoy our products on-the-go and pair with different types of food, going beyond how it’s originally served in a cafe environment in HK. So far it’s going well and igniting lots of interesting conversations. Whilst we don’t have a physical shop, we do lots of collaborations with other businesses, particularly other start-ups, and pop-ups.

CHA DONG on the menu at its in-house café. “That collaboration came about by chance,” laughs Lawrence. “They were hosting an Asian-themed auction and were looking for a drink for the event. Our tea proved popular and they asked to stock us in their café. We’re also stocked in Three Uncles, a London-based restaurant chain. Whilst people may associate milk tea paired with a pastry or something sweet, it’s excellent with savoury food. Roasted Cantonese meats are an incredibly popular pairing with our tea.”

<https://chadong.co.uk>

**Above centre:** Lawrence Wong with his award-winning CHA DONG tea  
**Far left:** A unique blend produces a very particular, yet familiar taste





# Innovative approach establishes Chilean fruit industry as a world leader

**In the last issue of Market Times, we featured the Chilean fruit industry and gave some background detail about one of the global powerhouses of fruit production, which supplies large volumes of premium quality fruit to New Covent Garden Market. This time, we asked Nicolás Poblete, trade commissioner at ProChile in the UK, what makes Chile such a successful player on the world stage**

**Chile is a leader in global fruit production and your industry is also recognized as innovative, through organisations such as ASOEX, the Fruit Development Foundation and Agrocap. How has that innovative instinct contributed to the growth of Chilean fruit exports?**

The Chilean industry is in a constant state of adaptation and growth, to meet the ever-changing tastes and demands of consumers in all corners of the world. Across the industry, strong innovative instincts, a clear vision of the future and the use of technology in the cultivation, production and processing processes, are combined with modern infrastructure and export logistics. The focus is not just on selling more fruit, but also on our continuing ability as a country to contribute to the health and well-being of consumers, which is reflective of people's ever-evolving desires and concerns around the world.

The industry has implemented great scientific and technological advances in recent years, which in turn has added significant value to the products we export. Every single year, fruit growers are presented with new technological challenges. In this scenario, experts say that the key is to increase fruit research, development and

innovation and that's what the Chilean industry has done.

As ProChile, we not only seek to support exporters of goods and services from consolidated sectors, but also those entrepreneurs who deliver incremental innovative solutions (improving existing processes) and disruptive solutions (processes that bring radical changes) that make them competitive, and who, in short, will contribute to the sophistication of the export matrix.

**Tell us a little more about ProChile's work in the UK, particularly how it aims to increase sales of Chilean fruit here. How can wholesalers benefit from the work you do?**

ProChile is the Export Promotion Agency of the Government of Chile. Through its commercial office in the United Kingdom, it supports importers and distributors in the UK market to find suppliers according to

their needs, through the wide portfolio of varieties and territories that Chile has.

Additionally, it can support fresh fruit retailers and other points of sale to accelerate the rotation and sale of these products through promotional campaigns to position Chilean products among consumers.

**What are the biggest challenges facing your industry right now and how are you overcoming them?**

Today the Chilean fruit industry has a great challenge: generating sustainable processes to achieve low-impact products that contribute to our adaptability and ability to mitigate climate change. Research, innovation and the adoption of new technologies are key elements to enhance the sustainability of the sector. All this is taking place within the context of high climate variability, that impacts all stages of the supply chains in different ways and at different levels: from competition due



“ Chilean agriculture has developed a defined roadmap to make the industry more sustainable

to scarce resources, low availability of soil for agricultural production, to how to make companies more resilient.

The various Chilean agroindustrial sectors, including fruit, have defined a roadmap on how they will face the challenges that the food of the future brings and the changes necessary to become a more sustainable industry. In this sense, they have proposed a series of initiatives that contemplate the efficient use of water, the use of renewable energy for production, waste management and adoption of new technologies, among others.

