

# MARKET TIMES

PAGE 2-4  
NEWS BITES

PAGE 6  
CITY HARVEST MOVES IN

PAGE 10-11  
MARKET LIFE OF BRYAN

PAGE 14-15  
EARLY-MORNING DEW



Mission Kitchen founder member progresses to bigger things



WE'RE  
BRITAIN'S BEST  
WHOLESALE  
MARKET!  
SEE PAGE 7





## Editor's Message



Welcome to the first edition of Market Times in what promises to be (and in fact already is) a momentous 12 months for New Covent Garden Market.

It's always nice to share positive news and the market being named Best Wholesale Market in the Great British Market Awards 2024 is an accolade that recognises the hard work and dedication of so many people here. Anyone in or around NCGM over the last few years will know that the redevelopment has at times been a difficult process to negotiate, not to mention the additional pressures on trade when the global pandemic hit. However, as was shown by the Hero Award the market received from its industry peers in 2022, for its incredible efforts during national lockdowns, the community we have here consistently shows its abilities to work through the tough periods and emerge stronger.

The National Association of British Market Authorities gave NCGM its latest accolade, citing our "rich history, environmental best practices and outstanding support of independent food businesses in London and the South East." For an expert judging panel at a respected organisation such as NABMA to place us at the head of our field is a perfect way to kick off 2024, during which we will build up to the 50th anniversary of our relocation to Nine Elms. We can celebrate our history while also pointing out that we're still considered the very best wholesale market in the country.

Sharing good news is obviously far preferable to the alternative, but sadly we have to report that the market community has lost three more of its number in the last quarter. Many market tenants are grieving for men who were long-time friends, colleagues and competitors and our condolences go to all three families. The market also lost Gilgrove, one of its better-known companies, in November (see pages 8-9). Most, if not all of the employees have found new jobs at NCGM though, which at least gives this dark cloud a silver lining.

There is plenty more content inside. Bryan Porter, the unofficial voice of the Flower Market, talks about his family firm's 110-year history and gives an erudite and realistic outlook on the current position for NCGM's traders. Jim Dew of Harwoods of London, once a customer based in the East End, made NCGM his business's home in 2010 and never looked back. And Mick Reid of DG Flowers started work on the pitching gang on the day NCGM opened, in 1974 – he tells us his story.

From the Food Exchange, we've talked to Eva Thorne, whose fast-growing Garden of Eva is one of the true success stories to be associated with Mission Kitchen. On page 5, you'll find the first in a series that sees Clive Bourns, regular snapper of the market for 56 years, select some of his favourite images and explain why they stand out to him.

I hope you enjoy the read.

**Tommy**

Tommy Leighton, Market Press Officer

# Damian Fowler: 1973-2024

It is with immense sadness that we have to report that Damian Fowler, Managing Director of Gilgrove, passed away on January 12th. He was 50.

Born on September 3rd, 1973, Damian grew up in Bexley, Kent. On leaving school, he spent some time travelling the world, before coming back to London in his early 20s and joining the family business, the C&C group. He started in the pavilion at New Covent Garden Market, then alongside father Peter, moved to launch the firm's business at New Spitalfields Market when it relocated to Leyton. After a successful spell in east London, Damian returned to NCGM and eventually took over the reins of Gilgrove, as Peter retired and the multi-centre business was united under one banner in Nine Elms.

In 2012, he took a break from the business to fight a first bout of cancer but he was back in the fold quickly after his recovery and continued to drive forward one of Buyers Walk's most respected firms. In November 2023, aware of his failing health, Damian made the sad decision to close Gilgrove rather than relocate to the new Buyers Walk. The business had been owned by the Fowler family for 37 years. As was his character, he diligently ensured that everyone affected was treated in a fair and respectful manner.

Damian loved the market and the people in it and cherished the camaraderie, friendship and support. He truly enjoyed his work and the colleagues he worked with. He was also very proud to be on the executive team of the Covent Garden Tenants Association and over the last decade, had played an integral role in the association's work around the redevelopment programme.

Outside the market, his overriding passion was for cars, predominantly classic and sport cars. He owned several and loved travelling and touring in them. He was also a very good skier and would indulge this passion as often as work allowed, hitting the slopes with friends and family.

Above all, Damian was a family man and the time he loved most was spent with his wife Jess and their children Finlay and Erin. Jess said: "Damian left his life too early. He wasn't done. He was authentically and genuinely the greatest man I have known and I am grateful to have had him as my man."

"Thankfully he had very few regrets and instead was full of love and happiness for the life he lived. Finlay, Erin and I will hold his love, compassion and zest for a life well lived with us as his legacy."

Damian's sister Kelly works at The Menu Partners, having worked for the family business for several years and brother Lawrence also spent a number of years with the family firm. He added: "I've lost my best friend and the most incredible brother. He has looked after me all my life and I'll be lost without him. The support from the market has been incredible. As it did when our dad died, the market has shown its strength, care, love and community for us."

CGTA Chairman Gary Marshall said the



market community is devastated to have lost a great friend and colleague. "Damian was a friend to us all, a phenomenal market man and possibly the nicest and most decent man I have ever known. He was hugely dedicated, skilled and passionate and loved being part of the fruit and vegetable industry and the market. I will be forever grateful for the immense hard work, commitment and support he gave the CGTA on behalf of all of us, and me in my role as Chairman. "Damian was like a younger brother to me and I'm devastated that he's left us way too soon. I want to send deepest condolences, sorrow and love to his mum Chrissy, Jess, Finlay and Erin and all the Fowler family. The market community is here to support you."

Jo Breare, General Manager at Covent Garden Market Authority, said: "Damian was one of the nicest people you could hope to meet – always engaging, genuine and an absolute gentleman, just like his dad. He was a credit to his family, his firm and New Covent Garden Market. He was also a brilliant wholesaler who knew the industry inside out and understood the needs of his supplier and customer bases so well. His passing is a huge loss to the Market community and he will be very sorely missed by us all, including me personally."

Tragically, Damian died within a year of his father. His very well-attended funeral took place on February 7th, at Honor Oak Crematorium, with a wake at one of Damian's favourite pubs, The Crown and Greyhound in Dulwich Village.





## First section of new Buyers Walk to open

The first section of the brand-new Buyers Walk was due to open in the Market shortly after this issue of Market Times went to press. Tony O'Reilly Project Director at Covent Garden Market Authority talks us through the detail of the latest phase of the redevelopment and what happens next.

"Phase 3 of the redevelopment programme began in October 2022, immediately after the culmination of phase 2 (A2)," said Tony. "The 24 units in this section are on either side of a Buyers Walk that is 80 metres in length, 6.5m wide and 14.5m high. The program was extended slightly to accommodate the requirements of tenants for a wider walkway to accommodate their fresh produce shows and an additional 2-metres of canopy outside each unit."

Five companies are relocating into the new block of units

– French Garden, London Fresh, Premier Wholesale Foods, Premier Exotics and Supreme Salads. Over the course of the last three months, they have all undergone extensive fit-out projects and made fantastic use of the space.

Tony added: "The state-of-the-art Buyers Walk will, I'm sure, enhance the experience of customers who come to the market to buy their fruit and vegetables."

"Work now begins on the next phase, which begins with the demolition of the units in the middle and western sections of the pre-existing Buyers Walk and to do that, three businesses have relocated from that area on a temporary basis until their new units are completed, in autumn 2025. Thorogood & Son is now in units C62-64, S Newman (Wholesale) Ltd has moved to D73-75 and Rotterdam Oranje can now be found in Arches 38-40. Also moving within C and D block is European Speciality Foods, to D60, and Neil Brown Herbs has added an additional unit to its firm (D62)."

