

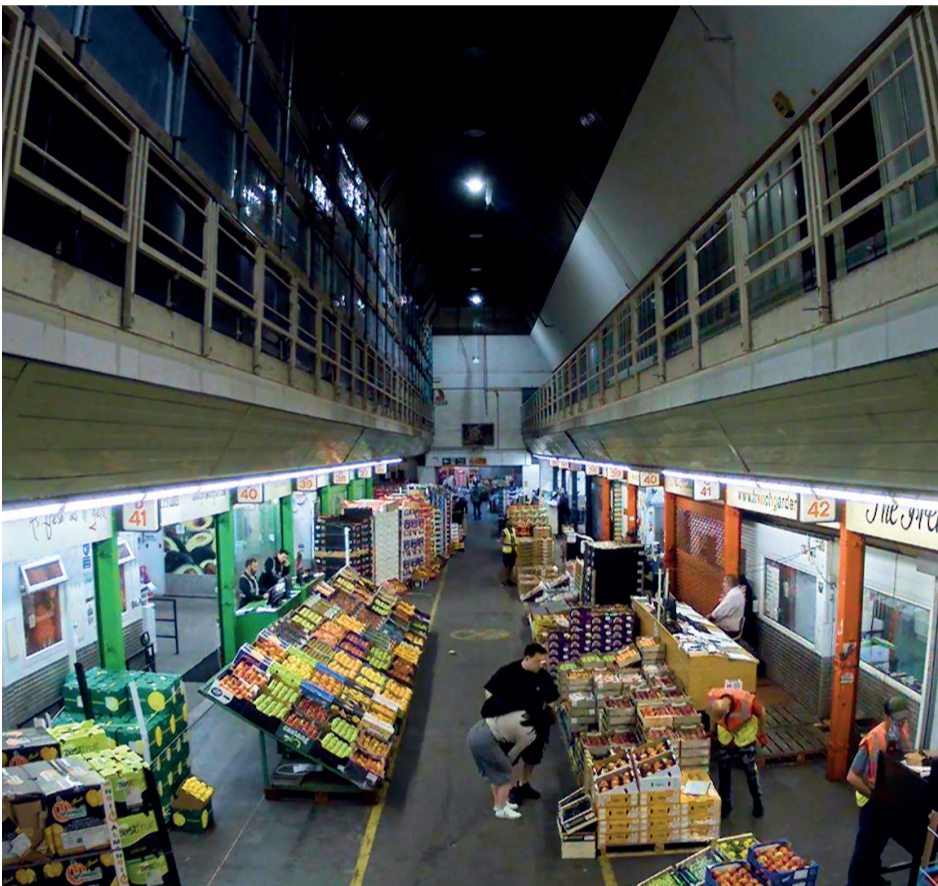
# MARKET TIMES

PAGE 2-4  
NEWS BITES

PAGE 8  
CHARITABLE THOUGHTS

PAGE 10-13  
VERY BRITISH PARTNERSHIPS

PAGE 14-15  
MOMO ON THE MOVE



**BACKING  
BRITISH  
GROWERS**  
SEE PAGE 10-13



The first new section of Buyers walk for 50 years opened in June (P6-7)



## Editor's Message



Welcome to the Summer edition of Market Times. I think it's fair to assume that this will not go down as one of the most memorable summers weather-wise and that can, of course, have a negative impact on trade. The law of Sod says that the weather improved just as the schools close, which doesn't help trade either. I hope at the very least that means our readers with children enjoy well-earned family holidays in the sun.

There has been plenty going on in the last quarter, as always here at the country's official Best Wholesale Market 2024. Undoubtedly the biggest landmark is the opening of the first new section of Buyers Walk to be constructed at NCGM since we first opened the doors in 1974. Inside this issue, we talk to the traders who have relocated from C&D blocks to the new Block B and find that the move has been pretty positive so far. Replace anything that is 50 years old with something brand new and there will inevitably be a period of harking back to what went before. Here, we have the added element – there is a vibrant section of the 'old' Buyers Walk still operating. Until the next phase of the redevelopment is complete therefore, the urge to compare and contrast will remain. The market has always shown itself to be adept at moving on and adapting to changing circumstances – this is the next chapter for the fruit and vegetable wholesalers who are central to the unique ecosystem of this market.

There are several articles in this issue that look ahead to British Food Fortnight, in September. On the 20th of that month, we'll be hosting an event in the market where we'll be welcoming a large group of British growers who supply the market to join us to mark the start of BFF24 with its organisers and other guests. Our last issue similarly looked forward to the first National Florist Day, which was a huge success in June – read the article opposite on this page for more details. Traders at NCGM sell product from every corner of the globe to satisfy the year-round demands of their customers, but there is immense pride in the long-standing relationships the market has with British growers and suppliers. Customer demand for British product never diminishes – the more domestic growers selling their world-class products through wholesale markets, the better.

On the back page, unusually, we've included two adverts. First, the CGTA is holding an annual dinner and dance, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the market's move to Nine Elms and your presence would be most welcome! And second, we plan to unveil The Garden Wall in November, to permanently commemorate people and firms who have served, and continue to serve this wonderful market. We need to have a critical mass of plaques purchased before we install the wall, as the secondary motive behind the wall is to raise significant funds for charity. So, please scan the QR code on the back page and create an eternal record for yourself, those special people or your company's place in this market's history.

Enjoy the read!

*Tommy*

Tommy Leighton, Market Press Officer



## Market demonstrates support for florists

The Market led the way on the first ever National Florist Day (NFD) on June 8th as more than 1,000 florists across the country got involved.

The Flower Market was among the patrons of this inaugural celebration of the magical floristry industry and a series of fantastic Flower Demonstrations in the Market caused quite the stir on social media.

Five florists, all long-time customers at NCGM, took it in turns to showcase their skills to a live audience, hosted by another lifelong friend of the market, NFD founder Caroline Marshall-Foster. Elaine of Pesh Flowers, Ahmed of Paul Thomas Flowers, Warren of London Event Florist, Alan of Hybrid Flowers and Simon of Simon Lycett created a variety of inspirational floral designs while also providing expert commentary liberally punctuated with positive comments about the Flower Market.

The event was live-streamed and watched by no fewer than 1,490 people – not bad at all between 6am and 9am on a Saturday morning. The real measurement though is the reel that was posted as soon as the live stream finished. That has so far been played 31,600 times, with a total watch time of 175 hours. The average watch time was 1 minute and 10 seconds – the Instagram average is 7-15 seconds – and, of course, lots of people watched for a lot longer.

If you haven't seen the social coverage, you should! It is still available in its entirety on the @marketflowers feed.

Our NFD, activity reached 11,500 accounts and got 36,500 impressions. The Flower Market was been mentioned in well over 100 stories on other Insta accounts and, interestingly more than 1,200 visits to the @marketflowers feed were registered from people who had searched for the Flower Market through Google and other search engines. That's a huge uplift.

For all of the patrons who co-funded the project, it was a unique opportunity to interact in a totally different way with their customers, both current and future. We were able to engage and connect with the industry in a way that not only showed our support for the industry as a whole but generated interest in the market and made us part of the whole buzz and feelgood factor.

Creating that feelgood factor was one of the key reasons the event was launched, said Caroline Marshall-Foster,



pictured above with Simon Lycett. She explained: "I wanted to create a buzz, generate a sense of pride and, under an official banner, enable everyone to show off just how wonderful the flower industry is and how it touches every part of life. That's why I set myself and the project three goals. To create Pride, Awareness and Sales.

"Having seen the interaction, the camaraderie, the friendships formed, and the support given, coupled with the amazing feedback and astonishing reach, we clearly achieved all three in a way I never thought possible for year one."

For more information on how you can get involved in National and International Florist Day 2025 email [hello@nationalfloristday.com](mailto:hello@nationalfloristday.com).

**Above:** The children at Wyvil School, which is just a stone's throw from NCGM, marked the first National Florist Day with a project that involved weaving recycled materials to create this magnificent bouquet of flowers, which we displayed in the flower market. Thank you so much to these budding artists and their teacher Sue for all your hard work!

## Harwoods and Koppert cress to impress London



New Covent Garden Market based catering supplier Harwoods of London has three decades of trading history with family-run Dutch business Koppert Cress and the long-time partners have teamed up to promote Koppert's range to London's chefs and consumers.

A digital marketing campaign this summer has particularly highlighted London's Secret Ingredient: Premium Microgreens and Harwoods rebranded the van that exclusively distributes Koppert's products to customers across London and the South East.