On the other hand, one of the main challenges that Chile faces in the context of exports, given the fluctuating global marketplace in recent years, is the need to maintain a position of trust, excellence and quality, adapting quickly to the requirements and regulations of global markets.

Competitiveness in international markets is essential, which requires not only the capacity to maintain competitive prices, but also an ability to truly differentiate through product safety and security, with consistently high standards of quality and traceability.

Furthermore, Chile’s trade has opened up to a wide and rich diversity of international markets, which means adhering to different regulations, consumer demands and health requirements in each destination country. This



can, of course, represent a logistical and administrative challenge for exporters and it consequently drives us to be at the forefront of our industry; complying with these various requirements with the support of certifications, good practices, seals of origin and sustainability, amongst other things.

**Where can anyone who wants to know more about Chile’s fruit industry go for information? From wholesalers who want to work with Chilean fruit, to retail and catering clients who want to incorporate it into their offer and consumers who want to buy it.**

ProChile, through its One Click Import tool, connects British importers with Chilean exporters in less than a week. For this, you only need to complete a short form indicating the data of the importing company and the products to be imported, after which you will receive a response and support from the ProChile office network.

The form is found at the following link: One Click Import

Likewise, the Association of Fruit Exporters of Chile (ASOEX) can provide relevant information for British companies on each of the fruit industry sectors through its website, and sector-specific information offered by different committees in those sectors on a day to day basis to support the marketing and export of these fruits.

More information at: <https://fruitsfromchile.com>



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# Christmas comes early every year at Lavenders



For the impatient Christmas lover, one of the first annual signals that the festivities are fast approaching is when the Christmas range hits the Flower Market at Lavenders, in mid-September. Brady Lavender has been working in the Market for 28 years and although it's the most hectic time of the year, the run up to December 25th remains his favourite time of year. We caught up with him to find out why



Christmas is always a great time to walk into your emporium at the Flower Market, in fact it feels like Christmas by late September, so for Christmas fanatics, it must be a real wonderland! How important is the festive season for you as a business?

It's our number one time of the year. Fortunately, both Faye and myself are Christmas junkies, so we love it, but the amount of work it takes is always a challenge. We source everything a year in advance, so basically just as you're getting over it, you are reordering it. The regulars up the Market can tell when Christmas is coming because we spend our lives up there in September and October. Some love to see us, others run away!

Can you pick out five products for us that you think will be popular this year and tell us why?

- 1. Sisal Stars** – they are probably our biggest volume seller. They are great value, eye-catching and versatile products. We sell them in four sizes too, so there's something to suit every customer.
- 2. Baubles** – it's a close run thing whether we sell more baubles than stars, but we sell thousands and thousands of both every year. We do a range of bauble sizes from 6cm to 30cm.
- 3. Glitter Stems** - We always sell good quantities of them and we have an amazing range for people who want to glitterify their Christmas!
- 4. Artificial Spruce** - We do garlands, wreaths sprays and a massive range of flame-retardant spruce in garland, wreath and Christmas tree. Our wreaths range from 12 inches to eight foot – there's a huge choice.
- 5. Seasonal Picks & Stems** – this is the must-have items such as mistletoe, holly, berries etc... they are perennial favourites.



# THIS YEAR'S FESTIVE TOP FIVE



Sisal Stars

Baubles



Glitter Stems



Artificial Spruce



Seasonal Picks & Stems

Are there any trends this year that stand out - or to put it another way, do you tend to find similar products being the staple lines each and every year?

We are doing a great range of glass kitsch tree decorations. I personally love these, particularly the animal range. When we first put the full range out, these were definitely the most popular items, so I'd say that's this year's trend.

You can't really call it a trend any more, but one of the best sellers that I really thought would have lost a bit of its popularity by now is candy cane. It is still right up there for our customers and we will sell a lot again this year.

People invest a lot of money in their Christmas decorations and I guess if you spend £400 on stuff this year, you're not going to just throw it away. I like to go a bit crazy myself though and have new things every year.

