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Old meets new in our bumper 50th anniversary issue





This is a momentous issue of Market Times, marking a significant milestone in New Covent Garden's history. I'm delighted, as the relatively new Chair of Covent Garden Market Authority, to be able to recognise our 50 years in Nine Elms and share with everyone involved with this Market the celebrations of half a century as a hugely important part of our local and regional communities.

I'm not really one for looking back too far, for me the future is always more interesting. However, it would be wrong to ignore the long and distinguished history and heritage of NCGM and its predecessor in WC2. Until 1974, Covent Garden had been central to the country's supply chain of healthy and nutritious fresh food, and beautiful, life-affirming flowers, plants and foliage for more than 300 years. The evolution of the fresh produce industry means that this site has a more regionalised focus, but in different ways, it remains absolutely integral to the success of a customer base that feeds and flowers the population of London and The South East.

That this Market has faced down its well-documented challenges over the last half a century and emerged as a vibrant and forward-thinking £880 million site is testament to the expertise and commitment of thousands of people who have worked here in that time. As we naturally reflect on that period, it is the fact that we are building the platform for our tenants to play a vital role in the future of food and floral supply that excites me.

The redevelopment programme is well into its fourth phase. There can't have been too many projects of this size that have seen 50-year-old buildings operating perfectly well alongside the brand-new buildings that are, bit-by-bit, replacing them. As we're observing with the two sections of Buyers' Walk, the original section is still more than capable of delivering on its remit, while the facilities in the section completed earlier this year undeniably provide opportunities to improve the customer experience, enhance efficiency and deliver a better environment for the workforce. Like the wholesalers in both sections, I am impatient for the time when they are all operating in one building again. Then we can begin the process to relocate the flower market and the end of the project will be in full view.

What drives me in this role is the desire to see every tenant across NCGM housed in the units they deserve as soon as is practically possible. Once we have achieved that, this Market will be able to fully utilise its status as the UK's leading wholesale market brand – built over centuries – and simultaneously boast with complete justification that it is the newest and best-equipped wholesale market in the country. I don't want to see tenants here focus on survival or preserving some kind of perceived status quo; I want them to be out there expanding their horizons and competing confidently for more business.

We should be proud of our past and our heritage as without it, New Covent Garden Market would be far more exposed. Without a future filled with potential and profit however, we would have nothing, and I'm delighted we all reach this anniversary with so much positivity ahead of us.

Wanda

Wanda Goldwag OBE
Chair, Covent Garden Market Authority



Gary Marshall presented with Lifetime Achievement Award

Gary Marshall, Owner of New Covent Garden Market wholesaler Bevington Salads and Chairman of Covent Garden Tenants Association, was given the Lifetime Achievement Award at the FPC Fresh Awards 2024.

Presented by award sponsor Westfalia Fruit, at a glittering ceremony at Grosvenor House on Park Lane, the award recognises Gary's achievements during a lifelong career in fruit and vegetable wholesale, as well as his wider contribution to this Market and the fresh produce industry.

On receiving his award, Gary thanked the judging panel and the FPC for the recognition and congratulated all of the other winners on the evening. In a well-received speech, he reflected on his time in the industry and the wholesale market sector generally.

"This is the 20th anniversary of the first running of these awards and I believe I'm right in saying that from my sector, only David Matthews, a fantastic wholesaler from Bristol, has received this award before me," said Gary.

"I suppose that says something about the understated nature of our sector, as well as the perception that we are a dying breed. Let me tell you - we're anything but. Just in London, the three wholesale markets are still worth roughly £2 billion each year – New Covent Garden alone turned over £880 million in its latest financial year. That may pale in comparison to the supermarkets, but we are still a hugely important industry.

"To paraphrase the famous Heineken campaign, wholesale market traders reach the customers and consumers that other parts of the supply chain cannot reach!"

Gary told the 750-strong audience that he'd loved every minute of the 45 years he has so far spent at New Covent Garden. "I love the people and the community we have there. I love the passion and dedication, the immense skill and knowledge of my fellow traders, the fantastic product we buy and sell and I love what we stand for," Gary said. "We work daft hours, we work bloody hard, but the population of London and the South East would not have the same access to premium quality, flavourful, nutritious and sustainably sourced fruit and vegetables without us.

"I followed my grandad and dad into the trade and I'm proud that both my sons followed me into the business. My eldest Bradley has flown the nest now and is working in



the whisky trade in New Zealand, but George is here in the audience tonight. He's a brilliant salesman – I'm not sure where he gets that from! – and I look forward to watching him take the business to new levels in the years to come," he said.

"I should end by thanking my wife Deana. I could have said long suffering – we've been together since we were 16 and she would have most definitely agreed! – but most importantly she has been incredibly supportive and understanding of my career. I think that goes for every wife or husband of a wholesaler – once you're in it, you're in it. There is no turning back and it can make life very tough at times.

"I am one of the many who has accepted that, stuck with it and had an amazingly enjoyable career. I wouldn't change anything – it's been a wonderful ride and it's far from over yet.

"Thank you so much, I'm delighted to accept this accolade."

• For a profile on Gary, go to pages 6-7

• Paul Grimshaw honoured by Westminster Kingsway College – go to page 17

Special award gives Market golden glow on successful night



New Covent Garden Market received a special award at the FPC Fresh Awards in September, to mark the milestone of 50 years since the relocation to Nine Elms.

The surprise award was only announced on the night and received on behalf of the entire Market community by Jo Breare, General Manager of Covent Garden Market Authority, and Gary Marshall, Chairman of Covent Garden Tenants Association. It was given for “50 years of dedicated service to the fresh produce and floral industries from its site on the south bank of the River Thames” and “embracing innovation and change to continue satisfying the shifting demands of both businesses and consumers”.

Judges commented: “We recognise NCGM for its remarkable example of dedicated service during the last 50 years.

The iconic Market stands as a cornerstone of the UK’s fresh produce industry, supplying London and the nation with the finest fruit, vegetables and flowers with efficiency and expertise, all the while keeping sustainability and quality proudly at its core.

“Throughout the past five decades...NCGM has continued to adapt, innovate and grow to remain at the top of its game. With exciting redevelopment plans, well under way, the next 50 years are set to be just as vibrant and successful.”

It capped a very successful night for the Market, as P&I Fruits Ltd was also a runner-up in the Fruit & Vegetable Wholesaler of the Year Category. Jo Breare also presented the award for Foodservice Supplier of the Year, which is sponsored by NCGM, to Market customer Woods Foodservice.

Congratulations to everyone who picked up an award on the night and, of course, to everyone in the Market community, as the special award was recognition of all your efforts down the years.

Chiquita becomes Golden Sponsor of Market dinner

Chiquita is the Golden Sponsor of the New Covent Garden Market 50th anniversary dinner.

London’s number-one banana brand has been a significant supplier of premium bananas to the UK’s largest wholesale market for many years and has established a deep-rooted relationship with its customers at NCGM.

John Cockle, Chiquita’s Director, Nordics, UK and Ireland, said the company is thrilled to be the main supporter of the dinner and dance, at The Royal Lancaster London, on November 9th. Five hundred guests will celebrate 50 years since traders left Covent Garden in central London and made the short, but momentous journey to Nine Elms, on the south bank of the River Thames.

“This significant milestone celebrates half a century of excellence in the wholesale market sector, and we are honoured to support an event that acknowledges the hard work and dedication of this entire community,” said John.

“Our collaboration with New Covent Garden Market has been integral to our success in the UK, making it one of our major outlets in the South of the country. This support showcases our gratitude to all the customers who have trusted and supported us throughout the years.”

The wholesale market sector is of the utmost importance to Chiquita’s business model in the UK, he added. “It serves as a cornerstone of our operations and provides a vital gateway to independent retail and foodservice. We have dedicated ripening centres designed to cater to wholesale markets, enabling us to supply high-quality bananas and other exotic fruits in the variety of colours needed by this unique sector. Supporting NCGM’s anniversary dinner underscores our commitments to the produce industry.”



David Emmett, Key Account Manager, Chiquita Europe B.V. UK Branch, also extended his congratulations to the Market and its tenants. “The Market’s long and successful history reflects the hard work and dedication of everyone involved in this community,” David said. “Over the past 50 years at Nine Elms, NCGM has evolved into one of the most professional and successful produce markets in the country. Chiquita wishes all the very best to current and new customers as they embark on creating the next chapter in this Market’s rich history.

“Join us in celebrating the New Covent Garden Market and honouring the past while looking forward to a future filled with continued success.”

Retirements and new arrivals shake up Flower Market



There have been a few changes in the Flower Market in the last few months, with a couple of companies closing due to retirement and others taking up the vacated space.

L Mills and G.B Foliage closed their doors, as Bob Cooley and Dave Gorton, the men behind the respective firms, hung up their Market boots. In their place have arrived Ilo Bloom, Petalux and Michelle Lomas Floral Design Limited. Porters Foliage has expanded its presence and on the upper floor, Pinstripes & Peonies has taken on an additional unit.

One of the ‘new faces’ is Damian Waloch, who opened new plant wholesaler Ilo Bloom in Unit C17. The Ilo Bloom name may be new to customers, but Damian’s certainly is not, having worked as a salesperson in the Market for several years. He began his career in Nine Elms with G.B Foliage, then spent a couple of years with both Bloomfield Flowers and Porters Foliage.

Damian (pictured) feels now is the right time to realise his ambition of going it alone. “I know starting on my own is challenging and carries its own risks, however I’ve been planning this for a while and I know I can totally do it, with

the approach to the business I possess,” he explained.

“I’ve started out with supplies from Holland, but I also have English growers lined up to start serving me. Like everyone should, my main aim is to make clients happy and pleased with the purchase, making sure they come back the following day.

“Quality, service and price are all important, but I also want to offer several new products that attract customers and make them visit the Market instead of purchasing online” added Damian.

“Competition is always good here, it’s what makes the Market successful. I’m looking forward to the challenges ahead,” he said.

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



Market supports Harvest Festival with City Harvest



New Covent Garden Market teamed up with food redistribution charity City Harvest to support the annual harvest festival service at Southwark Cathedral, on October 6th.

Sarah Calcutt, who is a Non-Executive Director on the Covent Garden Market Authority Board, is also Chief Executive of Market tenant City Harvest. She delivered the address during the service that outlined just why the work of City Harvest is so valuable to the 20% of households across London and Greater London living in food insecurity.

City Harvest delivers 1.2 million meals a month to the capital's hungry and, increasingly, across the country. The charity has expanded rapidly through the last decade, but said Sarah (pictured above):

"It hasn't been enough, so we continue to grow. We could double in size tomorrow and there would still be unmet need.

"Today, there are twice as many food banks [in Great Britain] than there are McDonalds outlets. There are as many food banks as there are branches of Tesco."

"Half of London's single parent households are in food poverty, just think how desperate that must feel, how precarious your life is, in every moment. Think how often that parent goes without, so that their children can eat.

"That is not sustainable. That is not dignity. That is not acceptable," she said.

CGMA Chair Wanda Goldwag OBE spoke at a reception after the service, on behalf of the NCGM community. "I thought what you said [during your address] was very powerful," said Wanda. "While listening to it, I also thought to myself 'when was I last actually hungry?' and the answer was in my early 20s when on one day in my life I did not have enough money to buy food. We scrambled around and found something called a traveller's cheque and took it to the Edgware Road where we knew someone would be able to cash it."

For many people, Wanda inferred, her one day of being hungry can stretch into days, weeks and sometimes years. "Frankly, it's a disgrace in the modern world that this is the case in this country and that's why the work of City Harvest is so important and why we are so, so happy to be one of the partners to support you. We are as proud as possible to be part of this with you and I thank every one of the staff and volunteers at City Harvest for their work," she said.

Students learn from first Flower Market visit



A group of 20 students from Plumpton College floristry school experienced the wonderful sights and scents of New Covent Garden's Flower Market for the first time on October 1st, when they visited Nine Elms for an organised tour.

The aim was to introduce the students to Britain's only wholesale flower market, including meeting several wholesalers who spoke about New Covent Garden's importance to the floristry industry.

The students met Bryan Porter of Porters Foliage and Freddie Heathcote of Green and Bloom, as both business owners explained

why the Flower Market is vital to the florist trade in London and the South East. They also revealed how the students' job direction choices could potentially see them having a career in Nine Elms.

Sara Beney, a tutor at Plumpton College who attended the event, was delighted with the tour. "It's great for our students to see the scale of the Market's wholesale operation as well as the amazing choice of flowers, plants and foliage available. I'm sure the visit has inspired them with their studies and they're already looking forward to their next Market visit."

Inspiring London's chefs

As flagged in the last issue, Harwoods of London and Koppert Cress held an event at Mission Kitchen in September, to inspire London's chefs to use more of the Dutch grower's microgreens in their culinary creations.