Koppert Cress is known for producing natural, innovative ingredients that chefs can use to intensify the flavour, aroma, or presentation of their dishes; products that meet the increasingly stringent requirements of restaurants worldwide.

Cresses are the freshly-sprouted seedlings of 100% natural aromatic plants. They offer an intensity of taste and aroma that, says Koppert, are only found in young seedlings.



Alongside the marketing campaign, the two companies are holding an event at Mission Kitchen in NCGM's Food Exchange on September 23rd, which will see chefs from across the capital come together to learn more about the culinary flexibility of microgreens.

Harwoods will celebrate 35 years of trading in November this year and for most of its time in business, Koppert has been a close partner, says Harwoods Managing Director Jim Dew: "We have been London's number-one distributor of Koppert Cress products for some time," he adds. "In my view, they are second to none, our customers love the quality and versatility and the point of difference that Koppert's wide range of flavours adds to their menus. We couldn't wait to get out on the road to shout about it!"

For more information, and to watch Koppert chef Franck Pontais showing you the content of a sample box, visit <https://discover.koppertcress.com/en/londons-secret-ingredient/>

## Berry leader renews focus on wholesale

Global fresh berry leader Driscoll's has strengthened its long-term relationship with The French Garden, its exclusive partner at New Covent Garden, and the two businesses are looking to maximise the potential for berry and cherry sales through the market.

British cherries have been a particular focus in the last quarter and they are considered a customer favourite, as Driscoll's found in its latest research that 91% of British consumers voiced a preference for homegrown cherries.

Driscoll's research also found that seven of the 10 best-performing cherry varieties were British, with higher brix levels meaning British cherries are extra sweet, encouraging more people to purchase.



Jon Hillary, Driscoll's Cherry Product Manager, said: "The favourable weather conditions for cherry growth this year meant we were able to offer consumers flavourful British cherries earlier than usual. We're thrilled to be delivering fresh British cherries as part of our berry portfolio for a second year. Our commitment to quality and freshness is reflected in every batch, and we are excited for customers and consumers alike to enjoy them for all occasions this season."

Iain Furness, Managing Director of The French Garden, Driscoll's wholesale market partner, selling the company's cherries and berries at New Covent Garden Market, said: "It's heartening to see Driscoll's renewing their focus on the UK wholesale markets. They are working with us exclusively at NCGM. They have seen that we have invested in our brand new facilities here and that we are committed to this market and our partners."

"We can be more confident in bringing suppliers and customers to the market in our new surroundings and it's a great environment to show off a leading brand like Driscoll's to our customers."

"We will work with them to promote the brand and they will recommend people come here to the market to buy their berries and cherries. It's early days, but if they are pushing people towards us, it can only be good news for the market."



## Premier marks quarter century

Premier Foods Wholesale, the largest individual wholesaler in the UK's largest wholesale market, celebrated its 25th anniversary in June.

On June 6th, 1999 Premier Fruits Covent Garden was opened in two units at New Covent Garden Market, by Jason Tanner and Roger Garber. The firm has expanded into 15 units, acquired businesses along the way and today delivers nationwide from its NCGM base. It is well inside the top 50 largest fresh produce firms in the UK.

Roger still works at Premier, but is no longer a director. Jason is managing director of The Menu Partners, the wider group of which Premier Foods Wholesale is now an integral part. He said: "It's been an incredible journey over the past quarter century. Our story to becoming an industry leader began in 1999 and we have remained committed to ensuring quality and service to our loyal customer base

ever since, whilst continuing to forge new relationships with suppliers and nurturing existing partnerships globally.

"Today, Premier Foods Wholesale looks very different than it did at the outset, but it continues to embrace its family-owned spirit. Our move to a new purpose-built multi temperature facility happened just a few weeks after this milestone and with a growing fleet capable of countrywide deliveries 7-days-a-week, we are future fit for the next 25 years and beyond.

"A big thank you to our people, customers and suppliers for joining us on our journey. Here's to the next quarter of a century of continued success!"

## CGMA Chair awarded OBE



Wanda Goldwag, Chair of Covent Garden Market Authority (CGMA) was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in HRH King Charles' Birthday Honours List.

Wanda was honoured for her work with leaseholders, having previously been Chair of the Leasehold Advisory Service. Wanda says: "My real hope is that I can take my experience from other sectors and use it to support New Covent Garden Market and the wider wholesale marketplace."

Meanwhile, Fiona Fell was reappointed to the board of Covent Garden Market Authority (CGMA) as a Non-Executive Director for a second term. Her reappointment follows that of Sarah Calcutt and David Fison, who were both reappointed to the board for second terms in 2023.

These reappointments were made by Defra Ministers in accordance with the Governance Code on Public Appointments. All reappointments were made on merit and political activity played no part in the decision process.

CGMA's General Manager Jo Breare said: "The diverse skills and expertise that Fiona, Sarah and David bring to the CGMA board will continue to be invaluable in ensuring the success of New Covent Garden Market and the redevelopment of the market infrastructure."

# Films celebrate shared virtues and values of Market life

A series of short films celebrating work and life across New Covent Garden Market (NCGM) are now live on the NCGM youtube channel. The films are part of a larger project to capture the people and businesses of NCGM during an anniversary year that marks half a century since the Fruit & Vegetable and Flower Markets relocated from West End Covent Garden to South London's Nine Elms in November 1974.

The films already uploaded include a 50-second flying visit to the UK's largest wholesale market for flowers, plants, foliage and sundries, interviews with three Mission Kitchen members that illustrate the way the organisation has empowered them to grow and, as well as three flower market customers explaining just what NCGM means to them and their businesses.

"We're capturing a cross section of events across the market leading up to our 50th anniversary in November, another historic milestone in the market's long history," explained Tommy Leighton, NCGM Press Officer. "We often say that we're the oldest and will soon be the newest wholesale market in the UK, and these short films provide a fascinating glimpse into what life's like for the market's businesses and customers, as well as the values and strengths that drive New Covent Garden Market's success."

Tommy added: "We're working closely



with local production company Chocolate Films because they're based next to us in Nine Elms and know the market well. It's not easy filming in a busy wholesale market, so I'd like to thank the individuals and businesses for their time and playing their part in our history."

There is plenty for you to enjoy at your leisure already – just type '50 years in Nine Elms' into youtube. And make sure you watch out as the year progresses, as we'll be adding several more.

## Richard Clements

Richard Clements, Sales Manager at Premier Foods Wholesale, died on June 14th, aged 52.

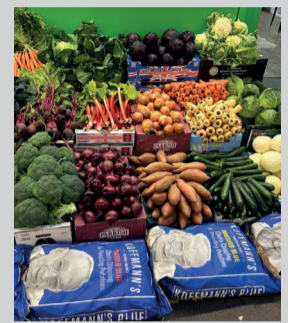
Richard was born in Denmark Hill and during his childhood, his mother and father Gordon and Jill ran a greengrocers, Weamacs in Park Hall Road, West Dulwich. Gordon owned and ran the shop for around 40 years, until the early 1990s. Several family and friend links to New Covent Garden Market and he was a regular visitor with his dad before he came to work here, for Thorogoods, starting on March 22nd, 1998. He was at Thorogoods for around a decade, then spent a period at P&I, before joining what was then Premier Fruits 12 years ago.

Richard's wife Diane has worked for The French Garden for 24 years and theirs was a true market romance – Richard would see Diane walking along the balcony above him while he worked at Thorogoods, before one day asking her out for a date.

The couple married in 2008 and have a 12-year-old son, Louis, who Arsenal fan Richard would often take to Selhurst Park to watch local team Crystal Palace. Richard was also a regular at the gym and a massive music fan. "He was totally dedicated to market life," said Diane. "It was his main focus. During the school holidays, he would take Louis into work on occasion to meet his friends and customers and show him what dad did for a living. Louis now knows lots of them by name."

Jason Tanner, Richard's boss and long-time friend, said: "He was always a likeable person, having a laugh and a joke with everyone, and a helpful and thoughtful man who invariably put other people before himself. Workwise, he had a good following and was very well liked by suppliers and customers, many of whom he'd been working with for more than 25 years."

The picture above is of the last show Richard assembled at Premier. "We will miss him - a massive hole has been left in the Premier family and the market, as he was a great advocate of market life," Jason said



## Obituaries

### Billy Smith

Billy Smith, who worked in the Flower Market for almost half a century and co-founded Smith & Green with Peter Green, died in May, aged 81.