## Nick eyes five years of opportunity

Nick Santoniccolo, Head of Finance at Italian specialist catering distributor Vincenzo Ltd, shared his company's outlook for the global economy in 2024 and said he believes the next five years should be full of opportunity for the fresh produce industry.

In a New Year's message, Nick said we should anticipate a significant reduction in inflation across the board this year, ushering in a period of enhanced stability in commodity prices, particularly in the realm of fruits, vegetables, and various other food products.

"This newfound equilibrium will offer valuable insights into the authentic pricing of products at any given moment along the entire supply chain," he predicted. "Reduced inflation will naturally benefit companies specialising in premium and niche products within New Covent Garden, while simultaneously posing challenges for businesses engaged in the trade of [more] commonplace fruits and vegetables. So brace yourselves for the onset of margin compression as a result of this stabilisation, allowing for a more transparent and fair

marketplace."

A decrease in interest rates opens a window of opportunity for businesses in the wholesale fruit and vegetable industry for capital expenditure, he added. "Simultaneously, although [this is] something Vincenzo Ltd will never use, we anticipate more and more companies turning to invoice financing due to the fact it will become cheaper, contributing to further margin compression and decreasing operating profits within the industry," Nick, pictured, said.

While inflation remains a persistent force for now, commercially minded economists in the City forecast a steady rate between 3-4% for the next five years. Nick sees this as a positive sign. "From our perspective, this moderate level of inflation signifies a healthy state for the fruit and vegetable industry, steering clear of the race to the bottom witnessed in the era between 2008 and the COVID inflationary period, characterized by zero inflation and zero interest rates," he added.

"While challenges and uncertainties lie ahead in 2024, the economic landscape over



the next five years presents opportunities for growth, stability, and innovation. Let us navigate these currents together, adapting and thriving in the evolving dynamics of the global economy here on Nine Elms Lane."

## OFC report is misleading

Jason Tanner, Managing Director of The Menu Partners, read with interest a report published by the Oxford Farming Conference in January entitled 'Is Our UK Food Supply Chain Broken?'.

"While the report makes many useful and accurate points about the challenges facing the food supply chain feeding into the UK supermarkets," said Jason, below, "it ignores virtually every other part of the chain, including wholesale markets, which do not get one mention."

"The report would suggest that the supermarket buying model (particularly the damaging one-way relationship supermarket buyers are said to have with their grower suppliers) is very broken. Foodservice and exports get a throwaway mention as alternative sales channels, but there is no meaningful comparison made with selling to the UK supermarkets."



"I also listened to the podcast released in December to promote the report. Wholesale markets were simplistically painted as the places where growers sell product they can't sell to supermarkets. That may be the case for some growers, but wholesalers in markets around the country have fantastic relationships with growers and consistently the feedback we receive from growers who take our sector seriously is that they find working with us easier, more transparent and often more profitable."

In London alone, the fruit and vegetable wholesale market sector is worth more than £1.5 billion, supplying the foodservice, hospitality and independent retail sectors throughout the capital, the Home Counties and the South East of England. "That's a big chunk of the supply chain to ignore," Jason added. "The supermarkets do not represent the whole chain; they operate differently to every other part of the chain and their impact on the potential profitability and sustainability of their suppliers is much more intense."



# Frankie making an Honest living

From creating brownies in her kitchen during lockdown to now supplying a major restaurant chain, Food Exchange business Frankie’s Brownies has gone from strength to strength.

Suppling national burger chain Honest Burgers with a brownie-based dessert is the latest accomplishment for the Mission Kitchen based firm, founded by Frankie Spivey. Her tasty treats are a first for Honest Burgers. “I reached out to see if they would be interested in collaborating with me as they didn’t have a dessert offering on their menu,” said Frankie. “We worked together over a few months to create a bespoke Salted Caramel Brownie Pot, exclusive to Honest Burgers.”

Frankie has now supplied more than 20,000 desserts since August 2023; her brownies are available in 16 restaurants across the UK.

“I started selling my brownies and baked goods on e-commerce site Etsy after redundancy hit during the pandemic,” she added. “I rented a space at Mission Kitchen and my first listing sold out, the rest is history!”

The business remained a side hustle, as Frankie gradually added corporate connections and created a professional network that saw orders slowly grow in size. Companies started to place bigger orders as gifts for their teams when they were working from home or as return to work treats. She took the plunge to go full time in 2022 and her clients now include WeWork, Compare the Market and Yelp, as well as Honest Burgers.

Frankie believes Mission Kitchen has been instrumental in her success, as the space is set up for growth and ensures she can scale up when needed. “Equally as valuable have been the unseen benefits such as mentorship,



events, and the ability to network with like-minded foodies,” she said. “I couldn’t have asked for a better space to kick-start my business and highly recommend Mission Kitchen to any food start-ups out there.”



# Market supports local elderly

More than 360 senior citizens attending a charity festive lunch on Christmas Day left with a smile on their faces after New Covent Garden Market traders donated fruit and plants for take-away gift bags.

Organised by local charity the Rotary Club of Battersea in an event marquee at Battersea Park, the Christmas lunch event supported elderly people who live across the Borough of Wandsworth. All attendees would have been alone on Christmas Day without the Rotary Club’s support, which included transport to and from the venue.

Fruit and Vegetable Market business Direct Delivered Produce donated delicious easy-peeler oranges, while flower and plant wholesaler Green & Bloom supplied small plants from the Flower Market, for every diner.

More than 200 volunteers were on hand to support the occasion, as was the Mayor of Wandsworth, Juliana Annan. “Thank you so much for organising and gifting the small plants as well as the easy peelers,” said Ré Johnson, the Rotary Club’s secretary. “It is very generous of New Covent Garden Market and brought a smile to the faces of our elderly guests and gave huge Christmas Cheer on Christmas Day.”

The event’s slogan ‘No Elderly person should be lonely this Christmas’ was replicated up and down the country.

# Dishoom warms up Flower Market



Independent restaurant group Dishoom visited the Flower Market in late January, offering free cups of their famous Bombay chai to their new Nine Elms neighbours.

“We’ve recently opened in the Battersea Power Station complex, just a seven-minute walk from the Flower Market,” said Dishoom’s Natalie Poole, Local Marketing Manager. Dishoom donates a meal to a child for each meal eaten in their restaurants – to date they’ve donated more than 20 million meals!

“It was great to meet so many new faces and explain a little about what we offer,” added Natalie, who was also offering free breakfast vouchers alongside a warm cuppa. “We serve breakfast up to 11.45am each morning, so we’re looking forward to meeting you all again when you visit us.”

# Obituaries

## Adil Boulhahri

It was with regret that G.B. Foliage announced the death of Adil Boulhahri in his beloved Morocco on January 18th.

Adil started with David Gorton 15 years ago when Dave established G.B. Foliage in the Flower Market. Adil had only worked in the Market for a month or so, for AF Bacon, prior to joining G.B. Foliage.

“Adil was a much-loved colleague, salesman and foliage cutter,” said David. “He was with me at the start of G.B. Foliage, helping me with all the ups and downs. He was a strong, vibrant character and hugely valued by myself and the G.B. team. I will really miss him.”

He was very close to his mother, who survives him and lives in the UK. Adil also leaves a daughter and a stepson who worked with him at G.B.

Rest in Peace, Adil.



## Tony Gaeton

Tony Gaeton, who worked at his family firm MG & Sons for more than 40 years, died in Phuket, Thailand, on November 7th. He was 59.