The group of chefs was welcomed into the specially designed Tasting Garden at Mission Kitchen by Chef Franck Pontais, Country & Culinary Manager of Koppert Cress, and Jim Dew, Managing Director of Harwoods of London. Chef Franck

modern cuisine.

"Our cresses are the freshly-sprouted seedlings of 100% natural aromatic plants," said Franck. "They offer a freshness and intensity of taste and aroma that, are only found in young seedlings." Adding that the plants are "much more than cress" he outlined ways in which chefs can optimise usage (and minimise waste) by using parts of each plant that they may ordinarily have thrown away in innovative and delicious ways.



took them on a tour of the Koppert range, explaining the distinctive flavours and uses of a wide array of products – from Feathertops to Sechuan Buttons, and Floregano to Salty Fingers.

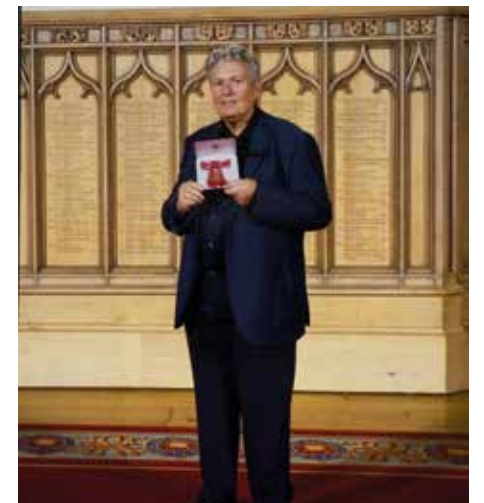
A lunch created by Koppert's own chefs to showcase the company's range of varieties and tastes was booked by a hands-on World of Plants workshop with Franck, in which he talked about and demonstrated the potential of premium microgreens and their role in changing

Harwoods has been selling Koppert's range to its customers for 30 years and is the number one distributor of the range in London. Jim said: "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 started out selling Daikon Cress and Shiso Purple and now we stock more than 40 of their lines throughout the year. The demand is phenomenal."

CGMA Chair collects OBE at Windsor Castle

Congratulations to Covent Garden Market Authority Chair Wanda Goldwag OBE, who accepted her Honour from HRH The Princess Royal at Windsor Castle on September 24th. Wanda received her OBE for work with leaseholders, having previously been Chair of Leasehold Advisory Service.

Pictured with friends and family on the momentous day, Wanda said: "It is, of course, a great honour to be recognised by His Majesty The King in this way. My aim is always to maintain the high standards I believe have led to this recognition and use my experience to help New Covent Garden Market to achieve its potential in the coming years."



Secure a permanent place in Covent Garden history for yourself, your firm, a member of your family or a colleague, with a plaque on The Garden Wall. To help commemorate and celebrate the history and the present in this wonderful market, simply scan here and create your own message



The move in pictures

For 40-50 years before 1974, it had felt inevitable that the old Fruit Veg and Flower Market in Covent Garden would move from its central London site. Clive Boursnell selects his favourite images of the days of the relocation, November 9th to November 11th 1974



I have known Covent Garden since the 1950s, when as a boy woodsman on the Windsor Crown Estate, I with others, would cut and bind over 130,000 feet of Christmas trees for George Munro's.

Having worked as an assistant to a fashion photographer in Covent Garden, in 1968 I started to photograph the market. It took about a year for me to get to know the Market and its people to understand that I was serious about telling the story of the Market photographically. I was no "fair-weather photographer", as one porter suggested.

So, I had been photographing the Market for over five years when the move to Nine Elms came.

My photography has always been about showing the market and its people as it uniquely presents itself. Thus, the very few pictures that I show in this article are about the last day, the move and the first day at the New Covent Garden Market. They are pictures that could not have been taken at any other time and capture just that was uppermost in my mind and sights, no longer for a short period, the beautiful still life of fruit or vegetables.

The last week of the old Market saw on the one hand a celebration of the time, yet on the other a dread, a real sense of loss and the awesome realisation of the passing of a 300-year era that would never be seen again. London was awake to what was happening. Film crews, reporters, photographers, artists and so many members of the public, including young girls clad in their stylish grey school uniform coats – all turned up with their cameras. The pubs were full to overflowing, knowing that they would never open again at 5am. The cafes were coming to terms with catering for a new clientele. But above all, the people of the market faced a fast-moving and changing way of working.

Most did make the move to Nine Elms, yet within months, market traders and porters began to disappear. The closure of the original Covent Garden was truly the end of an era; now 50 years on, the 'new' Market is again in transition, but not anywhere near an end.



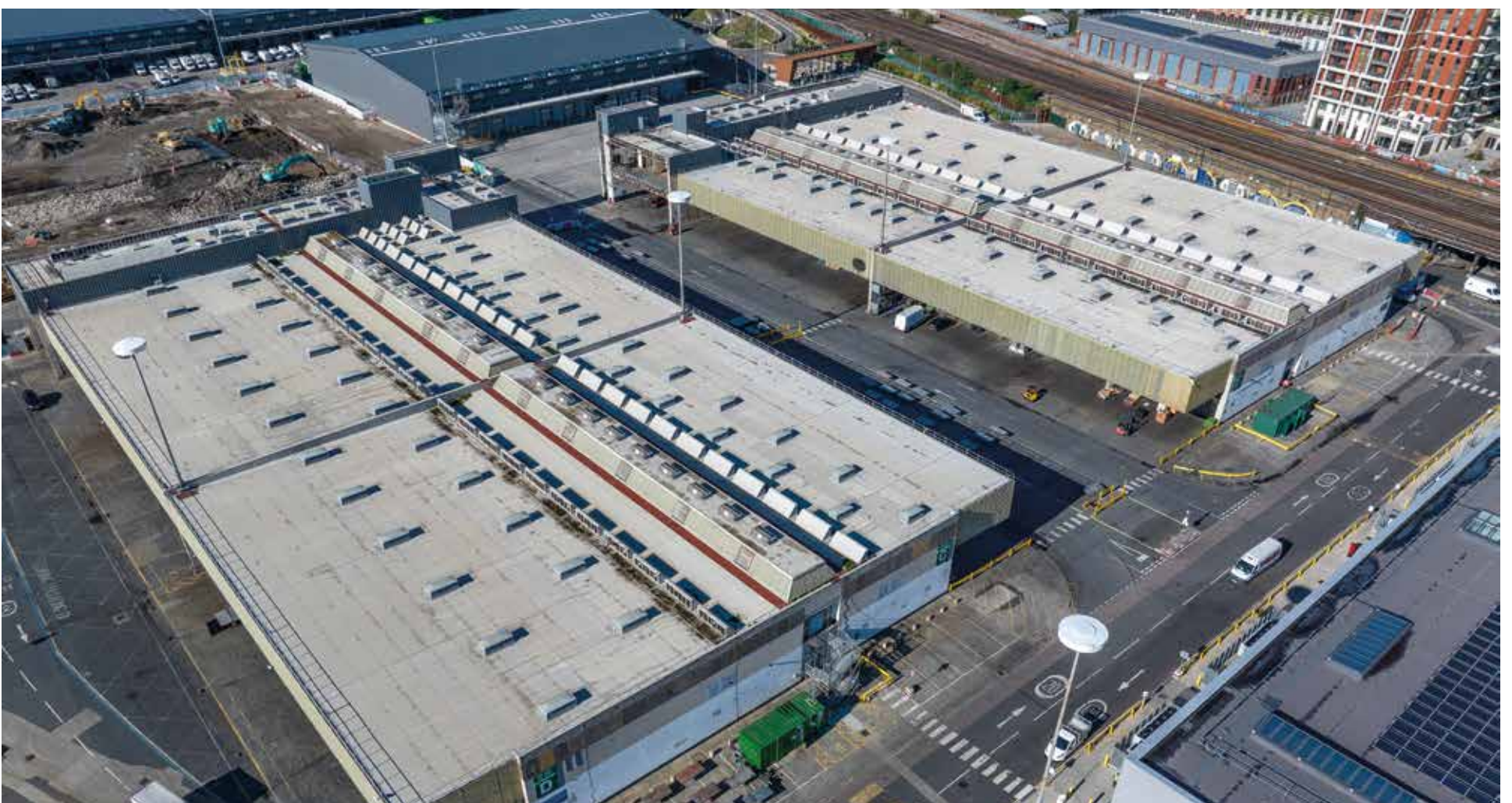
I've been taking pictures of this Market since I first stepped foot in it and fell in love in 1968. In this series, I'm looking back on some of my favourites and explaining the thinking and stories behind them

See you next time!
CB O8/24

50 years on - the Market soon to be all-new again



After decades of little change, New Covent Garden Market and its surrounding skyline have been significantly redeveloped in the last decade



The last remaining buildings that opened on November 11th 1974, which house one section of Buyers' Walk and several catering distributors. These will be demolished and the tenants rehoused during the final stages of the programme, due to complete by Q4 2027

Industry accolade recognises Gary's achievements

As reported on page 2, Gary Marshall, Owner of Bevington Salads and Chairman of Covent Garden Tenants Association, received a much-deserved Lifetime Achievement Award at the FPC Fresh Awards 2024. Here, we share the reasons the FPC judging panel gave for selecting Gary for the honour and Gary looks back on his career and what continues to drive him



Citing their reasons for recognising Gary with this award, the judging panel commented: "Whether serving as a collaborator, facilitator or innovator, Gary has dedicated his working life to the wholesale industry in the UK, making numerous positive contributions to the sector and also charitable causes. His remarkable unwavering commitment to New Covent Garden Market and its 200-strong tenant community, in his role as Chairman of Covent Garden Tenants Association for the past 18 years has been exceptional. Gary works tirelessly to drive forward the market he loves, while fighting the corner of its tenants, investing large amounts of time outside his long working hours and showing no limits to his energy and dedication, all the while running his own successful business.

"Gary is a true produce industry hero. He is richly deserving of this prestigious award for his lifetime achievements to date."

The third generation of his family in the business, Gary left school at 13 and followed his father and grandfather into the street market trade. He has since spent all of his working life as a major trader, character and influencer on London's wholesale and retail market scenes and, for the last 45 of those years, he has been a successful fresh produce wholesaler and business owner at New Covent Garden.

He recalled: "On my first day working in New Covent Garden, in 1979, I was told in no uncertain terms that I was wasting my time joining this industry as the Market was going to be turned into a bus station! People have been telling me ever since that the wholesale markets are dying and that there is no future in my trade. But I'm still here and the wholesale markets are still going strong. We're a crucial part of the British fresh produce supply chain. New Covent Garden Market is celebrating 50 years in its current location in Nine Elms and we've just announced a record annual turnover of £880 million."

Gary's business acumen, passion and dedication to the fresh produce trade has ensured that his business

“ I love the fantastic product we receive from supply partners and pass on to customers

Bevington Salads continues to be a leader in a very competitive marketplace, serving independent retailers and catering firms across London and the South East with premium quality fresh fruit and salads.

While running a successful business, though, his unstinting commitment to New Covent Garden Market and its 2,500-strong community is second to none. Having sat on the executive board of the Covent Garden Tenants Association for many years and also served as its deputy chairman, for the last 18 years, he has represented the tenants of the Market as chairman of the CGTA.

Gary's steadfast belief in wholesaling and New Covent Garden Market has been instrumental in driving the Market through a major evolution, from being predominantly a supplier to the retail sector to becoming the major provider of fruit, vegetables and flowers to the restaurant and hospitality sectors across the South East of England.

"The nature of the business has changed;

it had to," said Gary. "But what continues to drive me on is the people I work alongside, their work ethic, their passion and commitment and above all, their friendship. I love the fantastic product that we receive from our supply partners and pass on to our customers and I love the fact that we're supplying inherently healthy and nutritious food to the population of London and the South East. We all know how necessary that role is and while other parts of the supply chain play their role, wholesale market traders are able to access consumers that others just can't reach."

Gary has performed the role of leader of the tenants' cause and his greatest achievement is perhaps to maintain a high degree of unity amongst members who compete robustly against each other every day; bringing together companies of all sizes, with different priorities, to defend and protect them and the Market he holds so dear.

Both before and during his tenure as Chairman, he has also led the Market's incredible fund-raising efforts each year, organising a series of events and gatherings that between them have raised well in excess of £750,000 for the Market's chosen charities. It is not unreasonable to say that without his relentless desire and commitment, the vast majority of that charitable work would not have happened.