Billy was born in Hackney in January 1943 and followed his older brother and several more members of the Smith family into the old Covent Garden in the early-1960s. He began his career working for QED, before working for CJ Gardiner, where owner Charlie Gardiner became a mentor. Billy moved on to FJ Foster and after the move to Nine Elms, he gave Peter Green a job at Foster's in 1978. Both had also worked elsewhere for short periods, before they set up shop together in 1991.

For much of his Market life, Billy could be found delivering flowers around Essex, where his customers would have been royally entertained by the character and the stories that were so loved by his market colleagues. "Everybody loved him," said Peter Green. "He was hard working, always well dressed, constantly smiling and happy, a practical joker and a great storyteller – I'd heard most his tales 100 times, but they always made me laugh! Some days, I'd leave the market with pains in my stomach; it was a lot of fun."

After a few years working part time, Billy retired in 2011, leaving Smith & Green in the more than capable hands of Peter and his son Jack, who is also Billy's Godson. He was still active until a few years ago in a field in which he was even more famous than flowers – football.

A storied playing career as a tough-tackling, long-haired centre half in non-league will be best remembered for his time at Tooting & Mitcham, but some of Billy's best days in football came after his playing days. He managed Dulwich Hamlet, Carshalton Athletic, Kingstonian, Corinthian Casuals and Crawley Town and as well as lifting trophies and inspiring cup runs at several of those clubs, he was also well renowned for the number of players he introduced into high level league football. The most famous is Ian Wright, but he also spotted and developed Alan Pardew, Murray Jones and Andy Gray, who all had very successful professional careers.

Billy is top centre in the photo of the Flower Market's football team in the late 1970s.

Billy leaves his wife Mavis and their daughter Tracey. His funeral was at Croydon Crematorium, at 10.30am on June 14th.



### Tony Hall

Tony Joseph Hall, who had been a porter at New Covent Garden Market for more than a quarter of a century, died on June 5th, aged 59.

Tony was born at King's College Hospital in Denmark Hill, in 1964, and grew up on Brixton Road in Kennington. He started his career as a school caretaker and also spent some time as a cab driver, before coming to the market to help out Attila Frozen Foods as a porter. Like so many, once he was here, Tony didn't leave. He worked for Attila for 23 years before spending the last three years as a porter at London Fresh.

One of Tony's sons, Charlie, worked at the market for a few years and his other son, Jamie, worked alongside his dad at Attila for 13 or 14 years then after a spell at Premier, joined him again at London Fresh over the last year and a half.

Jamie said Tony loved the market, particularly the banter and the people. "I enjoyed working with dad. Sometimes the arguments at home could be brought to work, but there were far more laughs and good times. When they are gone, you do appreciate it more," Jamie said.

Tony was a Chelsea fan, although ill health had stopped him travelling to games in recent times. He was a family man and leaves his wife Lorraine, his sons and seven grandchildren.

His funeral was on July 9th in Hither Green and was very well attended.

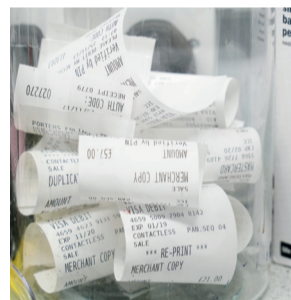


For more on these stories and to keep up-to-date with news from NCGM, scan the QR code



# Still life tells the simple stories

The Still Life picture is an image depicting mostly inanimate subject matter. This type of image can play several roles. First, it is documentary simply to show the subject at the time of photography, highlighting it in a way that pictures with people in them tend not to, as people in many pictures tend to dominate the view – well, we do have a tendency to look at ourselves first, don't we?



The still life picture will reveal the simple documentary; the light on the subject, the atmosphere, the sheer beauty and line that apparently very ordinary subjects can radiate. As I wrote in the last issue of Market Times, photography captures moments in time and the very ordinariness of a subject that we can hardly be bothered to give any attention to today can often tomorrow become extraordinary. It is often those still life pictures that tell the story of our history and our past lives, as opposed to the chaotic chance that people reportage photography often captures.

More than we would normally allow ourselves to do, we slow down for still life, we take time to look, to compose the picture frame, to know what you want to show and say about the subject you are about to put into the camera, possibly for posterity, without peopled visual distraction.

I've mentioned before that I always compose my pictures in the camera. Before I shoot anything and put it in the camera, I know exactly what it is I'm trying to capture – there is no fiddling about in the darkroom or with Photoshop and NO CROPPING AFTER the event.

The inherent beauty of any well shown fruit and vegetable or flower display is clear enough, but there's far more nuance to it than that.

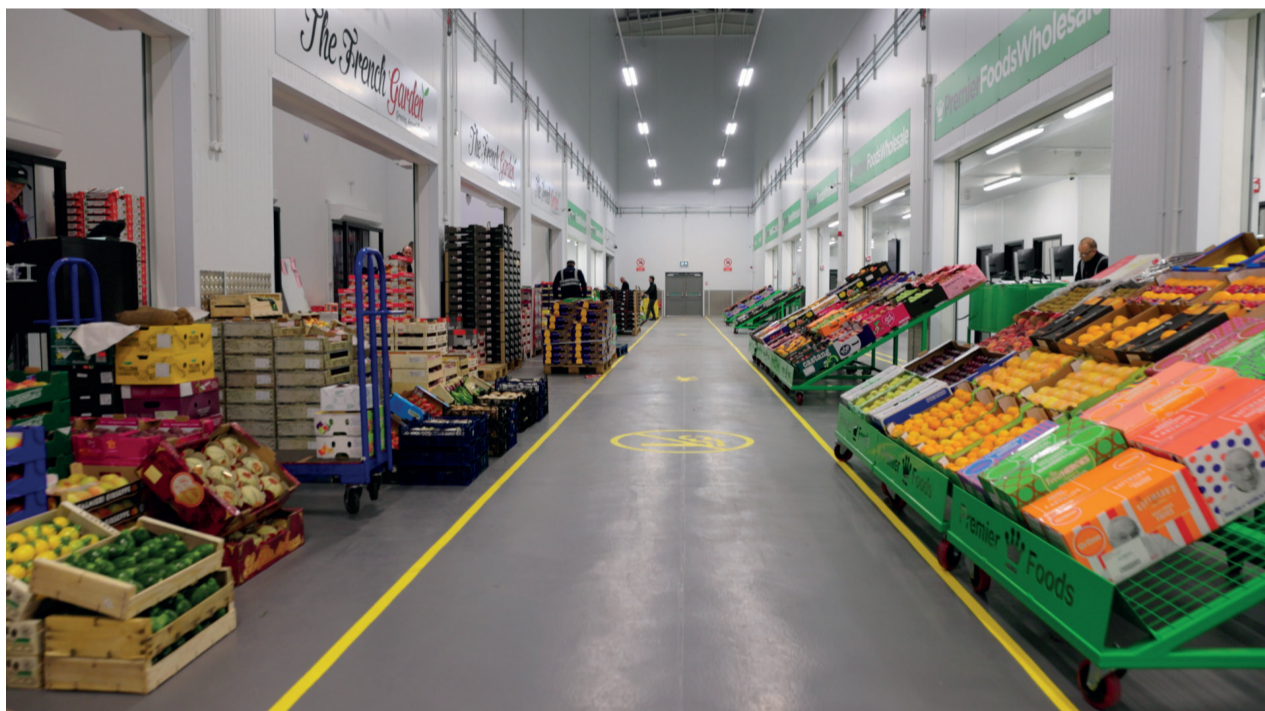
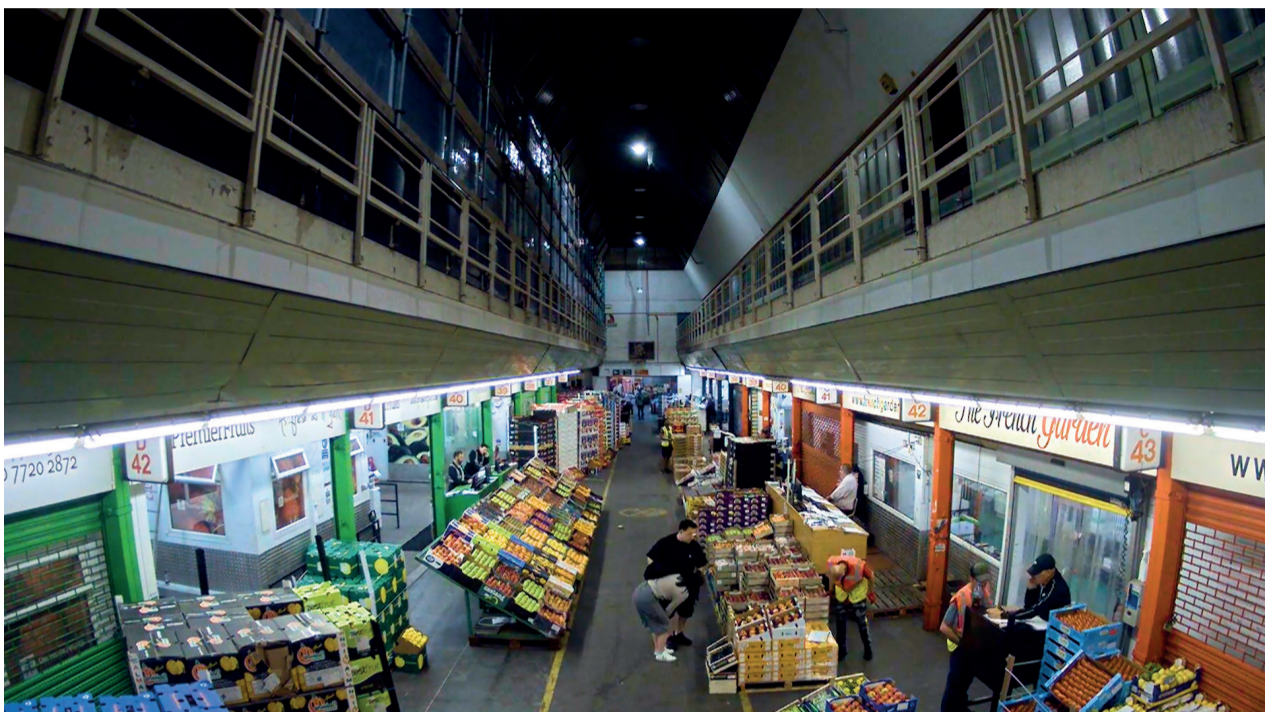
The veg stacked up outside with the soil of the field it was grown in still visible tells such a different story, the label display before the bar codes, the walled anchored telephones, the office out of a briefcase, digital payment receipts in a glass jar, the design and atmosphere of close up of fresh produce, the market buildings standing silently and starkly alone, waste awaiting its wheeled journey to the recycling facility, even the desolation of a discarded and forever closed Market café, that's where the beauty often lies.