Born in Charing Cross Hospital on January 10th, 1964, Tony had already been a delivery boy for dad Mickey before leaving school and joining the company, at 14. Mickey, who started his own career as a porter in the old Covent Garden, had established his own business as in the 1960s, initially wholesaling fruit and vegetables from a unit in King’s Cross. The firm was initially called Michael Gay Ltd, but renamed MG & Sons when the family changed its surname to Gaeton in the early ‘70s. It relocated to New Covent Garden Market in 1980 and many still knew and referred to the father and son team as Mickey and Tony Gay right up until the business was sold to Premier Fruits in 2018.

The firm had built its reputation as a supplier to London’s first flush of Indian restaurants, but as an ambitious young buyer, Tony moved the MG & Sons offer on, and running the firm alongside Mickey, became a supplier to fine-dining clients. They specialised in speciality French produce and Tony regularly visited French wholesale markets to find the product required by a demanding customer base.

His son Barney joined his dad in the business – he is now 29 and works as a heating engineer. He is pictured above with Tony and Mickey. Tony’s brother Mick Gaeton, who was also at MG & Sons from 2016-2018, said: “Tony gave his life to the business and his beloved son, Barney. He was in the market for nearly 40 years and everyone knew him. Outside work, he loved golf and Arsenal. He was a very proud man and so many have said that he had a heart of gold.”

Tony was married to Barney’s mother Tina, who tragically died in 2005. In 2018, he moved to live in Thailand after meeting a new partner Ana. Having suffered life-threatening injuries in a motorbike accident on the South East Asian island last year, Tony recovered, then came back to the UK in September to see family and his friends from NCGM. Soon after his return to Thailand, he had a stroke, from which sadly he never recovered consciousness.

“He was larger than life – once seen, never forgotten and he lived the life he wanted to live,” said Mick. “He would have been pleased to have been granted a painless and peaceful exit.”

CGTA Chairman Gary Marshall said: “I dealt with Tony for over 30 years and for me, he was always passionate and professional. He bought a lot of product in the market and he was a very good market reader who always gave you a chance to make a living. Another iconic personality has left us and on behalf of myself and the rest of the market, I’d like to pass on our condolences to Tony’s son and the rest of his family.”





# Capturing the pace of Market life



**Clive Boursnell has been taking pictures of Covent Garden Market since a late summer morning in 1968, when he found himself stood at the top of James Street by Long Acre at 5am. The street had been soaked by an early-morning rain shower and the fruit, veg and buyers and porters glistened in the rays of the sun, creating an entrancing scene that stole this photographer's heart and has kept him enraptured ever since. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Market's move to Nine Elms, Clive is going to share some of his photography (and the stories behind it) with Market Times**



It is some 56 years ago that I first turned my camera on to the old Fruit Veg & Flower Market of Covent Garden, in its iconic, original home in Central London.

Despite "knowing" the Market from the 1950s, (in fact I cut Christmas trees on the Royal Windsor Estate - where I worked at the time - for Geo Munro's of Covent Garden), in 1968 I was still blown away by what I saw when I started to look at its constituent parts. Especially the bits of it that I could see from the street through the lens of my camera.

To begin with I have to admit I was very overwhelmed by the different aspects that went into the make-up of the Market as a whole. I've written several books on the Market and as I say in one of my introductions, it was some nine months of looking, getting to know the work and people of the Market, before I was entirely comfortable with the place. At that point I so well remember having to ask myself, "are you going to do a proper job here or get the hell out of the Market?" Thankfully, I chose to try the proper job option.

So, nearly six decades on, and 50 years since that old market moved to its new home in Nine Elms, in this series of wee articles I would like to show some of the different aspects of my working in the Market and why and how I took the photos I did.

The Market is like a cut diamond; there are so many glinting facets that make up the whole, and just one of those facets is the movement of goods. One of my tasks was to work out how to get this sense of movement into the camera. It was important to me to show that these images could only be from Covent Garden and I wanted to capture the exchange of fast moving goods by its people.

In the 1960s and 70s, my working camera was a medium format 6x6cm Hasselblad, a square box of a camera, very good for holding steady in the hand, with a 15th, 8th or quarter of a second exposure time, so I could let the movement in front of me pass by or I would move the camera with the subject using the same exposure times. The first technique produces a sharp background, but a blurred subject, the second switches that around and blurs the background while

bringing the subject into sharp focus.

With either, I have a point of stillness/ sharpness within the picture, which enhances the sense of movement of the work.

So, my practice began to capture the many sides of the Market, the products, the people and the atmosphere. I'm still very passionate about the everchanging way of working in this place, the characters who work here, the ever-expanding array of goods, the means of conveyance, be it by hand, by barrow, by forklift, by truck, or by mobile phone!!

No doubt I'll be photographing electric vans and drones pretty soon! The Market is a photographer's dream (or at least this photographer!) as the possibilities are infinite.



**See you next time!  
CB 02/24**



# Charity initiatives abound as City Harvest takes a unit at the Market

As food redistribution charity moves in, Market tenants continue to show their generosity



Since the first week in January, City Harvest has been renting unit B72 on an initial trial of three months, to use as a satellite for short-term storage and collections.

The charity collects surplus food and provides meals for the homeless and others in food poverty in and around London. The market community already supports City Harvest by providing near date and expired produce free of charge, however, there may be an opportunity to enhance those links now that it is based on the market.

Richard Barker is the face of the project for City Harvest in NCGM and had enjoyed a busy first couple of weeks when Market Times caught up with him. “We’re here at 2am every morning. We collect product and do a run to our head office in Acton to drop it off and then we come back for more. People know we are here, they’ve got our number and they all want to help. As soon as we get our business cards printed, we’ll do a full walk around and network the whole place,” he said.

Richard was homeless himself for a period when he was young. So, he’s seen the challenge facing City Harvest and the people the charity helps from both sides. “I’ve been a driver for the last two and a half years and I’ve seen the amount of good these donations do for people who are really struggling.

“Everyone here is really friendly. They all care and want to do the right thing. It’s old school and I like that. Obviously, I have good manners, which helps! I’d never asked for anything before I came here, but I know where it’s going and it means a lot to me.”

City Harvest records the weight of every donation, from every trader, so people will know how much they have given over time. There’s a cost-saving element for the market too, as every tonne of organic waste that is disposed of through the market’s zero-to-

landfill waste management system has a cost attached.

Both Richard and his colleague Mike Motl have worked in a similar vein at other wholesale markets. Mike says: “Markets have always been very good to us. Being based on site is useful though – it’s nice to have that connection with people, so we can tell them exactly where the food is going and how it is helping.”

Many of the businesses on the market already donated surplus fresh produce to other registered charities and one very important element of the City Harvest presence is that any other registered charity collecting from site will also be able to go to City Harvest unit and collect produce.

That service has already proved beneficial to several other charities, including Clapham’s Holy Trinity Church, which has been collecting from the market for several years. “We still rely on our regular donors in the Market, but it’s fantastic to have a direct connection with City Harvest,” said Janie Yang, a volunteer for a fresh foodbank at Holy Trinity on the Common. “When I went to see Richard and Mike, they had put aside some products for us. As a result of the combined donations, 120 people got a great variety of healthy veggies which they would not normally afford, which we distribute from our free ‘market stall’.

“City Harvest is such a great initiative to save good, healthy food and stop waste. Now that they’re based at the market, I’m sure it’ll be easier for other charities to access.”

**Above:** Mike Motl and Richie Barker at their new unit in the Market

“ City Harvest records the weight of every donation, from every trader, so people will know how much they have given over time



## Rushton's donates 3.5 tonnes of produce to Crisis UK

During the Christmas period, Rushton's the chef's greengrocer donated a staggering 3.5 tonnes of fresh produce to Crisis UK, to help the charity in its mission to supply the capital's homeless with vital and nutritious food. Rushton's has an ongoing relationship with Crisis UK and through this collaboration its goal is to provide comfort and sustenance, fostering a sense of community and solidarity.