Left: Centre, Gary and wife Deana, with son George and his fiancée Misha

Above: Gary with his eldest son Bradley and Bradley's partner Kezia



FoodCycle celebrates 15 years of impact with two UK charity awards

Community dining charity FoodCycle has scooped two national UK charity sector awards, while marking its 15th year turning surplus food into free meals for those in need

Among the first cohort of tenants to move into the Food Exchange in April 2019, FoodCycle occupies unit 2.16. From here its head office team co-ordinates projects helping tackle food waste, food poverty and loneliness, through food and conversation. Currently on track to have launched 100 community meal projects across England and Wales - including 30 in London - by the end of 2024, the charity has also surpassed the landmark of serving 3.5 million meals

since launching in 2009. So far this year FoodCycle volunteers have served more than 130,000 free meals and saved almost 240 tonnes of food from going to landfill. The work of their staff and thousands of volunteers was recognised with two UK charity sector trophies in September, their official 15th anniversary month. FoodCycle was named both 'Medium Size Charity of the Year' at the 'Third Sector awards, and 'Charity of the Year - with an income of £1

Above: The team celebrates on the roof of the Food Exchange
Above right: Sophie Tebbets accepts prestigious charity awards at two major ceremonies in September

million - £10 million' by the Charity Times. FoodCycle CEO Sophie Tebbets said: "These awards are testament to the incredible dedication and hard work of our team, our volunteers, and the support from our amazing partners and donors. We saw a 57% increase in guests using our services last year and meeting those increasing demands has only been possible with the amazing people and organisations who support us. A huge thank you to everyone who has played a part." Among those partners, Mission Kitchen hosts FoodCycle's corporate Food Invention Challenges at the Food Exchange's professional kitchens. This initiative gives businesses the chance to create delicious



Themis Anastasatos
- Le Marché

I really like the vibe: it's the middle of the night and it feels like half of London is still awake. I have been working at Le Marché for almost a year and mostly deal with the operations in the new unit - resetting the operations, helping with setting up the software and bringing in new customers that I knew from my past experiences.



Zurab Peradze
- All Greens

It is a really, really good atmosphere here. The sense of humour is absolutely outstanding. London is a tough city, but here - no matter what country you are from - you feel like you are in your own family. People don't let each other down, It is very enjoyable.



Paul Wise
- S Newman

I've worked in Covent Garden for 59 years. It's a community. I've been doing it for all these years and I have always enjoyed it. I still do. I like the environment. I like the people. I like - to use a hackneyed phrase - the buzz of the Market. It is a great way to get a living and it has always given me a good living as well.



Steven Carter-Bailey's vegetable cake recipe

FOR THE CAKE

- 250g self-raising flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp mixed spice
- Grating of fresh nutmeg
- 200g light brown sugar
- 200g dark brown sugar
- 300g grated vegetables – try carrot, sweet potato, beets or courgette (If using beetroot swap the spices for 2 tbsp cocoa, 1/2 tsp apple cider vinegar and 1/2 tsp bicarbonate of soda)
- 300ml vegetable oil
- 1tsp vanilla extract
- 4 large eggs

FOR THE FROSTING

- 250g unsalted butter (room temp)
- 250g icing sugar
- 200g full fat cream cheese
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

- 1) Preheat your oven to 175°C fan then grease and line two 8" cake tins.
- 2) In two separate bowls combine the dry and wet ingredients. If you are using courgettes, you may need to wrap them in a clean towel and squeeze out any excess moisture.
- 3) Combine the wet and dry ingredients together and stir thoroughly. Divide the mix evenly between the two tins and bake for 30-35 minutes until golden brown. Remove from the oven once baked and cool in their tins for 10 minutes before transferring to a wire rack.
- 4) For the frosting, cream the butter and icing sugar together, until pale and fluffy. Gently whip in the cream cheese and vanilla. Refrigerate until needed.
- 5) Stack your cooled cakes with half of the frosting, and spread the rest on the top. Serve and enjoy.

TOP TIP - This recipe makes an 8-inch, two layered cake (20 slices) but you could also turn it in to a tray bake (20 squares) or cupcakes (20) and of course, just scale up for more people! If you're short of time, you can skip the frosting!

meals using surplus food, in a Ready, Steady Cook style activity promoting teamwork, creativity and sustainability.

The Food Exchange was also the venue for FoodCycle's 15th anniversary celebrations – among them a celebration day for staff and volunteers from across London & the South East and a 'FoodCycle 15' cupcake fundraiser (pictured above), giving fellow tenants an opportunity to donate. Mission Kitchen also contributed a prize to support FoodCycle's World Food Day raffle in October – with winners drawn on November 4th, after this issue of Market Times went to press.

Sophie, who herself hosted a 'FoodCycle 15' live cook-along fundraiser on Instagram, said: "FoodCycle is all about food and connection, and our success thrives in a building that fosters a vibrant community within our sector. Being surrounded by like-minded professionals in the Food Exchange encourages collaboration, sparks creativity, and allows us to tap into a rich network of expertise." Sophie added: "Congratulations to all at New Covent Garden Market on your 50th anniversary milestone and your much deserved recognition at the FPC Fresh Awards."

Also among those helping celebrate

Get involved

If your organisation would like to take part in a FoodCycle Food Invention Challenge, or explore corporate partnership opportunities with FoodCycle, please contact: fundraising@foodcycle.org.uk

You can also donate to FoodCycle here: <https://foodcycle.org.uk/donate/>

To volunteer with FoodCycle community meal project visit: <https://volunteer.foodcycle.org.uk/>

Learn more about FoodCycle's impact here: <https://foodcycle.org.uk/who-we-are/foodcycles-impact/>

was Great British Bake Off star Steven Carter-Bailey, who created a 15th birthday 'showstopper' style cake in the shape of a box of surplus vegetables. He even visited a FoodCycle project in Luton for a volunteering shift, and to deliver the cake (pictured), as part of his role as Food Expert one of the charity's corporate partners, kitchenware brand ProCook. Steven also shared a cake recipe, right, which can be made using surplus vegetables.



Bryan Porter
- Porters Foliage

The market has always been in my heart and in my bones – I've been here as boy and as a man and I've loved the experience. I want it to succeed and for everyone here to stick together. The strength of the market is the combination of individual businesses; that mixture is its uniqueness, its feel and its offer – as a collective we are much stronger.



Alan Hockley – Lavenders of Covent Garden

Ultimately, my love for the Market is the sense of community it's created and the friendliness of all the traders and our customers. Everyone looks after each other and lots of my customers have become friends. Plus we've got the Garden Café as our near neighbours - they make an amazing sausage sandwich!



Aycan Mehmet
– The Garden Café

I was born into the Market, as my dad ran the famous Nellies Café that was in the Fruit and Vegetable Market for 32 years. Now our customers in the Flower Market Café are like an extended family to us as we see them every day and they've become friends. What makes the Market different is that the products change across the year, so that keeps things lively.

Thorogoods keeps on evolving

New Covent Garden Market will not be the only wholesale institution marking 50 years in Nine Elms on November 11th. On the first day the new market opened its doors in Nine Elms, amongst the wholesale traders that became new tenants was S Thorogood & Son. The expanded Thorogood Group is still a major force at NCGM and also the only wholesale business that today has a presence in all three of London's major fruit and vegetable wholesale markets

The Thorogood family has been growing and selling high-quality British fresh produce since 1922.

Andrew Thorogood, right, grew up as part of a farming business with 10 partners who were all family members. "We were mostly hand-harvested vegetable farmers, right through the salad range, the brassicas, carrots and potatoes," says Andrew. The farms were mainly in Essex, but we had one farm in each of Norfolk and Suffolk.

"We'd had a stand in Borough Market since 1922, which used to take roughly a third of our product. Then in 1974, everyone had the opportunity to move to New Covent Garden Market when it was built. We had a choice between the Growers' Pavilion or the main hall and we chose the main hall. I was 16 at the time. As soon as we came here, we started to sell a smaller proportion of produce from our own farms and buy more produce from other farmers we knew."

Through the 1980s and early '90s, the Thorogoods operation started to struggle getting hold of decent staff for its farms – this being long before significant numbers of labour made its way over from Eastern Europe. "We had a lot of local families working for us and as they died away, it became very difficult to replace them with people who were good enough to do the job well. So we started to move away from growing salads and vegetables to arable crops," recalls Andrew.

Split decision

The partnership - S Thorogood & Son – split up in 1996, but the separate partners all retained the name S Thorogood & Son. The wholesale company had become a limited company in 1989 and retained the same directors. Andrew says: "It was such a complex set up we gave the problem to a set of accountants to sort out for us! We let them decide and agreed to accept their decision. It was a leap of faith, but it has never caused a



problem since."

The separate partners were still sending product to the wholesale businesses, although by the time of the turn of the century, most of the produce sold at NCGM was not sourced through the group. It was, however, still mainly grown in Great Britain.

"We purchased a site in New Spitalfields when that opened in 1991 and expanded that in the mid-90s. In 1993, we also bought a lease of a firm that had closed down at Western International," says Andrew.

"It's progressed pretty well. There are always ups and downs – people are always the main challenge. When I'd just bought Western, I really thought I had the blueprint and I

could open in 10 different cities around the country. Then I had a few different issues with staff at a couple of the sites and I could see where it could go wrong. So I reined back and I've never ventured outside London.

"I'm pleased I didn't do it now; it would have stretched me a lot and I was already doing a lot of hours."

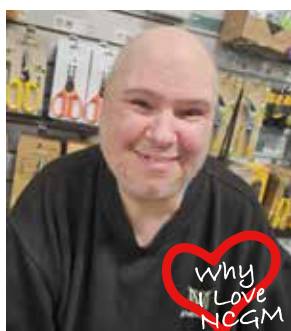
Back to British

Thorogoods has always maintained its focus on homegrown product and Andrew believes that now could be the time to



Damian Waloch
– Ilo Bloom

I love waking up each morning and meeting positive people. I've got a strong connection as my parents have worked with flowers all their lives - they create artificial Christmas trees. Our customers love it because they can see, feel and smell the products – which just can't be replicated online.



David Flockhart
– Wilfrid Whittington Ltd

I've been working at New Covent Garden since 1996. I just love the people and the atmosphere, the colours of everything, and especially the hours we work! I actually enjoy the night shifts, starting at 4am, as there's no traffic in the morning and we get the late morning and afternoon to ourselves.



Dean Knight
– Quality Plants

A lot of the people who work here would tell you they didn't plan to end up at the Market, but I've been here 23 years and so many of the same faces are still here. Plenty of those who leave either come back or end up regretting it. It's an amazing environment to be part of.



Above: Andrew on the Thorogood stand at New Covent Garden
Left: Thorogoods at Borough Market in its early days. Frank Thorogood is behind the desk

rekindle the relationships with the family farms. “I don’t have anything directly to do with the farms now. They are all still in the family apart from the one in Norfolk, but I think now perhaps we’ll start to see things go back the other way because it’s becoming more difficult to find English produce for the market of the right quality,” he explains.

“Most of the product the family farms grow now is wheat barley or oilseed rape, but we still grow potatoes, some of them sold here, and one of the partners grows a lot of asparagus, which we also sell. But we are trying to get them to produce more. They have the land, but it’s not straightforward [to start growing a fresh produce crop]. You’ve got a lot of set up costs, you need machinery you wouldn’t use for anything else, you’ve got to staff it.”

Andrew believes the way forward for wholesalers is to increase the volume of British product available. “We have tried to persuade our existing growers to do more and become part of our system,” he says. “Our suppliers are our business anyway and they are very loyal; we’ve been with most of them for decades.

“Most farmers, like me when I was farming, want to do what suits them. They want to do it well, but it needs to suit their year, their seasons, the availability of labour etc.. That doesn’t necessarily suit what we want, so it’s about

persuading people to do what we need and sometimes getting financially involved - I think that will become more important in the future too.”

Wholesale strength

The wholesale business continues to perform strongly. “Last year was our best ever across all three sites. Our product offer is a little different from most firms, so maybe we happen to cover the section of the market that people are more attracted to right now. ‘Buy British’ is slightly overdone, but the fact that we specialise in British has definitely helped us in the last three or four years. The growth of farm shops has also helped us – we serve more than 100,” Andrew says.

“Our wholesale business here serves about half and half retail and catering, which is very different to most. At New Spitalfields though, the catering to retail balance is around 30:70 and at Western it’s 20:80, which illustrates the difference between the markets. It’s a nice balance to have.”

“ The fact that we specialise in British produce has helped us in the last three to four years

Retail in London has obviously changed a great deal, he says. “You do hear terrible things, but it is still doing alright. It’s difficult to tell you why. The shops that are doing well have a broader range of product and are more specialised. They have tended to go slightly more rustic and our product range suits them.”

Catering growth

Over the years, the group has also expanded in different, more organic ways. “We had a bad debt at the NCGM stand and took over the customer’s business in 1991,” says Andrew. “We worked it from the Thorogood stand to begin with, but soon realised that it wasn’t good to be in competition >



Eric Potter

Eric Potter worked as a market porter first in the old Market and then at Nine Elms – his 42-year NCGM career running from 1956 until his retirement in 1998. He described his days here as “Good friendly employment. We were one big family.”