I've been taking pictures of this market since I first stepped foot in it and fell in love in 1968. In this series, I'm looking back on some of my favourites and explaining the thinking and stories behind them

**See you next time!**  
CB O8/24

# Half a century on, a new era begins for Buyers Walk



**On June 30th, the first brand new section of Buyers Walk to open at New Covent Garden Market since 1974 welcomed three firms as its inaugural tenants. We talked to all three about the move, to see how they feel about their new surroundings and whether it will change the way they view their businesses**

## The French Garden

The French Garden moved into units 401-408 and Iain Furness and Nathan Humphries (pictured below) were both happy with the relocation. "It's gone very well. The facilities seem pretty clinical at the moment, but that's because they are brand new," says Nathan.

For Nathan's 'clinical', Iain used the word 'sterile', but he too recognises that after more than 25 years in their previous units, things were bound to feel strange at first.

"It was sad to leave because that was the place where The French Garden developed into the company that we are today," Iain says. "I'm going to miss the other wholesalers around us and I'm going to miss the old building. But, as sad as it was, that door is closed behind us and we're now fully focused on what the future holds for us."

He continues: "We've moved from 10,888sqft of space to nearly 15,000sqft, so we've increased capacity by almost 50%, with another level on top. We were not desperate for more space right now, but we took it because we want the company to grow in this next phase and this gives us plenty of room to do that. Also, if we have a very busy day, we'll have the cool chain capacity to keep more produce chilled and in perfect condition. That's very important for customers in Guernsey and Jersey, for instance, and for products like baby leaf."

As well as its attractive front-of-house look, the firm also has additional space for racking and storage, three times the freezer space, spacious and comfortable office space on both



floors, a dry goods room, a kitchen, a 'warm' room, a storage room and a locker room and modern toilet facilities.

"This is bringing us into the 21st century operationally," says Iain. "It will enable us to give a far better service to both our suppliers and our customers and also deliver a better working environment for our staff."

Nathan adds: "All the staff were really excited about coming over. We'd been fitting this space out since last August so we've had plenty of time to think about what should be where and why. I haven't come across anything yet and said "I wouldn't have done it like that!"

"It's cleaner and brighter, the fridges are more efficient and the staff are able to work far more efficiently," says Iain. "As the business evolved in our old units, we had to find ways to fit everything into the old space and there were inevitably some compromises." The time spent manoeuvring things and waiting for colleagues to move product around has "significantly decreased already," adds Nathan.

Iain says: "There are no little alleyways or things that have been altered to make things fit. We'd altered so much there, but we've had all this time to get everything here just how we want it and apart from the odd glitch (which can be fixed) it's all been working as we expected."

Comments from suppliers and customers have been very positive, Nathan reports. "We've had customers in already

from Spain, Poland and the UK and they have all been really impressed with both the offices and warehouse space. We have invested a lot of money in the facilities and that reflects well on the market, giving existing and potential business partners greater confidence, which can only help relationships to flourish.”

At the same time as the move, TFG and London Fresh amalgamated under one banner. London Fresh had been part of the French Garden group since it was formed 22 years ago, but now the two teams have combined to create a significant joint force. “We have kept every staff member from both companies,” says Nathan, “and we’ve kept all of the departments in the business. As with

### Buyers Walk changes

The 24 units in the new building are on either side of a Buyers Walk that is 80 metres in length, 6.5m wide and 14.5m high.

Work has now begun on the next phase, which started with the demolition of the units in the middle and western sections of the pre-existing Buyers Walk.

To do that, three businesses relocated from that area on a temporary basis until their new units are completed. 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 D59-60, and Neil Brown Herbs has added an additional unit to its firm (D62).

anything like this, the biggest challenge is integrating two teams and making sure that they are all willing to support and help each other.”

The staff showed their commitment to the business on moving day, when everyone was on hand out of hours to relocate from Block C to the shiny new units at NCGM.

Another change to the organisation has seen Simon Greenhill, formerly owner of Greenhill Mushrooms, joining the sales team to bolster its mushroom operation. “Simon has loads of experience and closed his business down before we took him on,” Iain says. “The mushroom job is very competitive within the market, but because we have very good external mushroom sales, his specialised skills will add a lot.”

The relocation came at a quietish time for Buyers Walk generally, just prior to the school holidays and during Euro 2024. “We noticed the difference in footfall straight away,” says Nathan. “It has felt a bit empty some mornings. We were used to being next to Thorogoods, Newmans and Gilgrove, who like us generated a lot of traffic, but there are only three wholesalers now.”

Iain adds: “I think one of the concerns was that the split of the wholesalers would isolate the firms left in the old section of Buyers Walk, but the dynamics of it actually mean that this section is a bit more isolated right now. We do have a good following of loyal customers and they will still come to us, of

course, and we also have a strong customer base outside the market. But what this has already shown us is that the split is going to be challenging. We’ll miss being part of that and the sooner the next phase is completed and all the wholesalers are back together again, the better.

“We’re the type of firm that is very proactive, we don’t stand around and wait for new customers to appear. Now, we’ll have to be even more on our game, but we’ll do it.”

### Supreme Salads

Bart Conway, owner of Supreme Salads (unit 411) believes his firm’s new home will drive the business forward and that the redevelopment of the market can eventually pave the way for the next generation of wholesalers: “The facilities are so much better than we had before. I know some people who’ve been here for years will moan that it’s not the same, that it perhaps feels a bit sterile or that it’s too cold. But this is the way forward for this market,” says Bart, pictured.

“It’s clean, it’s efficient and it’s a modern environment where buyers will want to come and buy their produce. I’ve been working here for 42 years and set this business up in 2010. This isn’t about me or other people who have been around as long as I have – it’s for people like my son Nick and his contemporaries, who want to see that this market can continue to progress and be successful.”



Nick agrees: “The old buyers walk has the old-fashioned feel to it, that sort of nostalgic look that you see in films and it means a lot to the people who’ve been here 30, 40 or 50 years. I get that, of course, but personally I’m not going to miss the clutter; in our new place things are put straight and we’re not going to experience as many issues.