Christmas cheer: Every child deserves a gift at Christmas and to help spread the joy, County Supplies and the wider NCGM community donated toys to The Salvation Army's Christmas Toy Appeal. We hope all the donated toys and vouchers brought some much-needed cheer.





# NCGM named Britain's Best Wholesale Market 2024

**New Covent Garden Market was crowned Britain's Best Wholesale Market at the Great British Market Awards 2024, in Birmingham on January 25th**

The award is presented by the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) and comes at the start of a year when NCGM will be building up to the golden anniversary of its relocation from Covent Garden to Nine Elms.

The judging panel chose NCGM for its rich history, environmental best practices and outstanding support of independent food businesses in London and the South East of England. Announcing the award, David Preston, Chief Executive of NABMA, said: "[New Covent Garden Market] facilitates the connection between retail and catering businesses across the southeast of England.

"Leading towards the completion of a major redevelopment program in 2027 it seeks to work with its traders, their many customers and the local community to deliver a better working and shopping environment for all. It is a proud London institution and claims it will soon be able to boast it is the oldest and newest market site in the country."

Gary Marshall, Chairman of the Covent Garden Tenants Association (CGTA), said: "This is fantastic recognition for everyone at our market in what is a particularly momentous year. CGTA has been celebrating its 100th anniversary and we'll also be holding a dinner/dance in November to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the relocation of our great market.

"It is testament to the continued passion,

commitment and expertise of every trader here that we can say we were the market leader a century ago, the market leader 50 years ago and we're still the market leader now."

Jo Breare, General Manager of Covent Garden Market Authority, the landlord and management company at NCGM, said: "Congratulations to everyone who works at NCGM – this is an award that recognises the hard work and dedication of the entire market community.

"We are working alongside our tenants to establish the platform for a market that is steeped in history and heritage to write many new chapters as the premium fruit, vegetable and flower hub for London, a position it has held for almost a millennium. In 2024, a plethora of activities are planned to highlight the market reaching 50 years in Nine Elms and we're so pleased to be celebrating that milestone as the Best Wholesale Market in Britain."

When the redevelopment project completes in 2027, NCGM will have the site, the location, the product mix and the people to continue to set the trends and lead the trade for many, many years to come.

## Get in touch with your stories

On November 11th 2024, as many readers will know, it will 50 years since Covent Garden Market moved to Nine Elms, South London, and became New Covent Garden Market.

We'll be marking the milestone in a multitude of ways throughout 2024 with a look back through the market's half century here and a look ahead to the site becoming the UK's 'newest; wholesale market when our redevelopment project ends in 2027.

To do this, we need your help. We want to hear your stories, your feelings about and relationship with this great market, your milestones, your select suppliers and loyal customers, how your business has evolved here etc...

We're also looking for great pictures or historic items from the old market and would like to talk to as many people with memories of the market's move as possible. We'll be celebrating the history, of course, but we also want to celebrate the present and the future and demonstrate just how crucial the market continues to be for the food, drink, flower and plant supply chains for London and the South East.

This information will be used in Market Times, across our social media channels and on the market website. We're also working with a PR agency to increase the market's exposure this year, across trade, regional and national print and broadcast media.

We'll be talking to as many people as possible during the year, but I'd encourage anyone and everyone to get in touch with me and tell your messages and memories. There's a huge amount to communicate, but unless you tell us, something important might just get missed!

Thanks for your help.

Tommy, Press Officer, NCGM  
tommy.leighton@cgma.co.uk



**Left to right:** Katherine Brown, Blachere UK; Allan Hartwell, Market Place; Garin Auld, Covent Garden Market Authority; Tommy Leighton, Press Officer for New Covent Garden Market; Jonathan Fitzpatrick, Department for Levelling Up; Councillor Chris Poulter, NABMA President



# Gilgrove shuts doors for last time

As reported earlier in this issue, Damian Fowler, who had run Gilgrove on Buyers Walk, tragically passed away in January. Less than two months previously, he had taken the extremely hard decision to close down the family business after 37 years of very successful trading in London's wholesale markets. Here we look back on the company's history and recount conversations with three of the firm's long-standing employees on the day the firm closed



On Tuesday November 28th one of the leading and most widely respected wholesalers on Buyers Walk shut its doors. Gilgrove was established just a couple of years before the relocation to Nine Elms in 1974 and had been run by Peter Fowler MBE and then his son Damian since Peter's C&C Group purchased the business in the 1990s. In 1986, Peter Fowler had famously purchased C&C from retiring market veteran Lenny Cooper on the onerous basis that 'If at any time, you fail to pay me my money by mid-morning every Saturday, the company reverts to my name'.

He never did miss a Saturday payment and C&C went from strength to strength. It became known as an exotic fruit specialist, as Peter moved the business away from its focus on traditional fruit, set up at New Spitalfields on the day it opened in 1991 – where Peter and eldest son Damian worked tirelessly to establish a cracking business – and added a firm at Borough Market, where his other son Lawrence and daughter Kelly ran Elsey & Bent.

The purchase of Gilgrove increased capacity further. The firm was pretty acquisitive in its early years, before combining its strengths under the Gilgrove banner at New Covent Garden Market.

Throughout its 37-years, Gilgrove remained a family firm in the real sense of

the words – thriving with the service of not just the Fowler clan, but other families who have made the market their livelihood. Also part of the C&C "family" were long-standing suppliers from all corners of the world and a loyal band of customers who will miss them.

**Paul Wise** started his career in the old Covent Garden Market in 1965 and had worked for other fruit and vegetable wholesalers before Peter Fowler gave him a job in the mid-noughties. "Peter was very hard working. A shrewd operator who built up quite a big company," said Paul. "Gilgrove was established on Russell Street in the old market by Tony Goldsmith in about 1972. Peter bought it out at some point and it became part of the C&C Group.

"Times change, things change - they ended up closing down the Spitalfields firm. They combined everything on the one stand here and it worked quite well, particularly at the start," Paul said.

"It has been such a good company. I have been there for 18 years - on the fruit side - and have always enjoyed it. They left you to get on with it. It was a good firm to work for. No one was on top of you as long as you did your job properly, which is what anybody really wants.

"It is a very relaxed atmosphere in the Market anyway. And that firm was very



relaxed. There was a good team of people there.

"I'd like to think Gilgrove was the kind of place where you could come and, as we say, get on for what you wanted. You had us doing the fruit at one end, the salad and veg in the middle and the exotics at the far end. So you could buy whatever you wanted here. Salesmen and customers build up relationships. You know certain people and know what they want. As they walk up you think 'I've got something for you'. That is what I have always done."

What was Paul's reaction when he found out that Gilgrove was shutting its doors? "It came as a surprise," he admits. "We all knew that Damian was very ill. But somehow you expected it to go on. It was probably really because of the [prospect of moving to the] new part of the Market, which would have needed an enormous outlay to kit out one of those stands. That would have been a big commitment to make with his state of

**Top left:** Gilgrove was owned by the Fowler family for 37 years

**Above:** Peter Fowler and son Damian were hugely respected members of the NCGM family

**Top opposite:** Fred Hooper, Paul Wise and Keith Hart as Gilgrove shut its doors

**Top right:** Keith often ploughed a lonely furrow in the company's office

**Bottom opposite:** Paul with regular customers Darren and George Cox





“ Gilgrove was a place where you could come and, as we say, get on for what you wanted



health. Without that he may have let the firm just continue. I'd like to have thought so. I should have thought it was an extremely, extremely difficult decision to make.