Eve Kenna
 - CGMA

I love NCGM because it is unique. The people are hard working from all backgrounds and everyone has a story to tell. The thing that I love most is the history of the Market, the drive of the people from the old Market until the present day, the family-run businesses that are still going and still hold the same ethos.



Grace Vicente
 - Wilfrid Whittington Ltd

It’s the atmosphere and the people that make New Covent Garden Market special. I’ve only worked here for two years, which isn’t long compared to some of my colleagues, but the Flower Market feels just like being at home as I’m with my friends and it feels like a family. I really enjoy coming to work and the shifts work for me.



Above: Andrew's children have all worked in the firm and Will is now taking on responsibility for the Nine Elms operation

with our customers. So, we set up a separate business called Classic Fresh Foods, which was originally run by Michel du Barbier. It grew gradually, but comfortably; we've never tried to take over the world, but it's consistent.

"I instinctively knew we had to be on the catering side of the business, not because I worried about the wholesale side, it just gave us a better balance," he says. "Catering businesses have a completely different structure, different margin expectations, different seasonality."

"The two elements of the business can support each other as they don't always go down or up at the same time. They have always worked very well together - we have never forced the catering side to buy from our wholesale unit as that limits them and they are by and large treated like any other customer. But I'll always want to know why if they don't buy from us because they feel they get better value elsewhere."

The next moves took the group into the world of fungi and bolted on another catering firm. "We wanted to expand both sides of the firm at NCGM, without favouring one or the other, so we took on Mushroom Man in 2021 to extend the balance and range of our wholesale business, having also taken on Rushton's two years before that to do the same to the catering side," Andrew says. "They were both very well-run businesses. I am a bit risk-averse so preferred them to alternative options that may have had bigger opportunities to make more money, but didn't fit our structure."

Relocation and rebrand

When the catering business relocated to newly built units at NCGM in 2022, it also underwent a restructure and rebrand. Andrew explains: "We changed the name from Classic to Rushton's because there was always a problem with there being a Classic Fine Foods and a Classic Fresh Foods. There was never really a crossover with what we did, but half the phone calls were for them and half the cheques we got were for them too. We were first with the name, which was even more annoying."

"Rushton's had a very good reputation though and was also more specifically recognised for certain things, whereas Classic was a well-run, good value business but maybe didn't have as much character for people to hang their hat on. We could have continued to run them as two separate businesses out of our new units, but we didn't want to do that so we rebranded and merged as Rushton's the chefs' greengrocer on



November 1, 2022. The name has since been simplified to Rushton's, although we've left 'the chefs' greengrocer' on the vans," he says.

"We want to push on, so that's not necessarily the end of our expansion. My son William is gradually taking over more responsibility for the business. He's based at NCGM, although he works across all of our companies. I spend more time at Spitalfields as it is closer to me and I can deal with everything from there. Barry Westwood and Steve Goldfinch run Thorogoods at Western International - they've been there for 30 years and 15 years respectively."

"We still foresee organic growth, but we've looked at other businesses too. The whole of the catering trade is going to go through a period of settlement. People's confidence is pretty low, so we're seeing most outlets not doing as well as they were. It was always true outside London, but it's becoming true of London too. The city still looks like it's absolutely heaving when you go in and at the weekend you can't get in anywhere, but it's obvious that some people are missing out in certain parts of the week and that may well continue for a while."

Andrew's journey

"When we were in Borough, started by my great grandfather, one of his sons Frank ran it for a long while. When he died in 1961, my father Jim took over and looked after it for 25 years. He organised the move from Borough to here and for the first few years here, stayed in control. My cousin Chris was also a salesman at Borough and came to NCGM for the first 10 years. He used to go home and work on the farm too and

got to a stage when he felt it wasn't worth carrying on. He thought the whole business should withdraw from wholesale altogether and concentrate on farming. That was when I said I'd like to step in and take it on, as I thought there was a real future in it."

"I took over in 1984, so 40 years ago. "I worked at NCGM for seven or eight years on the wholesale side, then ran Classic Fresh for three or four years. I have a problem with getting sucked into something and find it very hard to break out! You make so many connections in the business you are focusing on that you lose the threads elsewhere and you also hate to go away, as you feel you are letting people down when you're not there. Classic was good for me as I'd never done much day-to-day buying and it was really interesting being on the other side of the fence for a while."

"Since then it's been me at the helm until William joined. He left university and went to work in insurance, as an underwriter, until about four years ago he came home one day and said he'd like to be part of the business. We'd spoken about it before, but I didn't expect it - I had started to get the whole thing ready for sale. He said he wanted to do a season skiing, then go to South Africa for six months, then another season skiing - so 'see you in two years!' - that's exactly what he did. Both my daughters, Katherine and Jo have been involved too at various times."

"I've absolutely loved it. I've never had a problem getting up in the morning and it is so varied. Not everybody who works here would think that, but I'm lucky that I'm always looking at something different - that's very exciting."



Igor Krawczyk
- Eurofrutta

I love the business and the hours - it's much better than being stuck in an office from 9 'til 7 every day. I was buying a lot of the product for some time and got to know the wholesalers - I really like the people here. It's a challenging job, there's no time to settle into a routine. I thrive in that kind of environment.



Indrit Arapi
- Field to Fork

What attracted me to the Market was the good people and the family atmosphere - there's no shouting and we all get along, despite the work being physical and hard at times. I actually like working the night shifts - I don't even have to set an alarm to wake up as I'm so used to it! The friendships I've made here are the best part of the job.



Jarek Malochleb
- Field to Fork

I'm lucky to really enjoy my job. I've been here for 20 years working for four different businesses over that time. Everyone knows each other and the Market becomes a big family with a lot of trust between everyone that makes you enjoy it more. It's the relationships you build that make all the hard work worth it.

Micky Gaeton in his own words

Micky Gaeton was a regular at this market for over 70 years, latterly as the owner of MG Produce, one of the wholesalers on Buyers' Walk. A few months before he sadly passed away this summer, he reminisced with us about his time in the trade and we thought it would be a fitting way to mark his passing to hear about Micky's life and career in his own words

"I started in the old Covent Garden Market aged 14, in 1946, right at the bottom of the scale in the empties warehouse dealing with the chargeable boxes that got returned. Back in those days, boxes carried a certain repayment. Then I became a staff man at Barney Springer's, where I was working in the actual workhouse offloading lorries and doing general work. It was a good firm to work for and I did really well there.

Sometime in the '50s there was a strike and the labour force was reorganised. We were all issued with porters' badges and life changed quite a bit for me. I would be delivering to various haulage lorries on the outside of the Market and they in turn were delivering around the UK, as that's how the Market worked then.

I got married and started to have children and soon realised that although a porter's wage was OK, I just wasn't earning enough to meet our family's needs. I started to do other things with produce – taking a trolley or barrow and pulling it into Soho. There was always someone willing to buy it and quickly I was making decent money. I thought 'if I could have my own van, I could go a bit further afield' so that's what I did. I learnt to drive, bought a cheap van and it went from there.

I often didn't know where I was going or who I was going to serve, but I soon found regular trade with Indian and Bangladeshi restaurant owners. They were excellent customers and very good at recommending me to different places, which allowed me to expand. Soon I needed a warehouse, so got my first premises in King's Cross. Then the business really began to grow and I started to employ people. I was walking on air – making money I'd never seen before!

At New Covent Garden, Fred Rowe was a friend of mine. He wasn't everyone's favourite as his business was big and competitive, but Fred always had time for me. I didn't do business with him, but he advised me that if I wanted to go further than being a supplier to Indian restaurants, then I should move to the market.

I moved to New Covent Garden Market in 1980. Things had gone well in King's Cross, but Fred suggested that we would improve our status and give potential customers a bit more faith in our credentials. Without a doubt, he was right. We had made a good living doing the basics of our trade, but when we got to NCGM we became established and things improved again for us. We never reached the heights of Fred Rowe, but I never lost his friendship.

Things progressed from there. My son Tony was in the business by this stage; It wasn't always a happy relationship and we didn't always see eye to eye. I lived the business and was never afraid of the early starts, the long hours and hard work or the affect it had on my social life. But Tony was a very young man when he joined and had an active social life. It was hard for me to convince him that he should be more dedicated to the regular hours of the business. I did get through to him though and he was instrumental in

expanding the business a lot. He got on with people and had a lot of sway and that helped us pick up a lot of new customers.

We employed quite a few people at one time and for many years, turnover was good and we were successful.

Throughout most of my working life, my wife Sheila was my right hand – she was my everything. She came from the Sullivan family, whose market business was based in Neale Street and produced trolleys and barrows for the Market's porters. So she knew the Market life. I didn't meet her in the Market though; Sheila's sister was a florist so I knew her, but I met Sheila at a dance and we hit it off. We courted for 18 months, got married, had three children and lived happily ever after.

Meeting her was so important for me. She did so much for the business, all of the clerical work, the accounts and the admin, as well as at home, and I could not have done anything without her.



Unfortunately, Sheila got dementia and as she deteriorated, more and more of my time was spent looking after her. I couldn't be in two places at once, so I spent much less time at work. Our chief salesman left the business and took a lot of the business with him. I never had contracts that would stop people doing that, which I probably should have done. I lost a bit of my interest after that, it was a difficult time.

When Sheila died, that was it for me and I told Tony I wasn't going to continue. I was surprised when he said he didn't want to take on the responsibility and was going to live abroad – maybe I didn't fight him hard enough – but the business really needed him to be there if it was to carry on, so we decided the time was right to sell up.

I've had a good life and I loved every single minute I spent in Covent Garden. There was something about the Market world that you just couldn't compare with anywhere else. The old Market was a very happy and jovial place to be. Because there were always public walking through, you were always in the middle of things and meeting lots of people. People would pour out of the West End and into the Market pubs in the early hours and that was

A family affair

Both of Micky's sons worked with him at the Market, Tony – who sadly also died last year – and Mick, who told us:

"As a child, I remember getting up with Dad in the night and watching him make toast with a fork on an open stove before going to Market.

"The long hours and early mornings were a tough life but my Dad was very happy in the Market and he worked into his eighties.

"I have been told my Dad was hard but fair as a buyer. He knew when to give and take.

"He liked the people and the banter and was loyal to the Market.

"He changed our surname in the 1970s but he was still getting shipments marked 'Micky Gay' 50 years later!

"He would still be getting up for Market now if he could!

"May he rest in peace."-

my world, some of the happiest times of my life.

The new Market never had quite the same aura – it never could as it was completely different. But it was still full of great people and I progressed further than I ever thought I would. I was at school during the war and didn't go after the war at all so had no qualifications. My mum wanted me to work in the printing industry, but I was a fish out of water, couldn't spell or do anything! When you came into Covent Garden then, you didn't need a lot of brains. As long as you could count and book a load in, you had all you needed.

When I employed staff, I had the good fortune to find people who were hard-working and loyal to me. Several of the office staff are still in touch now, even though I'm nearly 92 and I'm really grateful for that.

I've got no complaints about anything. Coming to Covent Garden was the best thing I ever did."



Jeff Clement
- The French Garden

I'm 83 now and have been driving for The French Garden for about 14 years. I go wherever they need me to go; regularly to Rungis Market (in Paris). I have driven fruit and vegetables around most of my life. I still love driving. I have to take a test every year now, but as long as I keep passing it, I'll want to be here.



Jo Breare
- CGMA

I love New Covent Garden Market because not only is it the best market in the country with the best tenants, the best produce and the best people – when we finish the redevelopment it will be EVEN BETTER!!!



John Sait - Evergreen
Exterior Services Ltd

I love the old school community at New Covent Garden Market and the banter between colleagues, friends and customers. It's still like it used to be when we first moved to Nine Elms. I always say it's the people who are important and make the Market the place it is.

Tony calls time on market career

An undoubted legend of London's street market scene, having taken on a highly successful multi-generational family firm in Portobello Road, Tony Glasgow cemented his status after moving into the wholesale game at New Covent Garden Market to finish his career. He retired in July and when we caught up with him, he was slowly but surely getting used to his new sleep pattern after 47 years of increasingly early starts. Tony looks back on his time in the trade

Tell us how you first got into the fruit and vegetable trade.

My grandad Charlie and dad Bill had always worked in Portobello Road. I was born in 1961, in Goldborne Road, Notting Hill, then we moved out to Wembley when I was 7 or 8.

I spent a lot of time on the stall from an early age and from around the age of 10, I can remember going to the old Covent Garden Market. We used to park out by the church. I still remember going to Kenny Brown's – his family is still in the market now; Neil Brown Herbs. Kenny is Neil's uncle. My first impression of the Market was that it was a fun place to go, I was going on a morning's work with my dad and I loved that. It was a great time there, hard work for the boys pulling the barrows, but the camaraderie was there for everyone to see.

My dad wanted me to go to school, but he definitely thought more of work than education and as soon as the bell went to end the day, I'd get on my bike and ride all the way from Wembley to Portobello Road.