“I want it to be new and fresh and it does feel like we’re entering a new era. Everything looks a lot brighter and a lot cleaner. Now we’ve moved, we’ve taken a big step and there’s more chance for the company and the new generation in the market to grow.

“There’s a new generation of salesmen and companies that want to come through and I feel like whenever anything new comes into play, it brings new opportunities with it.”

### Premier Foods Wholesale

Jason Tanner, Managing Director of The Menu Partners and Premier Foods Wholesale, noticed quick wins for PFW in its new home. “Within the first week, you could see the efficiencies – the chaps didn’t feel as if they were as busy, but that was because it was more organised within the warehouse and they had more space to operate in,” he says.

“It’s a completely different working environment – fridges running at 2-3°. All of the departments of Premier Food Wholesale are now next door to each other, which had never



been possible before and we have a freezer, which will be a great asset to us. There’s a lot more space on the ground floor, so once it’s been Quality Controlled, everything can go inside. That’s also made it more enjoyable for the warehouse team and the salespeople.

“We have plenty of toilets and showers now, as well as a canteen upstairs and downstairs. We’ve got a nice boardroom and comfortable office space and we’ve got a golf simulator and a gym too, which is there for all of our staff. It does make it nicer for everyone.”

Acknowledging that there have been a few negative comments about the new building, Jason (pictured) adds: “The new market has a different feel to it. Where the old building felt smaller and more compact, this is a larger building and having been used to working in the old building for 25 years, this doesn’t feel as homely yet. There is definitely an air about the place – it echoes more due to the higher ceilings, so it feels different.

“Some people just don’t like change, but there was always going to be a time when we could no longer keep trading out of units that were 50 years old. They were functional and they still worked for us, but however much money you spent on them to try and keep them looking nice, they were old and there were things that you just couldn’t change. You can’t say the new building doesn’t look nicer, it just doesn’t have that lived-in feeling that the other building had.

“This was something we’ve all been looking forward to for the last couple of years and it was frustrating towards the end of the process having spent millions of pounds to then have it sit there while we couldn’t physically use it.

“There will always be glitches and teething problems, things that were overlooked in the planning. We have got to look at the sprinkler system again, because we have lost the top row of racking as they stick out of the ceiling by a metre and a half. That’s not ideal.”

The entire stable of The Menu Partners is now in new units and 25 years since setting up Premier Fruits, Jason assesses the magnitude of the change. “It’s game-changing,” he says. “For the sort of customers we have been able to attract to the market now, the state-of-the-art facilities are crucial. I didn’t bring them to the old units, it wasn’t practical, but we can do that now. This is going to be a new market, with a lot of potential – we need to work together to get everybody into their new units and ensure that the whole market operates in a way that makes it attractive for customers to come here.

“Our business has changed, but 30-35% of it is still face to face, so we have a good proportion of customers who want to come to Buyers Walk and look at the product they’re buying. We’ve also got a large part of our business that delivers all over the country, which is why we have 18 articulated lorries, two 32-tonners and an 18-tonner.

“A lot of people can be too fixated on [what happens in] the market in my opinion. I think people have to try and look outside; we’re in a £100 billion food industry and there are plenty of potential customers outside. When people say that less customers are coming to the market, well, there are customers to be approached outside the market. Making that effort has been a big element of our success.”

Premier Foods Wholesale is now located in units 301-313 and units 409-410 in the new block.

# City Harvest recognises great trader support

Having made its trial period at the market a permanent tenancy, City Harvest will soon relocate from Unit B72 to Arch 5.



Bevington Salads



Bruce White



The City Harvest team



P&I Fruits Ltd



County Supplies



First Choice Fruit & Produce



La Sovrana



London Fresh Ltd



Mushroom Man Co Ltd

City Harvest's Rich and Mike will now be based in the rail arch and Sarah Calcutt, City Harvest CEO, said: "The arch unit means that we are going to be able to host volunteers at the market, which will enable deliveries direct from the market into the local community, the tenants supporting their neighbours in Wandsworth and Lambeth."

Mary Parsons, Head of Food at City Harvest, added: "We're delighted to have a permanent home at the market and to be working with the traders on a daily basis. We appreciate the hard work that goes into getting good quality produce from farms to plates and when food can't be sold for whatever reason, we're passionate about feeding those less fortunate with it. Good food doesn't have to be wasted."

To show its appreciation, City Harvest awarded its trademark green plaques to several traders who have donated surplus stock since they moved in earlier this year. "The support we've received from the traders has been phenomenal and we're looking forward to continuing to build strong relationships across the market," Mary said.



Premier Foods Wholesale

On receiving their plaques, three of the NCGM tenants explained why their ongoing relationships with the food redistribution charity is important to them.

Robert Hurren, Founder & CEO of County Supplies, said: "As a family business, we are always looking for ways to help other families. For over 15 years, we have been incredibly proud to support City Harvest in their mission to feed families in need. With over 3 million tonnes of fresh produce wasted every year, simply by donating our surplus produce to City Harvest we are united in our effort to tackle food poverty and reduce food waste."

Jason Tanner, Managing Director of The Menu Partners / Premier Foods Wholesale added: "We feel incredibly proud to be



S Newman Wholesale Ltd

working with City Harvest, an outstanding food charity deeply rooted in the heart of our community. We recognise the importance of its work, particularly in the current economic climate.

"We also align closely with the City Harvest mission in sustainability and driving a better future. We're constantly inspired by their dedicated team who truly love what they do and we encourage others in the industry to partner with them."

At Bevington Salads, another long-standing partner of the charity, Owner Gary Marshall said: "Bevington Salads has been donating to City Harvest for almost a decade. It is a remarkable charity devoted to easing the pains of the cost-of-living crisis and working hard to support families.

"The surplus food provided by New Covent Garden Market is too ripe for our retail customers and City Harvest ensures no food is wasted. We are delighted to support them and will continue to do so."



S Thorogood & Sons



Supreme Salads Ltd

**Pictured:** Richie from City Harvest presents green plaques to wholesalers



# Alberto takes inspiration from market floor

52-year-old Brazilian Alberto Leao has been an employee in the fruit and vegetable market for almost 30 years. More recently, he has found his inner chef and a desire to make more of the fresh produce that has either fallen out of its box or would otherwise be wasted. He wants more people to understand that fruit and vegetables can taste just as great even when they may appear a little past their best.



## How long have you been on the market?

I've been working on the market since 1996. I started working at Linkclass then went to work for Premier Fruits. All my life I worked for Premier Fruits - maybe 15 or 16 years. I am now working for Side Salads. Mr Tanner [at Premier Fruits] is my inspiration. You see where he comes from and where he is now. That's my motivation.

## How did you learn to cook?

I remember [the younger] me - when I first came into England. I had never cooked in my life. Outside the Market I am a different person. When my brain comes in here, I completely switch on. When I see anything on the Market floor, I want to cook and show the people what you can do with it - to show them that what you see is not what you get. You can see beautiful things and you don't know where they come from. For example, you see tomatoes on the floor, you can take them home, wash them and you make a nice salad. And the people don't know. That's why I am so fascinated with that. There is so much stuff [that some people might put in the rubbish] that you can use for something else.

## Where do you get your inspiration?

It's in my brain. My girlfriend asks me how I do things like that and I say I don't know. It comes into my brain. I don't know. When I see things I start to cook and that's what I do.

## Can you give me some examples of your experimental dishes?

The thing that most surprised me when I cooked was the cabbage. Particularly the red cabbage. When you change the colour of the food you're cooking, the blue. I was so fascinated with that. I love colours. I come from Brazil and it's exotic. I love to see colours on the plate. Even when I do omelettes and put the cabbage inside and it changes colour - I am so fascinated with that.

“ I love English produce - you can't beat homegrown fruit and veg when it's in season

## You have just come back from Brazil.

The markets there are amazing. We are so privileged here. We have forklifts. We have electric pumpers. Where I come from, we have nothing like that. We do it all by trolleys. All the pawpaws are loaded [onto the trucks] by hand. And the fruit and veg is amazing. So fresh. It is just unbelievable. There are so many types and varieties you cannot get here.

## Why is it important to not waste food?

If I could, I would cook food and donate it to people. There is so much that gets wasted that can be used. For example the beetroot I take home and it's only the leaves [that are bad]. There is nothing wrong with it. It just hasn't been sold.