"It feels very difficult. Even though everyone there has found somewhere else in the Market it's very hard because any change is hard.

"It's hard to describe if you have never been in this business and I don't like phrases like 'It's in the blood' but actually it is. It's been an enormous part of my life this Market. All my life since I was 15. I can't imagine not being here. I am now at Newmans. We closed there [at Gilgrove] that morning at midnight and walked round the corner and started here at 1 o'clock. I walked from one stand to the next. It keeps it seamless. And I don't want to let down the people I serve either. So here I am."

**Fred Hooper** sold fruit and bananas for Gilgrove for the last 14 years. He also moved to Newmans in November. "I feel very sad, disappointed - for the company and also for Damian," he said. "I'd known him since he was 8. I used to work on James Street in the original Covent Garden. Then came here. I did a 15-year stint in Western International then came back here again."

Fred will take away only fond memories of his time at Gilgrove. "It was very good. It was a family job. You came and had fun although you worked hard as well. Business has changed. It's not like it used to be. But Gilgrove always had a good reputation. They were secure. And fair. But times change don't they? Even though we [Paul and me] have both been here a long time it's new again. People work in different ways."



**Keith Hart** had been working for Gilgrove for 16 years. "My first contract, with Peter Fowler, was a handshake," he remembers. "I didn't have to sign anything. Someone recommended me and Peter took their word that I was ok. He was a lovely, lovely guy - hard but so fair. If you ever needed him for anything he would be there. And Damian took it over. He was a diamond.

"I feel really empty. I think you spend more time here than you do at home. Awake, anyway! I was a bit of everything - purchase ledger, sales ledger, taking the money, interacting with the customers, doing the

BACS payments. Although you did your work when you were here, to me it wasn't like coming to work. You are with your mates.

"It's like being back at school really. It was the atmosphere of everybody - meeting different people, you tell them your problems, you are like a therapist to them sometimes. It's one big giant family. You know everyone down here."



# Flying the flag for foliage

**Bryan Porter was part of the fourth generation to run his family's eponymous foliage business in the Market. The Flower Market was in his blood long before he started working here in 1990. He tells Market Times the story of the company now known simply as Porters Foliage and looks at the current state of play**



**Let's start where it all began – how did the Porters get into this trade?**

In the early twentieth century, my great grandfather, Aaron Porter, was a feather collector, delivering into London from Sussex. One morning, he saw the activity in the old Covent Garden, went and had a look and discovered they were selling some cut foliage. He thought 'there's some of that near me' and after a few conversations, began selling foliage to the traders at the market. From those beginnings, he decided to take a stand in 1910, first selling his own produce and then selling product supplied to him by other people.

The business began as Aaron Porter & Sons and at its peak, he had five shops in the market. The flower market was relatively small and they were selling from properties around Covent Garden, not in the main square, which was where the fruit and veg traders operated.

He had five sons working in the business, including my grandfather Ronald, and when Aaron died in 1948, he left a flourishing business. If I'm honest, my grandfather's brothers were more interested in reaping the benefits of their father's hard graft and spent all the money and lived the life! My grandfather, on the other hand, knuckled down to running the business and then went off on his own in the early '60s, creating Ronald Porter & Sons. Unfortunately, he died in his early 50s, in 1966, which is when my dad Brian and uncle Charlie took it on.



I've been in the market for 33 years now. As a child, I was always at the market and though I was very young, I do have memories of the old Covent Garden, sliding down the chutes into the cellars! Coming to this market, everything felt very space age – automatic opening doors was like being a spaceship to me at that age!

I always enjoyed being in and around the market and of course, it is in my blood, but my mum always pushed us away from the market. She gave us the best education she could because she knew what a hard life it is and the sacrifices involved. I went off and did motor vehicle engineering and worked in a dealership as a management trainee for while, but I was still living at home and one Christmas, I could see how busy my father was and went to give them a hand. That was it, once you're in, you're in.

Dad and Charlie ran the business until about a decade ago, before retiring and happily, they are both still with us. I loved working with him and my uncle. It was also a very good time in the economy and the market was a magical place to be – it always had a buzz and was great fun. As the industry has moved on, the market has changed and some of that fun and enjoyment has dwindled. It's not gone altogether, but it's harder work.

My older brother Barry had come into the business when he was 16 and I came in when I was 21 and we then ran the business for a few years and changed the name again to Porters Foliage, before he took a different direction and I bought him out.

My father encouraged me and my brother to do our own thing – he was very good at pushing us to make that effort. Big changes needed to be made to the way we sourced our product – the world had shrunk, it became easier to import and access new suppliers and I had started to travel and look for new suppliers around the world.



We found new sources in South Africa, to broaden our range of proteas and that type of produce, as well as South America and Australia. It is our diversity and ability to directly source items that aren't likely to come through the Dutch auctions that gives us our USP. We were flying in from eight sources around the world before Covid, but it changed everything. It was devastating to the whole industry of course, but some wholesalers were affected more than others. For us it was very difficult because we didn't have an online buying option at the time and that link into our suppliers and customers.

Our online portal opened us up to a potential new client base and raised our profile outside of the market. It's another challenge; running an online element of your business is time consuming and has a cost attached, but the new generation coming through need the option of having things at the touch of a button and we recognise that. It is still a relatively small part of our business, but momentum is growing and we saw much bigger uptake of online sales during Christmas.

**Where do you think New Covent Garden Flower Market is right now?**

This market is taking stock of where we all are.

The after-effects of Covid are still being felt. We got through it by borrowing money, but now we have to earn money to repay it.

Coming into the first quarter of 2023, for instance, we had had an OK Christmas '22 and we were looking forward to a steady year, nothing spectacular. Then, for mainly economic reasons, things just dropped off a cliff and we weren't ready for that. The summer was steady and the last quarter was a bit better, but for my business, the last quarter is the most important period of the year by far, so if we're quiet then, we are definitely in trouble.



**Opposite page, top:**

Bryan, centre, with Sam, right, and Josh Souter, left

**This page, top left:** One of the Porter family's shops in the old Market

**Bottom left:** Uncle Charlie with a customer in the '60s

**Bottom right:** Aaron Porter, now 30, has brought the original name back into the business



Covid changed London and the way in which our industry supplies customers. Of the customer base we would have supplied pre-Covid, I'd say 10% didn't make it through, while another 30-40% are still in business, but have removed their bricks and mortar retail element. They are working through webshops and on the telephone, but not face-to-face so much, which has a huge effect on the market.

People have placed a higher value on their time and are running their businesses with fewer staff and less resources. So, for some, coming to the market has become a question of time, simple as that. A lot of customers are buying to order, exactly what they need rather than speculating to sell onto a third party. Some are not coming to market as much as they would have, but even when they do, the purchases tend to be lower volume than they would have been prior to Covid.

The cost of transport, energy and documentation has also risen tremendously in the last three years, which has a compounding effect on the cost of the produce we sell here, so the price-point has become more expensive; undoubtedly too expensive for some.

That is our biggest challenge. We have broadened our horizons to attract customers that we may not have tapped into before. Moving forward though, we need to create more turnover, more volume, in order to sustain the market as a long-term viable proposition. I think there's ability to expand. The key is adapting to the marketplace and the new breed of customer, which has a fresh outlook, as well as fresh ideas and expectations. They will work in a different way to traditional florists and we have to find our way to move with the evolution of the industry and work in a more flexible way.