My last day at school, aged 16, was a Wednesday – we finished at 2pm and literally the following morning, dad had me up at 3am to start work! That's basically where it all started.

“ I finished school on a Wednesday and started work at 3am the next morning!

Back then, because we were running stalls through the day, we wouldn't get up until 3-3.30am. It was more of a day job, but we wouldn't close up until 5pm and by the time we'd put stuff away and tidied up, we'd be getting home at six at night. Then you could spend the evening with your family. It was five and half days a week and long hours, but it wasn't a job to me and none of the stallholders were any different - we all did those hours.

There were 60-odd fruit and veg stalls, all competing with each other and we were all market traders, all friends. We didn't often socialise together as we were busy, but they were good times. I grew into the market and began to love it, then my dad became unwell when I was 25 or so. He started taking a couple of days off a week and by the time he passed away, aged 68 I'd already gradually taken the business over and was running it on my own with a couple of staff.

You had a hugely successful business, so how did you end up working in Nine Elms?

I had no intention to move into New Covent Garden to work. I was running my stall, very happy doing it and earning enough money for my wife Deana and me and our two kids. But 20 years ago or so, the street markets in London started slipping backwards. It wasn't just Portobello Road, which is one of the most famous markets in the world, in a very vibrant area where people had money. But the supermarkets started to have free car parking areas, the wheel clamps started coming out around the markets and that started pushing the customers away.

I'd started serving the local restaurants and shops around the market. Because the Glasgow name had been around for such a long time and the chefs and retailers saw the consistent quality we had and asked me to supply them. I didn't plan it, but I took a few restaurants on, it went from strength to strength and they started using me more and more.

In the end, I couldn't do both and one was going against the other. The catering started to take over, so I went to the market office. I told them where I was in life and what I was doing and asked to retain my licence while I took six months out from the stall to see if I could make the catering side of the business work on its own – if it didn't, I'd come back.

They could have rented it out to other people in that time,



but they wouldn't do it. Not only had the Glasgow family had its name on a licence for 118 years, I had sat on the market committee for 18 years and represented the fruit and vegetable traders, putting so much time in away from the family after a day's work. I felt I had the right to ask, but they wouldn't let me, so I handed my licences in at Kensington Town Hall and that was that.

I had sheds privately rented when I left Portobello and stayed there for a couple of years, then a good friend of mine Chris Roach (CSR & Sons) asked me to come in and work with him at New Covent Garden.



Jim Dew
- Harwoods of London

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. It's a family up here. When the proverbial hits the fan and it comes to the crunch, we all come together. I love that.



Michael Barrett
- HG Walker

I feel part of something here – we're all in it together and I have respect for anyone who makes a living here because it can be very hard work. I also have huge respect for our customers. A lot of them are one-man band operators, so they come here during the night to buy product, then go back to their own businesses and do a full day's work.



Mohid Peera
- Oui Chef

I've been here six months and it's good for the money and the hours for me. I go to college too and the revenue I get from my job here in the Market allows me to do that – renting in London is so expensive!

Right: A. Glasgow 92 is the pitch number. Each stallholder had a licence and they rented pitches off the local council.
Below right: Tony on his last day in the market



Tony was one of a dying breed of buyer

Martin Dykes, Managing Director of Nature's Choice, has known Tony for 45 years and the connection predates that, as Martin's mum bought her fresh produce from the Glasgow family's stand in Portobello Road before he was even born.

"Tony had the very best stall; no-one has got near it since he left the market," says Martin. "I got to know him through Dave, who worked for him. Dave is still one of my best friends."



"He was at Nature's Choice for nine years as Director of Buying.

The years of experience he brought to us was invaluable, we've grown a lot in the time he's been here. He is a proper buyer, you just don't get them like that any more. He had to see the product, he wouldn't do it on the phone. Too many others will only do it on the phone and there's far less emphasis on quality."



People tell us you were 'last in, last out' and describe you as a proper buyer. What do you think a 'proper buyer' is?

It's the only way I knew how to buy. It always makes sense to view the goods, look at the quality and choose the quality you want to buy for what you would call the right price. I'd go in to see Perry at Premier, for example, and say I want juicing oranges today. He'd show me three or four options, I'd view all of them, then hand-select the one I wanted. He'd give me the prices and if he couldn't do the price I wanted, maybe I'd just have to drop to the next one as we had to be competitive for our chefs as well.

That was no different to being on the stalls, where our competition was the other stallholders. We were trying to beat them all the time by keeping the price right.

It's changed so much. I don't think programmes have done the Market any good. A lot of that is dictated by the chefs, of course, who want you to set up a three-month price so they know where they are going to be and organise their

That was my original move, I moved the business here and I helped Chris and he helped me. From there, about four years later, my son Nicholas came out of university and started coming to the market to help and that's where his career In Covent Garden started. He took the answer phone off me and talked to the chefs, grew to love it and now he works at London Herbs.

I wound up at Nature's Choice! I have to admit I don't remember Martin's mum (see box), it was a long time ago!. But everyone in Notting Hill shopped at Portobello Road and they all had their favourites, where they got a bit of banter. We'd keep the women happy and the kids would get an apple. I also met Martin's wife Fiona – she used to work in a bakery in front of me and she was good fun. Obviously we

didn't know she would grow up to marry Martin, or that they would run Nature's Choice together.

I thoroughly enjoyed working at Nature's Choice and the way it has grown since I came in, which is down to a great team effort. We put our heads together and each individual there has played an important part in pushing the business forward. The owners stay a bit on the outskirts of it and do a fantastic job and the family works for the firm too. In those nine years, it did move on a hell of a lot.

If you get the right people in the right places, who are doing the right job and loving what they do, it's hard not to move forward. Martin Dykes is no different to me – he loves what he does and gets that kick and buzz that takes you to work at 8 o'clock at night.



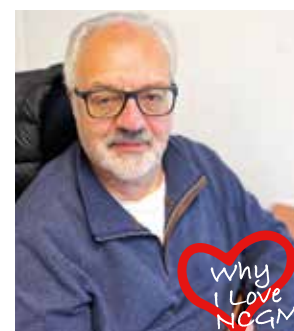
Tim Garrett - European Speciality Foods

I have worked since I was 14 and I have been to work every day. And I would never contemplate not working. It's the familiarity here, I suppose. I know everybody and it feels very comfortable. That's really what it is. It's the people we love, the people we are closest to - and they are here. Once you are in this, you're in.



Pedro Diogo Jalacassa - County Supplies

I've worked at NCGM for more than 25 years. I'd moved to London from Portugal and didn't speak any English. Since then, I've learned the language and everything about fresh produce from working in the Market alongside my colleagues, first at Chef's Connection and now at County Supplies. It's been an amazing journey.



Roger Garber - Premier Foods Wholesale

I never wanted to do anything else and I've had a wonderful time in the Market. I love the banter. Yes we're all competing to a certain extent, but over time you understand that the Market is a great leveller. People take the mickey out of me all the time, but it's all in jest and like a family we're all there for each other.

Right: The Glasgow name lives on at NCGM through Tony's son Nick, who works at London Herbs

menu and margins. It's promoted the idea that you can work three months ahead, so you can sit in the office and tell your wholesaler what you want, bash out a price and all he's got to do is guarantee the quality. If he can do that and the product is there, he's done his side of the deal.

To old-fashioned me, that's not what markets are about. It takes the fun out of it. I could have sat in an office and bought over the phone, but that doesn't make a salesman a salesman – he just writes the order down and that's it.

I thrived on the competition, on bidding for product and trying to get it for 10-20p less than the person next to me. There was plenty of competition in Portobello Road then and if you did a good job, you could go back and have more scope to compete with everyone around you.

To succeed as a buyer, you need that competition; the challenge between you and the salesman is what makes it worthwhile. That's where the buzz is, it's what makes your hairs stand up on your arms. If I could say 'that was a result, he wanted £3 for that item, but I've walked away paying £2.60' then I'd be happy.

What prompted you to retire?

If I wasn't married, I'd probably still be there, but I'm very much a family man and always worked towards a day when I get to retire. Since the kids have flown the nest, my wife has sat at home on her own every night I've gone to work. She has always 100% backed my businesses and worked with me on the stalls, as did her mum.

I've had a blast, but Deana and me wanted to finish work while we were both fit and well. We might travel around the world, we might not, but we know we can if we want to!

How do you look back on your career?

The greatest thing for me is I don't think it would have really mattered if I worked for Sainsbury's, a retailer down the road or in Covent Garden, I have always loved the business and thoroughly enjoyed what I have done. I never wanted to open a double glazing shop or lay carpets, I absolutely loved handling fruit and veg, understanding where it comes from and tastes like and what you can do with it. I loved the camaraderie of the industry and the fierce, but friendly competition between us all.

How do you view the industry now, as opposed to when you started out on the stall?

The world has moved on a lot in the last 15-20 years. The way you purchase fruit and veg, the way the wholesalers are, everything has moved on and you have to move with it, otherwise you get left behind. Do I think it's better now than 30 years ago? No, I don't, but you have to look at the changes in the clientele. When the stallholders at Portobello Road started to go to pound-a-bowl, that was reflecting an influx of customers from different countries and cultures. It becomes a different market – Brixton Market for example became a lot more about handling of the fruit and veg and the supermarkets encourage people to pick their own, touch them, squeeze them; when I was trading I didn't want people touching the goods. If you wanted 2lbs of tomatoes, I would select them, pop them in the bag and weigh them up. You wouldn't have to handle them until you got home.



A buyer who always did it the right way

Bevington Salads owner and CGTA Chairman Gary Marshall, who has known and supplied Tony for several decades, says: "He was a staunch supporter of this Market and always believed in buying his produce from Buyers' Walk. Both when he was in Portobello Road and while he worked at Nature's Choice, he was a very good buyer – extremely particular. He did it the right way – always had to look at what he was buying, and he was as hard a worker as they come, first in and last out many days. We're sad to see him go, of course, but wish him a long and very happy retirement."

A lot of people would disagree with me, but a lot would agree too – that has been a large part of the downfall of street markets and it has definitely impacted on wholesale markets including New Covent Garden. Programmes have started the decline in footfall within the market. A lot of the bigger companies are happy to operate in the background now and it's programmes that let them do that.

And finally, what does New Covent Garden mean to you?

I wouldn't have been able to run my stalls without a wholesale market, whether that be Western, Spitalfields or New Covent Garden Market. Dad and I used to use Western on the odd occasion, but Covent Garden was closest and easiest, so I really only went there.

It means everything to me as obviously I earned my living out of there, it's what fed and housed my wife and kids. It's the world, my second home. Buyers at New Covent Garden, 98% of them are second to none. You live in a night-time bubble and it's that camaraderie. You see the same faces all the time – you can have a row with someone one day, but that's business and it's almost always forgotten in an hour's time. That's the great thing about the Market. Everyone knows each other and the vast majority of us get on.

There are so young boys working there now who have young children, just married, mortgages to pay – that place is so important to them. I wish everyone could really understand that. They are all 35 or less and they've ploughed everything they have into that Market. They need the Market to survive. I'm not saying they couldn't get on outside of the Market, but it is a bubble and they feed off each other. The Market feeds all their families' mouths too.



Raj Patel
– NCGM Postmaster

It's part of my family and these are my people. The Market has been such an important part of my life for more than 36 years now and I've seen entire generations grow up here. I've got an amazing connection with the Market's people, who are all characters. It'll be difficult for me to retire as the camaraderie is just amazing.



Balkumar Khatri
– Infringement Officer

I love everything. The friendly tenants, the workers; they are all really nice people. It makes coming to work everyday feel special. I've worked at the Market for 14 years and still love my job and all the people who visit the Market. It's a unique experience working here.



Liz Marsh – Elizabeth Marsh Floral Design

We've been based at NCGM since 2007, starting in one of the Railway Arches, moving into the 'old' Flower Market and then the 'new' Flower Market, so we've seen a lot of changes. What I love is to be at the epicentre of the UK flower industry and a part of living history. In a world that is increasingly digital the market is grounded, earthy and full of soul.