Does the clientele differ at Christmas to other times of the year or do you find the same customers buying the festive gear?

We do tend to be serving a lot of regulars and of course that's really important to us. It's always lovely to welcome new people though and especially lovely to see their faces when they enter the shop for the first time. It really does make them feel festive!

How has the year been to date? Is everything on track and what have been the highlights?

It's been a tough year. There is definitely less money about, so people are looking for bargains. Heads up to those people - we are going to have a massive pot clearance in January to boost trade in a traditionally quiet month.

But the highlight of this year by far was October, which saw Faye and I travelling back to the Far East to see existing suppliers and find new products and suppliers for 2024. We couldn't wait to go; it had been four years since we were able to go and we travelled to Vietnam and Hong Kong and across China. [Before the pandemic], we were going as often as three times a year and last month, we were out there buying and sourcing new items for our collection.

We look forward to sharing them with our customers next year.

“ People invest a lot of money in their Christmas decorations. I like to go a bit crazy myself

Above: Brady models the artificial spruce, looking suspiciously like he's done this before!  
Opposite top: The Lavenders team gets into the festive spirit every September

## Whittingtons marks its 65th anniversary

Wilfrid Whittington Ltd was founded by Mr Wilfrid Whittington on October 10th, 1958 and at the outset sold only fresh flowers and plants on Nottingham wholesale market.

Barry Perkins was employed as a van driver in 1964, but he soon became a salesman and started to look at stocking accessories to the trade, buying a couple of old clothing racks from a shop sale from which to sell sundries.

This worked well and Barry and another salesman George Hill put in a mezzanine floor - sundries took off in a big way. Indeed, such was the popularity, that there was a queue every Thursday, because the floor wouldn't take the weight of too many people.

As Whittingtons perfected the art, other local sundries companies fell by the wayside and Barry bought all of their stock. In 1981, the firm bought an old Barclays Bank building on the edge of the wholesale market, which required it to borrow money for the first time and created a schism in the company. This left Barry and George with the business. Brian Perkins, Jason Perkins and Chris Samples came into the fray over the next few years and Brian and Jason took 30-foot sales trucks on the road, which featured custom backs built with customer stairs and wooden racking. They did a roaring trade in imported silk flowers and sundries.

In the following years, businesses were bought out in Sheffield and Leicester, before the major acquisition of Coquerel's in London in 1998. SFPC was added in 1999 then the stable was further bolstered by Fat Frog, in Hayes, Designer Flowers in Kent, Britannia in Waltham Cross and AGM in Norwich.

Lindsay, who is now the accounts and office manager joined the 'boys' in 2005. Senior management Mel and Brady joined the team in 2015 and Brady's wife Faye joined him over the following years, selling their well-established business Lavenders of London to Whittingtons. The trading name of Lavenders is now used in New Covent Garden, Sheffield and is still borne by the original business, in Isleworth.

## Celebration

“To celebrate the firm's 65th anniversary, we involved all our staff in a company birthday prize draw with some really nice gifts and prizes,” says Mel Walton, General Manager, Wilfrid Whittington Ltd. “We are so proud and thankful to all our wonderful and talented staff across the business who really make Whittingtons a success; we pride ourselves on customer service and product knowledge.

“We also would like to thank all our customers old and new and look out for bigger savings on everyday items - make sure we have your email address and you have a trade card and you can enjoy huge savings on everyday floristry basics.”



# Roger looks back on 54 years as a wholesaler

**Roger Garber has been in the wholesale market business since the summer of 1969, when he left school with one 'O' Level, aged 15, to join Louis Reece at the old Spitalfields Market. He's been at New Covent Garden since 1987, working first for Louis Reece, which had by then been sold, and then Gilgrove, before founding Premier Fruits with Jason Tanner. Market Times asked Roger about his time in the trade**

Roger is part of a family steeped in multi-generational fresh produce history. His father Sidney had worked at Louis Reece since 1948, having married the daughter of Louis Reece, who owned the firm. Louis had taken the Reece name from his stepfather, but was actually an Olins, with two sons and a son in law also in the fruit game. Both New Covent Garden and the industry as a whole have benefitted and still benefit from the next generations of Olins who followed them into the fold and, like Roger and Sidney, became leaders in their field.