“ We have to find our way to move with the evolution of the industry and work in a more flexible way



### **Why does this Market remain as relevant to London's floristry scene as ever?**

Our aim is to inspire, that's what we're here for. Some of the most creative people in the country are our customers and when they come onto our stand, we have to inspire them to create something they weren't going to create when they walked in.

There are secondary wholesalers around London that can offer a good service and a high percentage of what's on offer in New Covent Garden. For some people that's enough to get them through, but they will not get what they can get here.

I think the people who visit the market *are* inspired. Buying online is OK when you know what you're buying, but the sensory side of it is still very important.

We still have a unique offering – there is nowhere else where you can find the range and diversity we have at New Covent Garden Flower Market.

The key with our products is that it is very much a visual and sensory experience. You can't smell a flower online or appreciate the texture of foliage online. You need to see it for yourself, smell it and touch it. You need to see two items side by side to know how they would physically work together, or whether you need to switch out and change for a different product. That sort of facility is still hugely important to many florists, who want to mix and match.



### **You now have a fifth generation of Porters in the fold, including your son, Sam...**

Sam is 21 and along with his cousin Aaron, who's name of course harks back to Porter's founding father, he is indeed the fifth generation of the family in the business.

Sam has been with the business three years now and Bryan thoroughly enjoys working with him. “Working with my son is a great experience. It's lovely to have your family around you, to enjoy the time together and most of all it's lovely to see them all develop as young adults, both in business and their understanding of life.

If you asked Sam if he saw himself working here, he'd say no, probably not, he came here by default and was given opportunities to do other things. But he is pretty laid back and was given the ultimatum that if he didn't find something else, he'd have to come and work here until he did! He definitely enjoys the job, the market and the people. Does he enjoy the working hours and the routine – no, but that's the challenge for everyone who works here. He's still young, so we'll see if this is his job for life or not. His life and his skills will develop and there is loads of scope for that to happen here.

Hopefully the team here will master how to run a business without me, as I won't be here forever!

### **Finally Bryan, what does New Covent Garden Market mean to you?**

For me, the market has always been part of my life and I want it so succeed and for everyone here to stick together. The strength of the market is made up by the combination of individual businesses, and it is that mixture that gives the market its uniqueness, its feel and its offer – as a collective we are much stronger.





# Eva relishes the Mission Kitchen experience

**Garden Of Eva was a founding member of Mission Kitchen (MK) at New Covent Garden Market in 2021. We caught up with Eva Thorne and discovered that her journey epitomises what the commercial kitchen space and added-value membership benefits at MK are designed for.**



"I grew up with a mother from the American South who was really into the region's culinary traditions, so from the time I was young, I was making pickles, jams, and relishes and since 2012, I'd been dreaming of starting my own condiments company," says Eva. "My dream was fuelled by memories of mommy's sweet and tangy cinnamon-spiced pickled watermelon rind that she served at our holiday dinner parties, as an accompaniment to ham and turkey. They disappeared fast!"

Eva travelled the world over as a food lover, but the Ureka! moment happened at home in the US. "I was sitting in the parking lot of a pan-Asian supermarket in Boston, waiting for it to open because I needed to buy unwaxed lemons to preserve for a Moroccan tagine that I was obsessed with making. You couldn't find Moroccan preserved lemons in any store back then, so I had to do it myself. In that parking lot, memories of my experiences making pickles, jams and relishes with my mom, dad, and sister collided with needing unwaxed lemons for a tagine.

"I thought, 'you know what?; there's something in this, a demand for pickles from all over the world,'" Eva says. "It seemed to me that the best place to start would be with what I already knew – pickles, jams and relishes from the American South.

"I decided that the first product line would be pickles, starting with pickled watermelon rind (yes, the rind - no waste) and chow chow (pickled relish with cabbage, tomatoes, red and green bell peppers, onions, vinegar, sugar, and warm spices). Both the pickle and the relish go great with cheese, which Brits love. The pickled watermelon rind is

a good accompaniment to ham, bbq, venison, and duck. It also goes well chopped and added to tuna and pasta salads. Think of chow chow as a distant cousin of piccalilli. It's good with everything: veggies, pinto beans, hot dogs and sausages, and burgers. I have customers who eat it with eggs, roasted salmon, and roasted chicken," she says.

The vision was crystalised on arrival in England, in 2014, when Eva realised she still couldn't find any of the pickles and relishes she grew up with and recognised a similar gap in the UK market. Busy with her own career though, she was short of the time needed to make solid progress – until the pandemic hit and she decided to use the window provided by lockdown to spread her wings.

"As part of the pre-opening work conducted by Mission Kitchen, Amy Win, the organisation's Community Manager, had put together an amazing online course called Launch Your Food Hustle," says Eva. "During the autumn and winter lockdown in 2020/21, I applied and was accepted. I had been to plenty of 'Ra-Ra, you can do it' types of founder bootcamps and while they were inspiring, I always found that I left without a clear direction – do this, then do this, then do that etc... What was I supposed to actually do to create a business?"

"The course Amy offered was revolutionary for me, because every week, I had something new and concrete to do – a social media plan, a kitchen operations plan, a spreadsheet for all of my ingredients (to figure out my costs), recipes written out, feedback from testing the recipes, who to talk to in order to open up a website or to get insurance. So by the time I'd finished the course, all I actually had to do was register my business and buy my insurance and I had exactly what I needed to launch. |"

"It changed everything for me - I call her Momma Amy now!"

Eva's dream became a reality when she incorporated Garden of Eva in May, 2021. She became a founding member of MK. "I'm a proud founding member," Eva says. "I started making pickles and relish at MK and went up to four days a week, after work, from 6pm-10pm – for several months."

Just two and a half years later, Garden of Eva is the perfect





**The Garden of Eva**

Our first fried chicken special of 2022 heads Stateside to New Orleans and the American South, where 'chow chow' goes on anything and everything.

Chow chow is a sweet and tangy mustard-spiced relish made from green tomatoes, onions, peppers and any seasonal veg that needs using. It cuts through all kinds of rich foods from fried chicken and hotdogs to BBQ beans and cornbread.

We owe this discovery to our new friend Eva. Born and raised in NYC but with deep roots in the South, Eva grew up helping her mum through the busy canning and preserving seasons every summer and fall. These days Eva's settled in London but she keeps her family tradition alive as The Garden of Eva, a new home for the pickles, jellies and condiments of her American Southern heritage.

*Adam*  
Adam & the Honest Food Team  
@honestburgers  
@gardenofeva.uk

**NEW ORLEANS**

31 MAY - 04 JUL ONLY

A COLLAB WITH THE GARDEN OF EVA

Free-range buttermilk fried chicken thigh, candied bacon, American cheese, 'chow chow' green tomato relish, Bull's-Eye Louisiana Chipotle hot sauce, ranch mayo and lettuce

£14

All burgers come with homemade rosemary chips as standard - or switch for coleslaw or salad

example of what MK aims to achieve for its members. It is an 'incubator', supporting and enriching newborn food businesses until they have grown in strength and size and can fly the nest to bigger and, hopefully, great things. "I went to MK's events and joined its brilliant mentoring program," Eva says. "The program features successful industry insiders and at an event featuring new businesses, a co-founder of Honest Burgers (HB), Tom Barton, tried my chow chow over Southern greens and cornbread that I made. He loved it, offered to be my mentor, and suggested a collaboration. That meant featuring Garden of Eva's American Southern Chow Chow on an HB special burger of the month.

"The chow chow was served at all 42 HB restaurants across the UK. It took 10 months to find a manufacturer, scale, get the branding, etc... But the hard work, exhaustion and frustration paid off. HB created a Southern, buttermilk-brined fried chicken burger with lettuce, cheese, candied bacon, ranch mayo, hot sauce, and GOE's American Southern Chow Chow."