## What is your favourite produce that is in season now?

Purple sprouting broccoli - it's amazing. I love English produce. You cannot beat English fruit and veg when it is in season. The asparagus grown here is the best in the world. You can't go wrong with English produce.



Above: Alberto in his role at Side Salads and some of the creations inspired by the Market floor



**Above:** Shaun, Phil, Harry and Jason at The Menu Partners in the Market



**British  
Food**   
*Fortnight*

## A very British supply chain partnership

**Over the last three years, anyone who has spent any time in New Covent Garden Market, restaurant kitchens or independent retailers will almost certainly have spotted big blue bags of potatoes emblazoned with the smiling face of legendary chef Pierre Koffmann. What they perhaps wouldn't realise though is that The Food Heroes (TFH), the Lincolnshire firm that markets both the Koffmann's and Marco Pierre White fresh, processed and frozen potato brands, is also behind a growing stable of other British fresh produce brands.**

One of TFH's key grower partnerships is with the exclusive grower of salad potato 'Jazzy' in the UK, The Little Spud Company, and we got TFH's Farming Director Shaun Langley and wholesale partner Jason Tanner, MD of The Menu Partners (TMP) together with Jazzy growers father and son Phil and Harry Rogers, who run Pengelly Farms, in Helston, Cornwall, to tell us more.

Due to its geographical location, Pengelly Farms Ltd is routinely first to market with British grown salad potatoes, in early to mid-May each year. Since 2008, it has exclusively grown and marketed the Jazzy variety in the UK, predominantly in supermarkets, but for the last three years, the brand has been sold into the wholesale, catering and hospitality sectors around the country through its partnership with TFH.

The Menu Partners (TMP), the group that includes Premier Foods Wholesale, is a close customer of TFH. From its base here in Nine Elms, it sells large volumes of the TFH brands of fresh and processed potatoes into its UK and international customer network and also exclusively distributes TFH frozen veg brands nationwide.

The Rogers family relationship with The Food Heroes is more friends reunited than a brand-new venture, as Phil had known Shaun and his fellow Directors Simon Martin and Claire Koffmann for years before this particular venture. "We first worked together around 30 years ago – we hadn't lost touch, but when they came down to see me three years ago, we rekindled that relationship and decided the time was right to develop something new together," says Phil.

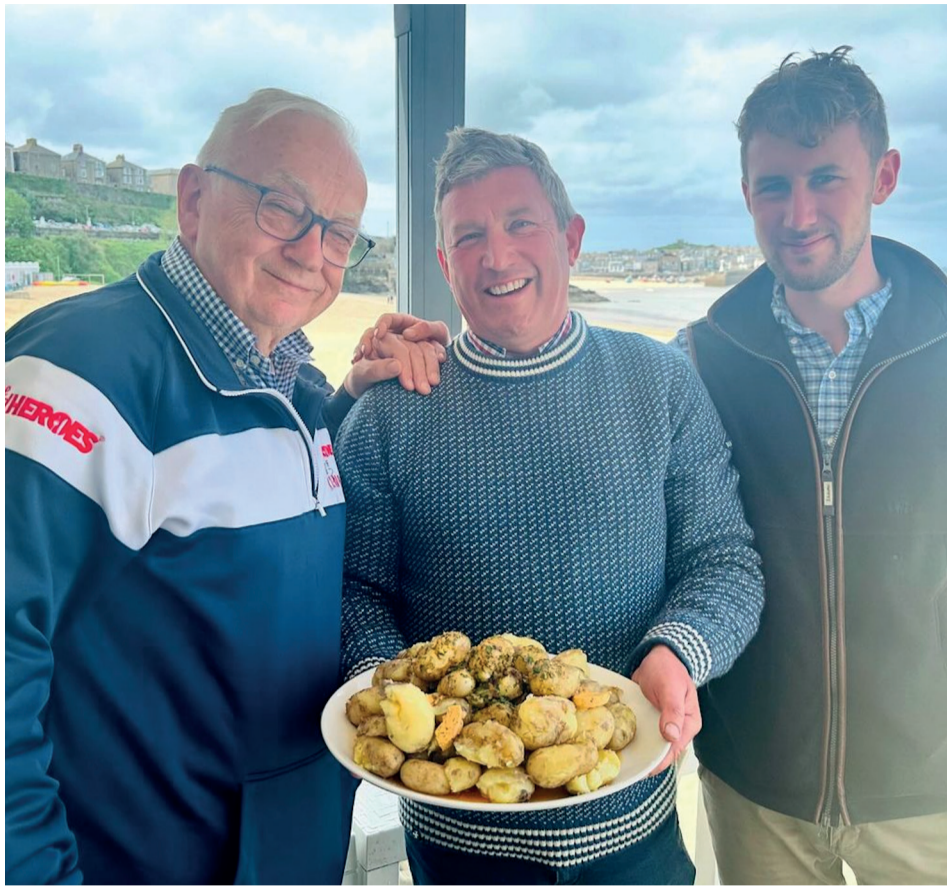
"We trialled Jazzy when it was just a numbered variety almost 20 years ago and realised the potential it had. Its yields and hit rates are excellent – there are very few fails. And in terms of quality, it's fantastic. We took the clamshell approach because we knew that if we let it be grown more widely, it would be detrimental to the brand. So, we applied for exclusivity.

Jazzy has quickly become an established year-round string to the TFH bow. Shaun says: "We have promoted the Jazzy brand through wholesale and put some proper structure behind that, which gives renewed identity to the variety."

### Route to market

The venture has opened Phil's eyes to a market he had largely ignored: "We'd found it difficult to find the right wholesale market partner, so we focused on retail," he says, "but the wholesale and foodservice side of things have got very interesting and dynamic again – there's so much potential. When you see the infrastructure that Jason has built in New Covent Garden Market and what he's doing at that end of the chain, it just has to fill us with confidence."

Phil's father Simon began farming at Pengelly Barton in 1967, three years before Phil was born. A third generation of Rogers, Phil's son Harry, is now in the business too. "With Harry coming in, we needed an injection



of excitement and we're all really looking forward to seeing where this will lead to. This relationship is giving smaller retailers and the whole catering industry access to top-quality product they wouldn't have had before."

The partnership between TFH and The Menu Partners has also been mutually beneficial. "We've been working with Koffmann's fresh and frozen products for almost four years now," says Jason. "The frozen product has been distributed into the catering industry predominantly, while the fresh product has been sold to catering and also secondary wholesalers across the country."

"The TFH brands have become a big part of our business in a relatively short space of time," he adds. "Initially, the Frozen and Fresh ranges predominantly included potatoes, carrots and parsnips, but new lines are being added on a regular basis - frozen Yorkshire peas and fresh English asparagus, for instance."

"It's the service, the quality and the range that sets them apart for our customers and demand has grown quickly across the country. The fresh brands are very popular and the frozen brands have also been doing very well. Price does play its part, but I think the demand for frozen has been driven by the outstanding quality and consistency of the product we have to offer," Jason explains.

### Stamp of approval

Shaun says the Koffmann stamp of approval has been crucial in building momentum behind the brands. "Because our brands are all built on quality and we've proved the consistency, they command a slightly higher price, which gives us the capacity to support our growers. Having Pierre with us has been huge - it's one thing that we say the product is fantastic quality, but to have the endorsement of one of the country's top chefs is a massive plus-point."

Pierre adds his Michelin Starred chef's eye and a vastly experienced understanding



of culinary quality to proceedings. He's heavily involved in the day-to-day operation, visiting growers, packhouses, customers, festivals etc... to constantly quality-check the product and get to know the supply chain and the people in it. "I look at it like a blue tick on Twitter (now X)," says Shaun. "If Pierre says it's the best and he'd be happy with it, then that's enough for me."

TFH is a very hands-on, personal affair, which makes a real difference to Phil "That's really, really important," he says. "To have people like Pierre come down to see us in Cornwall is so rare. It feels like we've been welcomed into the family and it's great that the people at the top are so involved with us. There's a real energy and it feels like we're all in this together, from the guy who plants the seeds, to the person who delivers the final product."

That final person often hails from New Covent Garden Market, where both TMP and Premier Foods Wholesale have now moved into extensive brand-new premises. A large part of the facilities is fully refrigerated and the firm has invested in state-of-the-art equipment both in its storage and handling depot and the offices above, which feature a magnificent development kitchen.