Paul Grimshaw honoured by Westminster Kingsway College

Paul Grimshaw, Managing Director of catering distributor D.D.P. Ltd, has been awarded an Honorary Fellowship of Westminster Kingsway College (WKC)



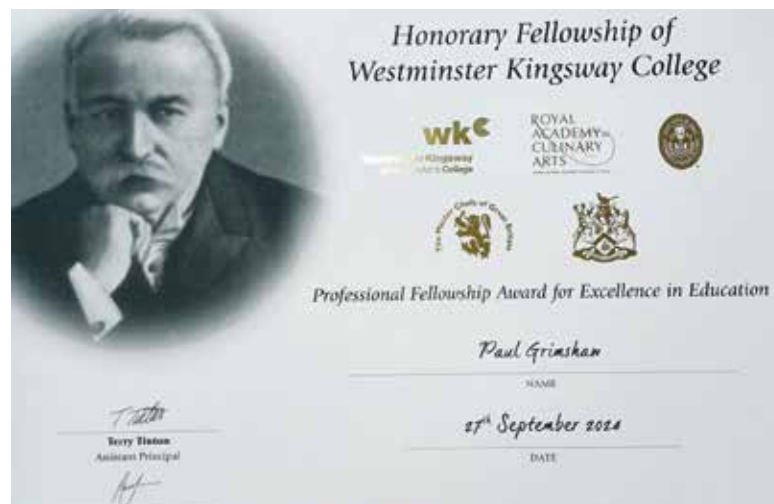
The Professional Fellowship Award for Excellence in Education acknowledged not just D.D.P's role as a supplier of fresh fruit and vegetables to the college over the last 20 years, but also Paul's regular and valuable contribution to the education of the WKC students. He was presented with his Fellowship – alongside another man well acquainted with NCGM, Michel Roux Jr – at an event that also marked the graduation of and celebration of the achievements of students who had recently completed their course at the college.

Paul is the third generation of his family in the business and has worked in the Market since 2001. He has relished the opportunity to educate the next generation of top London chefs at WKC. "It has been a pleasure being involved with lecturers and students every day for the last two decades," he said. "Supplying them with produce is one thing, but I've also really enjoyed trying to assist students, discussing lesson plans with lecturers, accommodating market visits or going into the college to show off produce during their lessons."

Building every chef's awareness of the intricacies of the fresh produce supply chain is extremely important, he added. "There are challenges in supplying fresh produce every day, which I embrace. There are day to day hurdles that have to be overcome by our industry, which could be weather anywhere in the world, transport conflict or simply the vagaries of supply and demand. I've always seen it as my role to ensure our customers are kept abreast regularly and to find alternative solutions when necessary.

"Passing on information is vital and although we cannot foresee every hurdle approaching, it is good education for everyone in the catering industry to expect the unexpected – whether you're working in the market or a busy kitchen."

Paul Jervis, Head of Hospitality & Culinary Arts at Westking, presided over the ceremony and commented: "Paul



[Grimshaw] has been an incredible supporter of the college over many years. His contributions have ranged from joining our student careers fairs and showcasing produce and the supply chain, to co-presenting lessons on fruit and vegetables and their origins.

"Paul is an invaluable link between the college and New Covent Garden Market and the regular updates he provides us on the availability of produce and what is in season plays a very strong role in the creation and design of the college's menus.

"The whole team are exceptionally grateful to day-to-day support from Paul and we look forward to continuing our relationship moving forward."

Paul Grimshaw added: "I am humbled and honoured to be given such a wonderful accolade. We have always had a fantastic relationship with the lecturers and student chefs at Westking and it's been a privilege to be part of the journey of so many young, aspiring chefs. Just like the lecturers at the college, I remain passionate about fresh produce. I hope that I have helped in a minor way to pass some of this on and it has been hugely rewarding when I meet former students who work for customers and remember us."

D.D.P. has been at the forefront of a campaign that sees the whole market support WKC, by providing two products a month – one homegrown and one imported – for the student chefs in each of the three years at Westking to focus on. A fact-filled PDF is also supplied, with details about the provenance and nutritional values of each product.

"D.D.P. has a very prestigious past history, but I am a firm believer that this should be used to contribute to the future," said Paul. "Our experience and knowledge can help the development of those in the catering industry, both younger and older."

“ It is good education for everyone in the catering industry to expect the unexpected



Yoko Edgeller
– Yoko Blooms

I really love the people in the Market and the fact that you can just turn up and pick your flowers personally each day. It's so much better than buying from a Dutch website! The traders here have so much knowledge and have helped me out on so many occasions. It's great here.



Neil Birks
– NB Flowers

It's the relationships and the knowledge here at the Market that are exceptional – everyone comes up with the best quality to meet our expectations. It's the people who make the Market. Everybody has to start work incredibly early and it's so nice to see friendly faces and be greeted with friendly banter each day. It's important to be able to have a laugh and enjoy work.



Phiroj Rana
– Security Officer

I really love patrolling the Market as it's such a huge site and so different to other places where I've worked. I get to walk around the entire site and meet so many different people. The facilities on the site are great too – the systems here and my colleagues make the job easier to do and the Market looks after itself.

Bob Cooley reflects on a lifetime of smiles at the Flower Market

Much-loved Flower Market face Bob Cooley retired from plant wholesaler L Mills at the end of May this year, after a fifty-three-year career spent across a host of businesses at both the old and new Covent Garden Flower Markets

Known to many of his Flower Market colleagues as ‘Bob Bacon’ – not for his love of pork-based products, but because he once worked for ANF Bacon – Bob has been a mainstay of the Flower Market since he first joined the old Covent Garden in 1971 before the move to Nine Elms in 1974. As well as the aforementioned ANF Bacon, which became G.B Foliage, and final employer L Mills, Bob worked for Blackburns (part of the Donovan Group), Baker & Duguid, Skeens, and Dutch business Warmerdam.

“In all I’ve completed 53 years in the Flower Market,” says Bob, “and I’ve loved every minute of it. It’s a sad goodbye to some good friends, but I’m ready for a change. This is the third stage of my life story – I’ve been to school, been to work, and now I’m starting a new chapter with my retirement.”



Above: Bob and his wife Lesley back in the day
Right: Bob with the old gang in the first iteration of NCGM Flower Market

A connection to Dickens

It was 12 April 1971 when Bob started working at the old Covent Garden Flower Market for a firm called Blackburns, part of the Donovan group. “We were based in a former publishing house that once had Charles Dickens on its books,” says Bob, who can remember all the small details of his first few weeks, despite five-decades having passed. “Back then I only weighed eight stone,” says Bob, “but I quickly put on muscle as I was running up and down four flights of stairs each day carrying heavy boxes. In a few months to a year, I was up to 10 stone and full of muscles from all the lifting and running around.”

A few months later that same year, the Conservative government changed the law – and the makeup of the Market – by bringing in employment law that stipulated employees had to be 18 years old in order to work night shifts. “I reckon I was probably one of the last porters employed at 16 as I joined the Market a few months before the law went into effect,” says Bob. “It was a stroke of luck really.”

Bob ‘Bacon’

ANF Bacon was the next business Bob joined and the Bob Bacon nickname stuck. “I spent years at Bacon as a porter, unloading moss, foliage and Christmas trees,” he says. “When I was 18, I got my porters’ badge and I felt very proud. My wages went up from £4 per week to £16 per week plus tips, so it made a HUGE difference to my pay.”

After 11 years working with ANF Bacon, circumstances changed, and Bob found himself made redundant in 1981. “Because I was under 26 years old, I only got half a week’s wages for each year that I’d worked with them, so basically nothing really. But I’d had lots of fun there and loved every minute, so there were no hard feelings.”

Bob didn’t stay out of work for long and was snapped up by Baker & Duguid. “I did a short spell with them as a night porter, got married in 1983, then went to work for Dutch firm Warmerdam as a salesman. The job was a lot slower than what I was used to before as a porter, so I ended up going back to portering – I just wasn’t cut out to be a salesman in those days.”

After another stint as a porter, Bob was offered another selling role at Universal by an old friend called Joe London. “Joe guided me through what was required in the selling role, but the timing was wrong for the business, and I was made redundant again. I got picked up by a guy called Lenny Skeen and started working with an old fella called Bert who had

been in the army. Bert helped me a lot as he was in his last few months at the market and wanted to pass on his knowledge and skills.”

The gift of the gab

Bob quickly excelled in his new sales role and was able to sell almost anything to anyone thanks to his gift of the gab. “I once sold cyathiums that were three weeks old, when they’re only supposed to be a couple of days old! My customer really needed them and – even though I explained how old the flowers were, they still took ‘em. A friend of mine who owned a flower business on Chelsea’s Sloane Square was flabbergasted! We’ve stayed friends all these years and they’re now based on the King’s Road opposite Peter Jones: they still buy all their flowers from New Covent Garden.”

From car washer to night porter

After the Skeens business collapsed, Bob stayed in the Flower Market but in a different guise. “I was washing cars in the Market’s car park to pay my bills. My wife had given up working to have my daughter Hayley, so I needed to keep the money coming in and the car washing fitted the bill.”

As luck would have it, Bob’s spell washing cars led to a new opportunity. “Roy Stevens from SR Allen came down to the car park and asked me to leave what I was doing and come and work with him. He knew that I was a grafter and a willing pair of hands. I was lucky that I’d lodged my union card and had kept paying my union fees, so I went straight to work for Roy as a Flower Market night porter.”

Bob spent the next 20 years as a night porter with SR Allen, a time that he



Adrian Soica
– Mechanical Engineer

It’s the people who make the Market special, in particular my mangers are really good to me and that’s what I love, the teamwork aspect. I’m doing around 22,000 steps each day just in my role here, making sure that the site’s mechanics such as air conditioning and plumbing are all working. I’ve been here for two years now and I’m still meeting new people every day as it’s such a massive site.



Daniel Jerome
– First Choice

I’ve worked at the Market for 30 years, starting part time when I was only 14 years old. I loved NCGM from the start, and we used to visit the pubs based here in the Market after work, so there was strong camaraderie. I was making good money from the day I joined, and I’ve only ever worked for two companies. I’ve been at First Choice for 15 years now and it’s a great team, with a great boss.



Finn Dykes
– Nature’s Choice

I love all the people across the Market and not just my own team – everyone is so friendly and we all look out for each other. Nature’s Choice is a family business so I’m following in my family tradition by working here. We all work hard but we play hard too and share the rewards. All the businesses help each other when needed.

looks back on fondly despite the unusual hours. “We’d start at 10:30pm and work through to 7am the next morning, Monday to Friday.”

For the first time in his Covent Garden career, Bob started working Saturdays in addition to the usual Monday to Friday routine, as demand from the public grew. “There was a lot of debate back then about whether the Market should open on a Saturday as it was an unknown risk for the businesses. Now Saturdays are one of our busiest days! It was a good little earner and I ended up taking my family to Disneyland in America off the back of working all those weekends.”

It was the start of a new decade in 2010 that saw another big shift in Bob’s career as the threat of redundancy loomed its head for a third time. “There was a big recession and unfortunately SR Allen had to make me redundant as their business went under,” explains Bob. “The generation of regular customers just filtered out and, as the trade faded, so did the business. But what a great team we were at SR Allen!”

Flowers and plants - just like any other consumer product

me that Billy Chev was looking for someone to work with him at L Mills as a salesman. I started working with Billy three days a week at first, spending the rest of my week as a landscape gardener. Eventually I started working full time and in 2016 – when Billy left – I started running the show on my own. Billy gave me the confidence to run the business and although it’s hard being a one-man band, I’ve really enjoyed it. The job satisfaction is amazing. I have to say a huge thank you to Iain Mills for bringing me into his business and to all the great workers down at L Mills nursery for all their support.”

The end of an era

Bob’s retirement brought about the end of an era for both himself and L Mills, which had been in the Market for more than 100 years and will continue to sell its produce via Market wholesalers Pratley’s and Quality Plants. “What I’ve learned from my time in the Market is that if you work hard, you can make money, and if you’re really lucky you can even

Bob’s TALL stories (believe them at your own risk!)

The haunted cellar: “In the old Covent Garden Flower Market, one of the cellars was supposedly haunted. The ghost was called Mr Tappy. I used to dread going down into the cellar as I was still very young and naive. For months I was sure that I could hear the ghost tapping every time I ventured down into the cellar... turns out it was supposedly haunted, but the tapping was just the other porters winding me up!”

Working at the pet cemetery: “I’d been let go at the Market and found a job driving around London picking up animals from vets and taking them to the pet cemetery. One day I was asked to collect 25 fighting dogs that the police had been forced to put down. The freezer at the police station had broken and the bodies had been kept outside for days. By the time I collected and delivered the dogs, I smelt like a dog’s dinner and couldn’t get rid of the stench for a week. That’s when I decided to return to the Market!”

The near-death experience: “One day I arrived at the Market early and they offered me some extra shillings for moving some foliage with a pitchfork. The old Covent Garden was open to the public and I hadn’t realised that a homeless fella was sleeping in the foliage. I was moving the foliage when I almost stabbed him! He had one arm and was known across the market as ‘Kimble’ after ‘The Fugitive’ TV show. He didn’t sleep in the foliage again!”



- have a lifespan and rise and fall in popularity but Bob’s been in the business long enough to ride the ups and downs. “The trick to longevity is to employ young people”, explains Bob. “If you’ve got young people in your team who are on the pulse then you’ll have a successful business!”