Thirty years into his career, Roger made the move that would shape the next 24 (and counting). "Jason and I were working at Gilgrove for a number of years and decided to go out on our own," he says. "Initially we teamed up with Premier Fruits Western International, opening up in NCGM under their banner. After a couple of years, we opened up Premier Fruits Covent Garden with two units in the Market and we have continued to grow and grow."

At the outset, the team consisted of its two founders, Jason's brother Justin and 2-3 porters, recalls Roger. "We've got at least 12 units in the market now and other depots; I can't actually work out how many people we have now, but it's a lot," he laughs. "At first, we just sold fruit, then we added a salad department and a veg department, exotics and bananas and it just mushroomed."

Roger is no longer a director of the business, but continues to play a key role, one which he is undoubtedly being modest about when describing it. "My job now is to help organise the deliveries, whether to our own depots in Bicester and Brighton or our customers around the country," he says. "Premier is a 24/7 business now, with orders coming and first and second deliveries going out – we've got at least 15 artics going out every night – we collate everything here, get it made up and make sure it is delivered on time."

"I have to say the incredible growth of the business has mostly been down to Jason Tanner. He has been the prime mover in taking us way beyond the dreams we had. His drive and commitment is exceptional, he has a superb memory for everything that happens in the business, he's very personable and gets on with suppliers and customers and he's got a lot of very loyal staff."

## Changing times

Roger remembers a salesman by the name of Jimmy Kline being the 'God' of Louis Reece when he joined the firm in east London, "sitting at the back of the warehouse with a megaphone shouting at everybody". He also remembers the older guys telling him

that trade in 1969 wasn't what it used to be and everything had changed, even then. "I remember being 15 and thinking 'I've got 50 years of this to come' and now I'm 69 and I'm wondering where those 54 years have gone!" Roger adds.

"And now it's me talking about the changes. This Market has changed dramatically since I came here, there's no denying it. A lot of the retail business has been lost, which has undoubtedly been to our detriment in the long term, but on the plus side, we have concentrated on supplying catering customers and that part of the business has seen massive growth. The way we trade is totally different to how it was too. There was a lot more face-to-face trading in the past and fixed and seasonal pricing was never a thing, for example."

"We used to start at 5am and now I get in at 8.30-9pm and I'm usually gone by 3am. The hours were definitely nice when my kids were growing up – you could pick them up from school or go to their netball or football matches."

He continues: "I never wanted to do anything else and I've had a wonderful time in the Market. But it's not for everyone and I can understand that. My son did a week with me and said 'no, thank you!', but Premier is still very much a family business – we've got plenty of sons, daughters, brothers and cousins working here."

It might not be the same, but Roger still thoroughly enjoys the Market life and particularly the people. "I love the banter. Yes we're all competing to a certain extent, but over time you understand that the Market is a great leveller. People take the mickey out of me all the time, but it's all in jest and like a family we're all there for each other. I've just had a few months off work to have a triple bypass and I had endless phone calls and chats with colleagues and competitors."

"That means a lot. And whether it's true or not, lots of people have said they are glad to see me back!"

Despite understandably being a little slower across the ground than he used to be, Roger recently completed a charity walk on behalf of The Birthday Dreams Foundation. "All the people in the Market have been so supportive of my fund raising efforts and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them on behalf of myself, my daughter and granddaughters, Louise, Ava and Lexi," says Roger.

If any readers would like to make a donation, go to <https://www.thebirthdaydreamsfoundation.co.uk/donate>



## 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](mailto:hello@cgma.co.uk) and if you would prefer not to receive Market Times, you can also unsubscribe. Thank you.