Eva supplies a wide range of customers, but charts her higher-profile progress since that initial breakthrough: "The collaboration with HB was in summer 2022 and things

have moved on quickly since then," she says. "I launched American Southern Chow Chow, Pickled Watermelon Rind and Chili-Watermelon Jam in Whole Foods Market UK in the summer of 2023 and there's another major store that I will be launching in early in 2024. There are a few online retailers that should be stocking our products soon, too."

The commercial success has been accompanied by awards and national recognition. Eva's pickles won 2 stars at Great Taste Awards in 2022 and Whole Foods Market UK recently named her Chili-watermelon jam in their list of 2024 food and drink trends for "complex heat".

The rapid expansion began in Nine Elms, but although Garden of Eva outgrew the MK facility, that wasn't the end of her membership. "I don't cook at MK any more; I've outsourced production to a manufacturer in Wales. But I'm still a member because I can come in and do development work, make a couple of jars for something specific or do some food photography. I love being part of the community; people get what you're doing and are really supportive. When you need someone to taste something - does it need more thyme, more salt, less cheese... - or just help you put the lids on your jars, that's always there for you. They're my people.

"I can't imagine not being involved in MK now," she says. "I think it's been great in terms of learning, but also they are really beginning to emerge as the go-to place for new food businesses. They are helping lots of emerging food brands to launch and grow and also, through their events, they are convening some of the really important conversations about the direction of food, whether that be in the context of climate change or what the future of food will be. They are helping to change the way people think about food and that's hugely important."

Instagram - @gardenofeva.uk.  
Website - gardenofeva.co.uk  
Pinterest - @EvaPickles

**Eva winning with Amy and MK**

Amy Win, Community Manager at Mission Kitchen, recounts her experience of working with Garden of Eva:

"As Eva says, we first met online as part of MK's *Launch Your Food Hustle* course, which was entirely delivered on Zoom during the peak days of Covid. It took very early-stage food founders through the building blocks of a food business. As the course instructor, I was intrigued by Eva's business proposition and impressed with her natural storytelling style and warmth (yes even via Zoom!).

"Eva ended up winning discounted MK membership and joining us as a founding member when we opened our doors in June 2021. Since then, her business has gone from strength to strength. She's secured a contract manufacturer, been mentored by food industry veterans such as Tom Barton and Pollen + Grace co-founder Kristina Komlosiova, as well as receiving Great Taste Awards.

"It's been rewarding to see Eva move through the various stages of her business over the last couple of years. She's made the most of what MK tries to foster: the network, community, and expert links.

That Garden of Eva's products are now found in Whole Foods is an amazing achievement for a first-time food entrepreneur, and although she has devoted much more time to her own business recently, Eva is still holding down a job in a completely different industry.

"Safe to say Eva is a powerhouse and I've loved working with her and keeping in touch with her during her food business journey."

**Opposite bottom and this page, top left:** Eva with her award-winning range  
**Left, bottom:** The big breakthrough came with mentor Honest Burgers





# Business is rosy for Jim and Harwoods

**Jim Dew, who owns and runs Harwoods of London, has not always been based in Nine Elms. The business relocated from East London in 2010, to be closer to its customer base and take advantage of the extensive high-quality product offer on Buyers Walk. Harwoods had long been acquainted with this Market though and we asked Jim to tell us about his relationship with NCGM**

“In the early ‘90s, we used to come to New Covent Garden Market as a company, even though we were based in Bow, a couple of miles from New Spitalfields Market,” Jim says. “We would buy most of our stuff then from Spitalfields, but either my dad or myself would come over in the lorry to Nine Elms every night and buy the products we couldn’t get over there.

“We’d visit Roux Lamartine, when Tim who now runs European Salads was working there, and buy all the French salads, products like oakleaf, frisee, even French bunched herbs in those days. When Roux Lamartine went, Paris Express came along and we also used to buy French salads from them. We’d get all the posh mushrooms, the Girolles and what have you, from Mushroom Man - I think we were their first customer; when they were Fruits of the Forest in Garratt Lane, they used to deliver to us in Bow.”

Jim and his dad (also Jim) would take the product from New Covent Garden back and sell it to the caterers in Spitalfields, companies like RA Prescott, which is now Prescott Thomas, and Nelson Bros – as well as their own network of catering customers, he says. “They used to help us,” Jim remembers. “Spitalfields wouldn’t open ‘til 3am and we’d have a Nelson Bros sticker on the side of the lorry so we could drive past the queue and get into the market early.

“We also used to drop product over to NCGM from Spitalfields. So even before we were a tenant at this Market, we were doing our bit.”

**Top left:** Jim, centre, with sons Gareth and James

**Opposite page:** Harwoods vehicles outside their unit here and former premises in Bow

A wider range of the products he needed for his customers may have been an initial draw, but Jim says that when Harwoods eventually decided to relocate to Nine Elms, emissions was the tipping point. “We were running a lorry from Bow Triangle Business Centre to Spitalfields Market, about a two-and-a-bit mile trip, and to buy a brand-spanking new lorry for five miles a day just didn’t make sense. Neither did running back and forwards in three vans,” he explains. “We had already decided we needed to be over here because of the clientele we had – no disrespect at all to Spitalfields but it didn’t have what Covent Garden had in terms of the lovely exotic gear, the French salads and mushrooms and our customers all wanted that.

“It hasn’t changed our business as such. We had almost exactly the same customer profile as we do now, restaurants and all types of catering establishments throughout London and the Home Counties. But the location is better because a lot of our work is in the West End. If a restaurant calls up for a second delivery in Piccadilly, we’re there in 20 minutes. From Bow, you’ve got the Blackwall Tunnel traffic, then the Mile End Road or Bow Road to contend with. It makes a big difference.”

## Family affair

Harwoods has an accounts office in Kent, where Jim and his wife Trish live, and Harwoods of Kent, which trades out of NCGM and delivers throughout Kent. “My three sons Gareth, Josh and James all work in the firm. Josh runs Kent, which is great as it splits the brothers up and reduces the arguing!” Jim laughs. “We had more or less stopped the Kent business, as it took a lot of time and was affecting the London business at times, but since Josh started to build it up again in a more dedicated way just before lockdown, he’s done really well.

“A lot of it is word of mouth and we’ve got more work through loyal customers like The West House in Biddenden,

a chef we’ve supplied for over 30 years. I’m proud of Josh because it’s a hard nut to crack. He’s got a driver and separate staff and the deliveries go all over Kent - as far as Folkestone.”

Family is central to the firm, and it’s clear talking to Jim exactly how much love he has for what he still looks at as his Dad’s business, and the responsibility he has felt to make it work over the last 25 years. “My brother came out of the business just after my Dad passed away in 1997. My Mum almost sold the business to a NCGM firm, in fact, but I didn’t want to go and work for my Dad’s business under someone else. So, to cut a long story short, I bought it from her. It was hard in the beginning – I was still quite young and I was used to working with my Dad, so him not being there hurt.

“To this day, every decision, including when we moved over here, in the back of my mind is ‘what would the Old Man say?’. He loved Spitalfields, his first business was in the old Spitalfields and he sold that to Midland Garden Produce and ended up picking some of that business back up when MGP closed down. That’s when Harwoods was born – we started with just three customers.

“At the beginning of lockdown, when we could see what was coming, I took the decision to downsize and moved units. A lot of people said I’d over-reacted at first. But I thought ‘this is my Dad’s business’ – I can’t risk that. I didn’t want to take loans and then have to pay them back if the business couldn’t continue. I’m glad I did that now, because we’ve made ourselves more efficient and we’re bigger than we’ve ever been.