From pet cemetery to L Mills

Once again, Bob was seeking employment, and it didn’t take long for his services to be snapped up. “I kept showing my face in the Market and did a few part-time ‘turns’ here and there for different Flower Market businesses. Then I got offered a full-time role in a pet cemetery. It paid the bills for a while, but it was very different to what I was used to and I didn’t really enjoy it. After one particularly hard week I put that job to rest and never went back.”

What had turned Bob’s head was a chance to return to the Market, working for plant business L Mills – a job that unbeknownst to him would be his role until he retired. “I’m eternally grateful to wholesalers Tony and Carole, who told

find love,” says Bob. “But time is only allotted and now it’s my time!”

It goes without saying that there were so many great times in Bob’s fifty-plus years in the flower business, but naming the highlights comes easily. “Where do I start? The football teams, the boxing nights out, the nightclubs, the river boat shuffles, the Market parties and all the misbehaving! I’ve loved every minute of it.”

Bob’s final month working at New Covent Garden saw a new youngster start in the Flower Market, across the way from L Mills. Whether Bob saw his younger self reflected back or just wanted to offer some friendly advice gained over half a decade, his competitive spirit was still front and centre. “He was going on about how old I am, so I challenged him to an arm wrestle the other day – when I beat him he was really shocked,” says Bob.

“That’s the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit, but wisdom is knowing not to put a tomato into a fruit salad!”



Retirement plans

Bob has plenty of ideas for how he’s going to spend his retirement: “I’m so used to working night shifts for the past 50 years that it’ll take some getting used to. When the Flower Market was closed during the Covid lockdown, I kept my regimen going, working out, gardening, and keeping healthy.” Putting aside the jokes and smiles that Bob’s well known for, he reveals that his retirement aims will see him divide his time between keeping fit, astronomy, and seeing more of his grandchildren. “I’m planning on starting at night school,” he jokes, “to learn how to sleep like everyone else! Plus I’ll be doing a bit of skydiving too. It’s always been a long-standing ambition of mine to jump out of a plane.”

On behalf of Bob’s many friends, colleagues and customers, thanks for being such a huge part of New Covent Garden Market. You’ll be missed – the very best of luck from us all, Bob!



Tony Costa
– Food Point

I like the options here in the Market, the choice to work different times to suit my work/life balance. Although it isn’t always the easiest place to work, we all pull together to get the job done. I started on the night shifts and now I work the day shifts. In the 11 years that I’ve worked here I’ve seen the Market getting better all the time.



Tracey Fleming
– Thornicrofts Ltd

I love the people and the diversity of all the characters here plus the bosses are brilliant. I’ve worked here for 10 years and we’re now seeing a lot more women working at the Market, especially in the offices – that’s been the biggest change. It’s becoming more inclusive and that’s really great to see. The Market is its own little world, like a village here in Nine Elms.



Mark Collier and Grant Hamilton
– Collier & Co

New Covent Garden Market is a world-famous destination. There’s a real recognition when you tell clients that you’re based at NCGM – it’s like a quality assurance badge for our customers. There is a great vibe in the Flower Market and so much knowledge. People will always help you and share their knowledge with the community.



Moving with the times

Exactly 50 years ago, Covent Garden Market became New Covent Garden Market, in Nine Elms. Fresh Produce Journal editor Fred Searle looks back at the many ways the Market has evolved since then and how its progress has been chronicled in the pages of FPJ, the UK's leading trade magazine for this sector

When traders at the old Covent Garden Market crossed the Thames and moved into their new site in Nine Elms, *Fruit Trades Journal* (as *Fresh Produce Journal* was once known) published a message from none other than the Duke of Edinburgh. In a special supplement to the magazine in 1974, Prince Philip wrote that “economically, commercially and technically, the new site is a vast improvement”, adding that the facilities at Nine Elms “are obviously the best and most convenient which the ingenuity of designers and architects can devise”.

Fifty years on, that assessment is, unsurprisingly, outdated. Indeed, most Market traders agree that New Covent Garden Market (NCGM) is much in need of its ongoing redevelopment – even if there was disagreement over what form it should take. Over the past five decades, the Market and its traders have been through a lot.

FRESH PRODUCE
JOURNAL

Ups and downs

Delving into the FPJ archives reveals mixed opinions about the relocation back in 1974. Ten years after the move, *Fruit Trades Journal* reported that the volume of trade at NCGM had grown “beyond most expectations”. This was largely thanks to increased storage capacity, the market’s accessibility to articulated and refrigerated lorries, and its suitability for forklift trucks, the journal pointed out.

Recognition of the new Market’s commercial success contrasted with reservations about “the loss of an established and colourful folklore” and “a negation of the way of life of old”. Traders expressed concern about a lack of contact with the general public at the “hemmed in” Nine Elms site. Of greatest concern in 1984, however, was that wholesale markets were “in danger of being used as a dumping ground” as supermarkets began to rise in prominence.

Scores of traders were forced out of business during a difficult period in the 1980s and 1990s when the quality and volume of produce fell sharply as suppliers began to prioritise the supermarkets.

In the nineties, traders began to switch their attention to predominantly supplying London’s burgeoning restaurant and catering sector – a pivot that has ultimately paid dividends. In the past 10 years, the big talking point has been the Market’s redevelopment, plans which met with vocal

opposition from traders before eventually being ironed out.

Fresh opportunities

Chairman of the Covent Garden Market Authority (CGMA), Bill Bowman OBE, wrote a comment piece for FPJ in 1994, arguing that NCGM should become a “one-stop shop” for the catering industry. “How can it fill the gaping holes that have opened in Market occupancy, due to the decline of the independent greengrocer and the traditional fruit and vegetable wholesaler who served it?” Bowman asked. Indeed, the number of traditional wholesalers at the Market had declined from around 120 in 1974 to fewer than 50 in 1994.

The answer, he said, was to fill the Market with a wider range of tenants beyond fruit and veg – including suppliers of baked goods, dairy, meat and fish, all of whom “could find the New Covent Garden site attractive”. In the 30 years that followed, these additional sectors became a bigger feature at the Market. In fact, the largest



supplier at NCGM today is The Menu Partners, offering a full range of ingredients, from fish to dairy.

Fruit, vegetables and flowers still account for the vast majority of produce traded at NCGM – but the Market's customer base has continued to change. Despite a slight resurgence in the independent retail sector during Covid, today there are many fewer greengrocers and street traders than back in 1974. Supermarkets, meanwhile, have long dominated in the purchase of food from the growers and in the supply of food to the public, forcing a number of NCGM wholesalers out of business.

But as former FPJ Editor Tommy Leighton – now Press Officer at NCGM – put it in his 30-year anniversary feature in 2004, the rising fruit and vegetable volumes demanded by London's catering trade “provided ample compensation” for the surviving traders.

“Wholesalers and catering suppliers are now the two interlinked pillars of the Market,” commented then Chair of CGMA, Leif Mills. And this dynamic has continued, with 80 per cent of the Market's trade now passing between companies within the Market.

It goes without saying that catering supply only thrives if people are eating out. And in 2020 and 2021, Covid lockdowns decimated the hospitality sector, forcing a number of NCGM traders to switch to home deliveries just to survive. Since then, the restaurant trade has recovered – albeit not to the same level as before the pandemic – but NCGM has recovered, reporting a record turnover of £880 million in its latest financial year.

Focus on quality

Today more than ever, the focus for traders is on quality, emphasises long-standing Chair of the Covent Garden Tenants' Association (CGTA) Gary Marshall. He says he is optimistic for the future of UK wholesale markets following the growth of greengrocers, farm shops and delicatessens during (and after) the pandemic, as well as rising demand for high-quality restaurant food and experiences.

Nevertheless, Marshall emphasises that appreciation for high-quality produce is still lacking in the UK compared to Europe. “People must start to appreciate fresh produce a lot better in this country,” Marshall told Fruitnet MD Chris White in a recent Fruitbox podcast. “In Europe, they all appreciate it. What we expect in this country is cheap, cheap, cheap. What we should be saying, and what New Covent Garden promotes, is quality, quality, quality, taste, taste, taste.”

Brexit, climate change, inflationary pressures, and customers' rising demand for contract pricing all present significant challenges for the Market in the immediate future. But the redevelopment of NCGM could mark a fresh period of expansion for some businesses, thanks to the extra capacity in traders' units, more efficient facilities, and a cleaner, brighter feel.

On 30 June the first new section of Buyers' Walk in 50 years was opened, welcoming in three businesses as its inaugural tenants. One of them in particular, Premier Foods Wholesale, sees major positives. “It's game-changing,” says Managing Director Jason Tanner. “For the sort of customers we have been able to attract to the Market now, the state-of-the-art facilities are crucial... This is going to be a new Market, with a lot of potential.”

The Market has always been adept at moving with the times and adapting to changing circumstances. And hopes will be high that the redevelopment only makes the Market stronger as it embarks on its next chapter.

Neighbours in the press

Fresh Produce Journal will itself be 130 years old in 2025. It moved its operation to Vauxhall with New Covent Garden in 1974 and took up occupancy in Market Towers, a new office block attached to the original Flower Market.

After a brief period on Wandsworth Road when Market Towers closed, FPJ is now a tenant of the Market, housed in the Food Exchange and perfectly placed to report on the next few decades of Market life on its doorstep.

First in, last out of BFF24



New Covent Garden Market (NCGM) was able to bookend British Food Fortnight with its support this year. As detailed on page 4, the Market was a partner of the Southwark Cathedral Harvest Festival, which marked the end of the fortnight. But at the very beginning of the 23rd British Food Fortnight on Friday September 20th, we also launched this year's activities with an interactive event at the Market to highlight and celebrate the work of British growers of fresh fruit and vegetables



Above: Tenants and growers joined forces to extol the virtues of British grown fruit and vegetables and the close relationship the Market's traders have with British growers

Highlighting the importance of fresh British produce was the main aim as the early-morning occasion brought together a host of invited growers with wholesalers and catering distributors, industry and government representatives and the media. The group's shared purpose was to show their support for British growers and highlight the relationships so many of them have with wholesale market traders.

"The first day of British Food Fortnight is always a momentous day in the nation's food calendar," said Wanda Goldwag OBE, Chair of Covent Garden Market Authority. "This market has marked the annual event in various ways over the years but this year, we wanted to make it more of an interactive occasion and invite people to meet some of the fantastic British growers who supply wholesalers both here and around the country.

"This market's catering suppliers provide premium, world-class product to the vast majority of the Michelin-starred restaurants

in the capital," Wanda added. "But it's also true that they supply thousands more small independent businesses who rely on them for the quality product and service that keeps their menus fresh and exciting. Accessing independent restaurants to supply them is not something most growers can do easily, but knowing your product is featured on the menu of a high-profile, high-end restaurant must be a fantastic feeling. Our traders make that happen."

The well-attended occasion began in the atrium of the Food Exchange building, where D.D.P's antique market barrow was resplendent with British produce and Driscoll's handed out homegrown berries from their promotional bike, product that the company sells through The French Garden.

Gary Marshall, Owner of Bevington Salads and Chairman of Covent Garden Tenants Association (CGTA), told the crowd: "We love the Market, we like what we do and we're passionate about it. And when you speak to growers, that's exactly what they think about their jobs too."

"Many of the companies here have relationships with British growers that span the generations and the passion and pride we feel to be able to sell their fruit and vegetables to the fantastic independent retail, catering and hospitality trades of London and the South East of England is immense," he added.



Gary, along with Jason Tanner, MD of The Menu Partners and Premier Food Wholesale, and Wanda gave brilliant live interviews to lively presenters from local radio station Riverside Radio, who were broadcasting their breakfast show from NCGM. Jason explained to Riverside's audience - located across Lambeth, Merton, Richmond, and Wandsworth – how the Market works with its suppliers and customers to feed the London population and the progress that is being made as we all celebrate 50 years in Nine Elms.

The growers present outlined some of the challenges they face in the current, high-cost ultra-competitive marketplace, and striking a realistic note on behalf of wholesalers, Nick Padley, Manager of Side Salads, said: "As much as a customer might want to buy British, they are unlikely to give you £3 a box more for it than imported product of the same quality. It's important, but they need to get their margins out of it as well."

Jason agreed: "Of course the chefs want British, without a shadow of doubt," he said. "When, all of a sudden British tomatoes are £2-3 more expensive a box than Belgian though, the people who are running the contracts will go for the Belgian product."

"Unfortunately, what has happened to a lot of our customers in the High Street is that they can't argue about rents, rates or electricity bills, the only products they can argue about on price are fresh produce, meat and fish. We found the strength was on our side after the pandemic for a while, but in the last 18 months it's settled down and all the groups are looking for every single penny again. They are having to be so hard with their suppliers and as the prices we pay have gone up 15-20% in the last five years, our turnovers have gone up with them, but our margins are much tighter."

During the morning, guests were also able to sample a selection of brownies supplied by Frankie's Brownies, a member of Mission Kitchen, and MOMO Kombucha's watermelon kombucha, developed and marketed in association with Natoora.