The Menu Partners also has sites in Brighton, Bicester, and Middleton, near Liverpool, but is firmly committed to its base. "The market is vital to what we do," says Jason. "The reason we have invested so heavily in New Covent Garden Market is that this is the best place by far from which to serve London."

### Mutual gains

TFH's market penetration has been swift and extensive and as the product range increases, so does the ambition, Shaun says. "In lots of kitchens, we can say we have 25% of the plate now. Obviously we're never going to be 100%, however, there's no reason why we can't aim to be 50% or more."

"The ethos has always been based on quality and consistency," he adds. "No-one in this country is finding it easy at the moment and as part of the supply chain, we feel we have to find a way to make chefs' lives easier and more predictable. Having product you can trust every time can make a big difference to your overheads."

"We never ask what's in it for TFH. We know loyalty matters and that this has to work for everyone. To be successful, we need a quality British grower base that shares our values and ambition and comes on the journey with us. Financially, it's not about us and them; if we don't both win then the whole thing fails."

**Above left:** Chef Pierre visits the farm

**Left:** Phil in his natural habitat

**Above:** A Premier Foods Wholesale truck prepares to deliver another load of Koffmanns branded product

# First English peaches and nectarines wow Market

The first known commercial crop of English peaches and nectarines was grown last year by Myatts of Mockbeggar, in Rochester, Kent. This year, as in 2024, the high-quality fruit has been marketed through both its retail customers and wholesalers at New Covent Garden Market and here, grower John Myatt recounts how his family farm came to grow the unprecedented crop



"J Myatt & Co was set up at Decoy Farm 30 years ago, as a partnership between my wife Kim and myself. We had previously managed Arnold Farm in Leeds (Kent) for my uncle Simon Brice, who mostly spent his time at Mockbeggar Farm. Working with Simon was a fantastic way to learn about the art of fruit growing – he was extremely creative and innovative and grew lots of different varieties of fruit.

"When we started out on our own, we grew strawberries and after a while moved into cane fruit. Our volumes increased gradually, but when Simon and another of my uncles Peter closed their business W Brice Ltd, in 2004, we had the opportunity to take some of the Mockbeggar Farm plum and rhubarb ground. We've evolved what we do since then – we used to be known as soft fruit growers, and some people do still know us as that, but we've really developed the stone fruit side of the business and there are also plenty of people who would recognise us more for being stone fruit growers these days.

"We only grow early strawberry varieties now – around 120 tonnes a year – and we grow roughly the same volume of raspberries, as well as 40t of blackberries. We grow 150t of cherries, 30t of apricots and when we have a full crop, 550t of plums and gauges.

"Last year for the first time though, we had a commercial crop of nectarines and peaches. We planted the trees four years ago, so we'd been talking about it for a while. In 2022,

“ Some of our best returns for premium product come from the wholesale markets



**British Food**  
Fortnight

**Left:** George Marshall of Bevington Salads surveys the crop first in the orchard and then on his stand in the Market



the orchards were full of flower, but it didn't set, so we decided to cover the crop in 2023 and although that is more expensive, it paid dividends. We picked about 20t of nectarines and 10t of peaches.

"We think it was the first commercial crop of peaches and nectarines grown in the UK – certainly no one has challenged us on that yet and we've never heard of another!

"From our point of view, we've been used to picking tree ripe stone fruit. You just can't pick it that mature if you're shipping it from Europe, South Africa or South America. All of the trials that we did in previous years had shown us that our peaches and nectarines would eat very well and the crop didn't disappoint. The eating quality was fantastic – better than anything you might import from anywhere.

"We know that there are plenty of people out there who will buy British product, but we need to know that people are prepared to

pay enough for it to make growing the crop viable. So many people are buying on price and this is a premium product which can't compete on that basis. Generally speaking, some of our best returns last year for premium product came from the wholesale markets. We do see some very good numbers and there is no reason why they can't play a bigger part with our peaches and nectarines in the future. I certainly hope they will.

"There is demand for our products, but the costs of growing versus the returns we are getting is making prospects less exciting for sure. That is the story of horticulture – growers have got very good at being more efficient, growing more productive varieties under more productive systems.

"I'm the fourth generation of my family to farm at Mockbeggar, which was founded by my great grandfather in 1927. Our daughters Alex and Hannah (pictured left with John), who are in their late 20s, both work on the farm with us now. Alex has been here since 2017, while Hannah sort of came in by default during Covid and stayed with us! Between us, we're the management team now. And we want to see a bright future for British stone fruit."

## First crop wows traders

Customers of New Covent Garden Market's wholesalers were amongst the first to have access to the first English-grown nectarines and peaches, courtesy of Bevington Salads and P&I Fruits.

The first available flat peaches, along with nectarines, and regular peaches, were brought into Buyers' Walk and distributed to retail and foodservice clients across London and the South East.

Gary Marshall, owner of Bevington Salads, and his son George caused quite a social media stir with their films of a visit to Mockbeggar, showcasing the first commercial crop of peaches and labelling them "astonishing" and "fabulous" while introducing grower John Myatt. "The colour, the consistency and the quality of their peaches is beyond anything I've seen," said Gary Marshall.

"The question everyone will ask is 'do they eat?'," he added, before demonstrating exactly how juicy and delicious the fruit was on film!

# D.D.P takes chefs back to source

Every year at the start of the asparagus season, New Covent Garden Market catering supplier D.D.P Ltd takes 15-20 chefs from one of its contract caterer customers, Elixir & Lexington, to meet its grower and supplier of English asparagus, Portwood Farm Norfolk. We asked Paul Grimshaw of D.D.P and Portwood's Andy Allen to report on this year's visit

Local, UK-grown produce is crucial to Elixir & Lexington's menus, as it works through the domestic seasons with D.D.P to source and promote the best of British throughout the year.

Paul Grimshaw, managing director of D.D.P says: "The annual visits to growers are a great source of education for the chefs and also a show of respect for what many of our British farmers have to endure and the myriad challenges they are up against almost daily."

The day is about passionate food people meeting passionate growers and it's always a fantastic meeting of minds, adds Paul. "The chefs not only get their hands dirty and pick the asparagus, they can oversee it going into the warehouse to be washed, graded and packed."

Portwood employs state-of-the-art equipment to wash and hydro cool the crop along with computer operated photographic image technology to accurately grade each and every spear – by thickness, length, colour, curvature and maturity. Its fridges are fitted with hi-tech fogging equipment to ensure the asparagus does not dry out and consistency and shelf life is maintained for as long as possible. The aim is always to deliver asparagus to customers within 24 to 48 hours from harvest.



Once they'd been wowed by the process, the chefs had a bit of fun too. "There was time for a quick 'ready-steady-cook' competition to produce some wonderful dishes in a very short space of time, within a couple of hours of the asparagus being picked," Paul says.

Who best to judge the food than Portwood's very own Andy Allen – his last and most difficult challenge of the day was picking the winning dish.

At least he thought that was his last challenge, until we bombarded him with questions about asparagus, Norfolk and the hurdles a grower in this country has to jump to produce such incredible product in a sustainable way. Here's what Andy had to say:

## What makes Norfolk ideal for growing asparagus?

Norfolk's deep soils and generally drier climate are very well suited to asparagus production. We do suffer from cold north-easterly winds, which tend to slow down growth, however inadvertently, they do also have a positive impact on the flavour profile.

## How else is asparagus affected by the UK weather?

English Asparagus can be affected dramatically by the vagaries of our Maritime climate, which changes all the time and not always when you'd like it to!

Discernible changing weather patterns over the 35 years I have been growing this crop (predominantly milder winters and wetter springs) have hampered the growth cycles of our asparagus, along with greater extremes we see unpredictably throughout the year.



In Peru, Mexico and much of southern Europe for example, the climate and day and night-time temperatures are generally warmer and fluctuate far less, which gives them a much more even growing pattern.

## Aside from the weather, what are the biggest challenges you face as a grower?

Apart from the weather, the biggest challenge we face is the availability of labour to harvest and pack our crops. Since Brexit stopped the free flow of labour between us and mainland Europe, we have seen big shortages of people.

Many growers, including us, have been forced to leave crops unharvested in the fields as they have simply not had the staff to work on their farms. Here at Portwood alone, I have lost more than £300,000 worth of asparagus because of this, and it is simply due to Brexit.

The government operated Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS) allows overseas staff to come to the UK on six-month visas to fill the massive shortfall of staff willing to carry out seasonal work on farms. Unfortunately, this is only rolled out

on an annual basis and we are never certain it will happen again the following year. So there is a reluctance for growers to plant perennial crops such as asparagus, soft and top fruits as there is an inherent risk that it could be left unharvested due to lack of labour.