“It wasn’t that Dad didn’t like the Garden, he was just loyal to Spitalfields, having spent years and years there. Things like that nag away at you, but when my wife first came to see the new units last year and what we have here now compared to what we had before, she said ‘if you’re Dad was alive now and saw all this, he’d be so proud’. I hope he would be. I don’t mind admitting, I was actually a bit emotional.”







Harwoods history

Founded by James Harwood Dew (Jim) and his wife Janice, Harwoods of London was established in 1989, in the middle of a world recession. It represented Jim’s second-coming as a greengrocer, as after working in the trade for two decades, he had sold his first business and with Janice, become a successful publican at a pub and restaurant in the heart of Kent.

Jim fell ill and wasn’t expected to recover, so the couple gave up the pub. Ever-resilient, he did recover though and backed by his two sons, decided to start a new business, a more personal service catering for each chef customer’s differing personal needs. Harwoods of London (Wholesale Greengrocers) was formed with just three customers, but it wasn’t long before word and Jim’s reputation got around and the business expanded.

Sadly Jim’s health declined again and in March 1997, he passed away, shortly after his first grandson was born, to in his words “carry on the good work”.

Janice retired and in March 1998, youngest son James (also Jim) took over the business with his wife Patricia.

Jim Jr and Patricia continued to increase the trade, moving with the times and into larger customised premises at NCGM. Harwoods of London remains a family-run business; their three sons, Gareth, Josh and James are all in the fold now and you could say the fourth generation is coming through now as Josh just had a little boy.

Today, Harwoods supplies fresh fruit and vegetables to all types of catering establishments throughout London and the Home Counties.

Delivering consistent quality on a daily basis established the business’s reputation and has enabled it to grow and prosper. Exotic produce is a speciality and the firm offers a wide range of non-fresh products, including frozen.



New facilities

Just over a year since moving into his new units, Jim is delighted with how it’s gone. “We’ve been in the Market 13 years now and we’d worked out of three different units (in D and B blocks) before moving into our brand-new facilities in the newly finished block A in October 2022,” he says. “This unit – A205-206 – we designed it ourselves and actually, we based a lot of it on the old Chef’s Connection units we used to be in and now it’s exactly as we want it, like a home from home. In fact, the journey home can take a long time, so sometimes I get my nut down for a few hours, get up, have a bit of toast, have a shower and get back in the Market at 10pm without the stress of driving in.

“Downstairs, it’s just a different world to what it was. When I look back, I don’t know how we did it before. We got a 5-star hygiene rating. They gave us a bit of a hard time, which is fair enough, but the main thing they were worried about was the specification on the bottle of sanitiser, so that would suggest there wasn’t anything else they could find to worry about. Our clients ask for all sorts of certifications and ratings and we are able to supply them with proof of how well we operate.

“The difference is quite amazing. Even though the floorspace downstairs is the same as we had in the old unit, where it was tight, we have got the upstairs space. It’s not being fully utilised yet, but we have moved things around to make more use of the space and we know we have room to expand in to. We could double the size of the business if we wanted to.”

“ To this day, with every decision, at the back of my mind is 'what would the Old Man say?

Jim reached his own half century this year and admits that that scale of expansion might not happen while he’s around, but with three sons and a grandson (so far), there’s plenty of time!

“The boys want to carry on and I think sometimes they’d quite like me out of the way,” he jokes. “When I go on holiday, I come back and pick up on things and they don’t always like it, but to be fair to them, I can always tell they’ve cleaned and tidied everything up the day before I get back!”

When he’s not on holiday, Jim is on Buyers’ Walk most nights and the firm buys almost all of its product from wholesalers here. Like so many who work the types of hours that are the norm in this Market, pulling back isn’t easy. “I’m not officially supposed to work weekends these days, but when I’ve got a night off, I’m looking to see how busy it is. If we’re short staffed, I’m coming in, because I enjoy it. It’s a bit of a drug if I’m honest,” Jim says.

“It’s a family up here, isn’t it? It’s what I say I say to Trish. When the proverbial hits the fan and it comes to the crunch, we all come together. When somebody is ill or dies, everyone knows each other and we all rally around, donate to good causes. I think that’s nice.”





# Mick looks back on life in the Market

**When Mick Reid made the short journey from Kennington Cross to start work in New Covent Garden Flower Market in late 1974, he was embarking on what is, to date, a 49-year relationship with what was then a brand-new market.**

“ I gave myself the nickname Greedy Reidy because I was always after all the 'turns'

Kennington Cross used to be railway sidings and they were my stomping ground as a kid. I had been doing an apprenticeship to become an electrician and earning £9 a week (and giving my mum £7!), while all my mates on the building sites were taking home £100 plus. So, I worked in a bar to earn money, was missing college and getting behind and the next thing you know the job came up here.

I started working for Covent Garden Market Authority, on the pitching gang, bringing the product into the market for the wholesalers. There were 14 of us and I had to do two months of training on the low-loading trucks, so officially I started in February, 1975. I did my forklift training too and there were only two of us who could drive them, so we were in demand. It wasn't easy as there was a bank outside the

market and in bad weather if you hit a bit of foliage you could be sliding down it!

It was important to get in and get to know people as, like lots of places, if your nose don't fit...

I was on there for 13 years and became the longest serving member and foreman. But the pitching gang was dwindling in numbers as other people started to do its work. I was on a low basic wage – you earnt money by collecting boxes or water for people. I couldn't earn enough money to get a mortgage, so I became a fully-fledged porter and first I was night man, working for a lovely guy, Gordon at Pratley's.

I thought I'd step in and find it easy, but I found the transition really hard, as there were so many porters and all the good 'turns' had gone to the regulars. So you had to run your nuts off to get new people and build your turns up that way. Gordon always wanted me to make more money from my turns as he knew that would encourage me to work harder for him, which it did. I was always happy to put myself out for others as it got you more work. Some of the younger kids even then didn't want to do it and the older boys found it hard to adapt to a new market and new systems, but that worked for me as people kept coming back.

I moved around a bit in the early days as a porter - with a young family, you'd chase the money and it wasn't too big a deal for the firms in those days. There were 76 porters getting a right good living; now there's maybe three or four.

I did settle down though and was with SR Allan for 22 years. When they made me redundant, my world came to an end. It was all I knew and even though I started doing deliveries, I wanted to be here. I'd known Dave, the guvnor at DG Flowers, since he was working in the office at 14. I was lost and missed the friendship and camaraderie. DG had got really big so I asked Dave if he could use me for anything and he said 'yeah, that's fine'.

That was a few years ago. I get in at 10pm and put together the orders for customers in the West End – you've got to deck it, put it on the floor and into the annex so when the guys come in, they know that it's all sorted for them. We trust each other. Dave knows everything will be spot on when he picks up an invoice and he has a head start over other companies, who come in later and look through stuff.

Sometimes I'll finish work at 3, but still be here at 5 – there's always something to be done and I won't go home until I'm finished. It all helps the firm tick. The time for a cup of tea and a chat is at the end of the day. Young kids coming in now find it strange, they don't want to get up in the morning and they want a social life. Work in the market and you don't really have a social life, you basically have one day off and that's to recover!

I haven't been too well lately and the market has been very supportive. I had 28 years without a day off and I was ever so proud of that. When I didn't come in one day, they couldn't believe it. I couldn't get out of bed!

I suppose it's like Marmite – you love it or you don't. To me it is a way of life. I loved the atmosphere from day one, it was a buzz. When it was busy, it was still friendly and everyone helped each other out. It was different gravy. I'm 69 now and I can't imagine not being here.

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