We have seen a change of government and a possible change of attitude to this scheme, but we are already lobbying to ask for a longer-term visa scheme of at least five years (and ideally longer for asparagus). Without that level of certainty, more English growers will pack up growing fruit and vegetables, which in turn threatens our UK food security and forces higher levels of imports that I would say would introduce more produce grown to lower standards than we enjoy from homegrown and certified food.



There has never been a more important time for consumers to support and buy UK grown produce. Otherwise, this industry will inevitably decline, shortages of food will be more common and even higher food prices very much the norm.

## What else does Portwood do?

We also produce Purple Sprouting Broccoli for the wholesale markets in March and April – sold under the "Portwood Produce" brand and packed in specially designed 4kg boxes.

**British  
Food**   
*Fortnight*

**Pictured:** Andy Allen gives chefs an overview of the work and products of Portwood Farm, before judging the meals they created with his asparagus



# MOMO's new home furthers ambitious expansion plans

**MOMO Kombucha has a new home at the foot of the Food Exchange and Josh Puddle, co-founder of the premium soft drink brand with big ambitions tells us why the market location has been fundamental to its progress to date**

MOMO launched in October 2018 and husband and wife team Josh and Lisa Puddle (pictured above) spent the early months brewing at home and supplying local delicatessens and cafes in South East London. Traction built quickly and soon they were signing a lease for 2,000sqft of space in Arch 8 at New Covent Garden Market.

"The space felt ginormous when we first moved in," recalls Josh. "It was pretty much me here on my own at first, then we hired Matt, who is now our head brewer managing a team of eight. For a while, he was in the back of the unit brewing three days a week while I was at the front, but we've seen consistent organic growth since then and rapidly outgrew that space."

That ginormous arch began to seem pretty small. The business has roughly doubled in size every year and projects to do at least that again in 2024 and '25. Josh first took on a second railway arch, to allow one to be used purely for the kombucha brewing process. Early this year though, he recognised that still larger premises were needed. In May, MOMO moved into around 11,000sqft of space at the Food Exchange – for any reader who is familiar with the building, it's the space vacated by The Menu Partners in late 2023. "This is good progress for us, but it is very much a temporary home," says Josh. "We see this as another stepping stone – where we will create a rock solid foundation for the really big move into what will hopefully then be a purpose-built facility, with everything under one roof and exactly how we want it."

He wants that next big move to see MOMO remain in the market. "Being here has been hugely important for the development of our business," he explains. "The obvious thing is location – you can hire someone from Walthamstow, Dorking or Beckenham and they can easily get here. We're also close to a lot of our customers – around 75% of MOMO's business is done in central London. I'm a 12-minute cycle from home and around half an hour from those customers."

"There are so many aggravations when you're trying to build a business, but this market works really well – we've had no security issues, there are always people around, transport can always get in and the fact that your premises and location work for you means a lot."

The entire brewing process continues to be carried out in the market and MOMO is proud of its traditional methods, which set it apart from most other kombucha brands in an increasingly crowded marketplace. Josh adds: "When we do move from these units, we'll consider being outside the market, of course, but ideally I think we'd want to stay at NCGM because of all the plus points. We really want to keep all the elements of our operation together for as long as we possibly can, as we believe the sales and marketing team should be connected with what's happening in the brewery."

Other perks of the location, like going for a regular run round Battersea Park, which a lot of the MOMO team do, and hosting yoga classes for the local community (there were 60 at the last one) add another layer to the general feelgood factor of brewing and marketing a healthy soft drink. "A lot



**Above:** The MOMO Kombucha team are responsible for one of the UK's leading kombucha brands. Kombucha is a fermented tea and when properly brewed, it is a delicious, slightly effervescent and wonderfully healthy and refreshing soft drink



## “ Josh and Lisa are committed to using their business as a force for good

of our marketing effort right now is putting on community events,” says Josh, “getting people together and connecting.”

Social impact and sustainability are always front of mind, as Josh and Lisa are “committed to using business as a force for good”. As reported in Market Times previously, the firm is proudly certified B-Corp and organic and a London living wage employer. Their products have picked up a number of Great Taste Awards and recognition of the company’s achievements to date came recently with a second place in the “Best SME” category at the Wandsworth Business Awards and Josh winning Business Owner/Entrepreneur of the Year (which he points out is a joint award with Lisa).

The awards and the move to new premises are not the only milestones this year either. “We completed our fifth funding round at the beginning of the year and raised another £1 million, so the total we’ve raised now is £2.5m,” says Josh. “That is growth



capital; we’re still not profitable yet, but we’re on track to be profitable next year. We do need to invest in a fair bit of equipment though, to help us scale up.

“I am really pleased with how the business is progressing; we’ve got some great data from Ocado for instance, where three of our products are the numbers one, two and three best sellers of around 200 in their single format soft drinks category. We also launched with Gail’s in February and we’re part of its craft supplier community. We smashed their expectations (though not our own) on sales rates. Gail’s initially felt ‘good’ would be about 1,400 bottles a week, but we’re already doing 3,500. Riverford is another good customer and a really impressive business. We’ve just launched an exclusive Orange & Rose kombucha (above) with them and that’s really exciting.”

MOMO is more than holding its own then in a fast-expanding category. “I always felt that the kombucha market would get this competitive in the UK,” Josh says. “When we first encountered it in New York it was already very competitive in the States. At Whole Foods, it was the biggest soft drink category in their fridge, with loads of brands and flavours. Kombucha plays to all the megatrends, such as gut health, low-sugar, alternatives to alcohol, energy-boosting,



veganism and vegetarianism. And we asked ourselves why such a great product was so big there, yet we’d never heard of it in the UK.

“From the start, with the strong conviction that this was going to become a big, competitive category, our aim was to produce the UK’s best tasting, highest quality kombucha. It’s always been about premium, but also authenticity – we make kombucha in a very different way to most of the others out there. Without naming names, most kombuchas on the market are pretty compromised, but if you come into our brewery, we’re producing kombucha in a way that remains very similar to how you might do it at home.”

Josh feels that MOMO’s uncompromising approach will continue to stand it out from the crowd as the kombucha market develops more nuanced segments. “I feel our segment– premium and authentic – is thinning out a little. It’s still a relatively small category and it’s very competitive. There are maybe 25 kombuchas sharing a space that’s still only worth around £40m a year and most, if not all, are not turning a profit yet. The market is growing at 30-40% a year and I think that will continue for decades.

“I know that some potential customers see us as a bit pricey and I understand that, but there are an awful lot of consumers out there who will pay for authenticity and quality. Sales through our own website show us that subscription (repeat) sales are increasing every month. People who drink MOMO Kombucha for the gut health benefits want to do that regularly.

“Our ambition over the next two to three years is to become the UK’s favourite kombucha brand – as we get bigger, more of our marketing message will focus on the fact that a lot of the other kombuchas out there are kombucha in name only, they are not the real thing. We need to get ourselves into some of the bigger high-street retailers before we get to that stage though. We will definitely get there!”

*For more information about kombucha and/or to connect with MOMO, go to its website or follow the business on Instagram - momokombucha*

# Immortalise your connection to the market with a plaque on THE GARDEN WALL

Create a permanent reminder of the association you, your family or colleagues, or your firm have with New Covent Garden Market

This is your opportunity to show how much our great market has meant to you, your businesses and your life.

“The Garden Wall” will feature classy black, zinc plaques with silver lettering. They are available in two sizes and aim to salute the incredible service that so many people and companies have given to the iconic Covent Gardens old and new.

All proceeds after costs will be donated to the CGTA’s chosen charities.



TO BUY YOUR PLAQUE, SCAN THE QR CODE



# Join us to celebrate 50 years of New Covent Garden Market

November 2024 marks the Golden Anniversary of the market’s move from our home of 300 years in WC2 to our then brand-new facility in, Nine Elms, SW8

On Saturday, November 9th, Covent Garden Tenants Association will host a dinner & dance, at the Royal Lancaster London, to share this landmark occasion with our fantastic market community and raise funds for our chosen charities

The dinner dance will be held at the Royal Lancaster London. Come and make more golden memories with us.

For more details or to sponsor, contact Ann Harding on 020 7720 7874 / info@cgta.co.uk or talk to one of the CGTA executive team



SCAN THE QR CODE TO BOOK A HOTEL ROOM