The convivial and thought-provoking occasion culminated with a breakfast of bubble and squeak and curried parsnip soup, cooked at Mission Kitchen by student chefs from

Westminster Kingsway College (Westking), using products sourced from the Market that morning. Westking buys its fresh produce from NCGM and also receives two products each month, one homegrown and one imported, free of charge, to support its students' development.

"It was fitting that the 23rd British Food Fortnight was launched at New Covent Garden Market, Britain's oldest and largest fresh produce wholesale market," said Alexia Robinson, Founder & CEO, Love British Food, the organiser of BFF since its inception.

"Fruit and vegetables from across Britain have been sold in London since Medieval times. And the new market established 50 years ago at Nine Elms provides an invaluable market hub for restaurants across the capital and South East."

British Food 
Fortnight



Straight to the Food Point

Fresh food supplier Food Point Produce celebrated its eighth year of successful trading from New Covent Garden earlier this year, with business owner Stefano Afonso establishing the business after completing an eight-year 'apprenticeship' at former market wholesaler Sheringham's Fine Foods. We met up with Stefano to talk about the trade, how things are changing, and what the future holds

Tell us about your business

"Food Point operates out of the rail arches at the Fruit and Vegetable Market, supplying fruit & veg, dairy, prepared veg, bread & dried goods to businesses across the capital," explains Stefano. "Our clients are hotels, restaurants, event and contract caterers, bars, pubs and schools so we work closely with the wholesalers in the market to source the highest-quality produce for our clients. We operate a fleet of 12 vans, which deliver to our clients each day, six days a week. Back when we started, we only had one van and no premises, so we've come a long way."

Fast-track to wholesale wisdom

After he was headhunted aged just 17 by Sheringham's Fine Foods (until recently one of the larger operators at NCGM), Stefano was placed on the fast track to learn more about the wholesale business world.

"I never thought I'd end up in the fruit and veg business," he says, "as I'd just finished a degree at Middlesex University. Joining the Market was a fun learning curve. I was encouraged to soak up the trading environment and learn all aspects of the wholesale trade. My dad comes from a restaurant background, so I was already a foodie, but when I started working at the Market I just learned so much. From office admin and invoicing, to packing produce and loading up the vans, I spent time across all the different areas. After two years I moved up to become Operations Manager, then

I got into sales as well as the operational side. I knocked on doors and made a lot of friends - as well as a lot of mistakes - but it was the best way to learn.

"I spent eight years working in the Market before I eventually decided to step out on my own and take the risk to start my own business. I was lucky that I had the support of many people across the Market, knowing my suppliers and having the knowledge of how to run a wholesale fruit and veg operation. I became my own boss at 24 - back in 2016 - and I can honestly say that I wouldn't have succeeded without the NCGM community supporting and guiding me. After a total of 16 years working here, I've got the same contacts I had when I started, and we've grown up together."

Making sacrifices to establish the business

"I worked hard to establish leads and new relationships to get Food Point up and running. It wasn't easy, and I had to make a lot of sacrifices to establish myself, seeing more of my Market colleagues than my own family!"

When Food Point started, there wasn't any space available at the Market and Stefano desperately needed a warehouse. Two of Food Point's suppliers - including Nick at Side Salads - were kind enough to offer space in their units and a new business was born! "We also had a lot of support from Premier, now The Menu Partners.

"That's where the support and camaraderie of the market

comes to the fore, with everyone willing to help out each other when it's needed."

Growing with the support of competitors

As Food Point grew it needed a permanent home: Stefano found a great location in Croydon to kick start the business... but always with the aim of moving back to NCGM once the opportunity arose. "We were in Croydon for three years, but we knew we wanted to return to Nine Elms," Stefano says. "Premier's Jason Tanner and Bevington Salads' Gary Marshall [through their roles on the Covent Garden Tenants Association] were instrumental in getting us a location in the Market, as was Covent Garden Market Authority. All three were super supportive in finding us a location that worked for us, as getting back to NCGM was key.

"We needed to be close to our suppliers and our customers, the majority of whom are based in central London. We started with two units in the rail arches and, as we've expanded, we've been able to take on more units within the arches. Now the business is spread across six units and the aim is to



Opposite: Stefano Afonso, Food Point's Owner
Left: The team in their NCGM unit

eventually move into one of the purpose-built new units in the Market's redevelopment."

Fast forward again to 2024 and the firm is an established food business which is keen to give back by helping support the newer, smaller companies trying to get a foothold in NCGM. "It's really worthwhile to give back," says Stefano, "and playing a part in supporting our neighbours is now part of our DNA."

Brexit's impact on profits and the rise of automation

"It's been difficult over the years, facing some tough challenges; the consequences of Brexit and all the import charges that created, then the pandemic affecting our clients' businesses, not to mention the minimum wage and business rates' increases. All of these have increased our costs and lowered our profit margins, so we've had to look at making the business more efficient."

This is where Stefano's investment in technology has proved a wise decision, with an increasing amount of automation introduced to reduce the time staff spend processing orders. "In the last year we've introduced a lot of technology, with everyone now using tablets to ensure we're almost paperless. We've been able to reduce our labour costs by 15 per cent, all of which has been reinvested in the business and means that we can absorb cost increases without passing them to our clients."

Another huge benefit of going digital means full traceability for every order - Stefano's team can determine what time produce arrives in the warehouse, what time it's picked and the time it's delivered direct to clients. "The new tech has meant we're able to reallocate our staffing budget to where it's needed. We've now placed a team member in Spain as a buyer, which has improved all of our processes."

By 4am all Food Point's vans are on the road and by 10am each morning everyone's back at the Market. "We also have drivers ready to go for any secondary deliveries if needed," says Stefano. "All our drivers have tech, recording the time and even the temperature of each order when it's delivered. Our clients can also track our drivers' location so they know where their order is on the road and the time they can expect the delivery."

Although keen to upgrade to fully electric vehicles, Stefano admits that's still a little way off. "The technology hasn't quite caught up with what's needed. The electric vans available now just aren't a like-for-like solution for our current van fleet, as we need refrigeration plus a decent milage, so we'll monitor the situation and make the move when the timing is right."



NCGM's role in Food Point's success

"Most of our produce is bought directly from wholesalers here at NCGM, and we always push for as much British produce as possible," explains Stefano. "Our clients

“ Being based in NCGM means the availability and quality of produce is sublime - the best

know that we're very picky and have high standards.

"Being based at NCGM means the availability and quality of produce is sublime

- the best products, the best knowledge, and a totally sustainable supply chain. Add to that the support and the unethical hours we all put in! We're a big family and part of a mini eco-system that just works.

"Over the next eight years, we anticipate a period brimming with innovation," he adds. "However, our commitment to caring for our people as a family remains steadfast, and this extends to our valued clients. As a youthful and passionate team, we're driven by the desire to make a lasting impact on the supply chain sector in London.

"Our ambition is to lead with creativity and dedication, ensuring that every step we take contributes positively to our industry and the community we serve. Through our relentless pursuit of excellence and unwavering support for our people, we aim to set new standards and leave an indelible mark on the future of supply chain management in London."

Sweet taste of success for south London girl

Mission Kitchen based firm Frankie's Brownies is finally getting its just desserts: a distribution deal with a UK-wide restaurant chain to provide sweet-tasting puddings that's proving to be the catalyst for bigger and better things

Frankie's Brownies is a firm that makes exactly what the name suggests, with London-born entrepreneur Frankie Michaela Spivey creating delicious 'home-made' chocolate brownies right here at New Covent Garden Market's Mission Kitchen, a shared commercial kitchen space, with state-of-the-art equipment that can be rented by the day, week or month.

"I'm a south London girl, having grown up around the Kennington and Elephant and Castle areas, just a stone's throw from Nine Elms," says Frankie, who is still celebrating scooping the 'Rising Star' prize at 2024's Wandsworth Women's Enterprise Awards.

"I'm very proud of my roots and the fact I come from a working-class background. People can always reach out to me, and I'm happy to be a role model for female entrepreneurs and prove there's nothing stopping people from a background like mine setting up a successful business from scratch."

Getting started

"It all started for me when I'd bake brownies at home and bring them to work for my colleagues as a treat," explains Frankie, who started her business in 2020 during the first lockdown. "My friends loved my brownies so much that they encouraged me to make it a business. I was a little sceptical at first, but I'm so glad they encouraged me to take that first step. Now I've got six freelance staff, working on producing our recipes, quality control of the products, admin, operations and arranging delivery direct to clients."

Frankie had to quickly learn how to be a businesswoman, with a rapid on-the-job education helping her grow her knowledge at the same time as the business



expanded. "I've learned that established food businesses and restaurants only offer new start-up businesses 'terms' rather than a contract. In the current financial climate, not many businesses are willing to offer long contracts. That means typical terms are a rolling two-month arrangement, which suits us as we can be flexible and react to clients' demands."

So how did Frankie make the decision to go from being a full-time employee to running her own business? "I was very fortunate that my employer kept my job open for me for six months after I left to launch Frankie's Brownies, in case the new business didn't work out."

"My old employer was very supportive and I was grateful, but thankfully I didn't need to go back! I'm very proud of everything that I've achieved, setting up a business from just an idea created in my Mum's kitchen and now my product is stocked in 16 Honest Burgers restaurants across the UK, with more restaurants just waiting to sign on the dotted line!"

Working with Honest Burgers

The opportunity with Honest Burgers came up when Frankie did some research into London's restaurant chains, creating a list of outlets that didn't include desserts on their menu. "Honest Burgers messaged me back almost instantly saying the timing was perfect, as they were looking to introduce desserts to their menu," she says. "When we first started the Frankie's Brownies business we were creating around 400 brownies per month to sell via our website. And now we're handmaking 4,000 brownie pots per month just for Honest Burgers, plus our regular corporate clients. I've also created a bespoke desert for an Italian Lasagna company based out of MK. To date, Honest Burgers has sold more than 30,000 of our chocolate pots, using over a million grams of chocolate!"

"The chilled dessert I've created for Honest Burgers was a step change for me and very different to what I'd done in the past. When I started making my brownies,



Pictures: Frankie hard at work at Mission Kitchen in the Food Exchange, creating an increasing range of flavours of her delectable brownies



they didn't need to be refrigerated, known as ambient in the trade. As I didn't need any refrigeration, I've had to learn how to keep the brownie pots chilled and how to transport them safely to my clients so they arrive perfectly chilled in line with industry regulations."

Frankie's also extended the business to supply a regular group of clients. "I know a lot of our corporate clients from my previous

employment where I'd worked in events and marketing, such as Compare the Market, Lego and WeWork. It's been really beneficial to use those relationships to promote my new business, as the clients already know me as a person and my work ethic," she explains.

With her orders rapidly expanding, Frankie's outgrown the Mission Kitchen space and has already been looking at a manufacturer recommended by a business acquaintance. "I'm working with a variety of restaurant chains to ensure they're happy with the outsourcing changes and that they're happy with the new production unit. Although my business is growing, I'm very keen to stay part of the Mission Kitchen family and retain my space at the Food Exchange, due to all the benefits it brings," Frankie says.

How NCGM has been Influential

"Being a part of the New Covent Garden Market and Mission Kitchen family has been so instrumental in my success and growth and I'd like to thank everyone for being so helpful and sharing their knowledge. I'm looking to expand my operation but even when that happens, I'll stay here for the knowledge and kinship they provide as well as all the connections I've made. I couldn't have done this without the help and support of my team, my family and my colleagues and fellow businesses across NCGM."

Frankie's father sadly passed away in May 2023, just three months before she officially signed terms to supply Honest Burgers. "They were very supportive of my situation, as we'd been in discussions since March that year. It was a hard time for me, but having the welcome distraction of setting up the partnership really helped me get through."

Looking to the future

"Although I might look for additional investment in the future, at this point I'm not looking to partner with an external investor. I've bootstrapped – which means self-funded – my business from scratch by saving money for two years before I launched."

"I set a target of supplying another three restaurants before the end of the year, either independent outlets or



another large restaurant chain. My USP is customising the recipe for each client to create something that's totally unique. My current thinking is to create products that are bespoke to each restaurant that can sit alongside our classic chocolate brownies, having a play on our most popular ingredients - Oreo, Biscoff and Salted Caramel!

"I've created the recipes and the products but now I'm focusing on the next stage of my brownie empire! I'm looking to expand my staff so that they can concentrate on the production in the kitchen, which will free up time for me to build relationships and secure more clients."

Giving back to the community

Frankie is part of a network at Mission Kitchen that supports each other and offers advice to help move every member's business forward. "I've learned so much about food in the past two years that it feels like a crash course!" she laughs. "I've gone from using my Mum's kitchen and oven to make small batches of brownies, to using industrial-sized ovens that I didn't even know how to open when I first started!"

“ I'm looking to expand, but when that happens I'll stay here for the knowledge and kinship

Students from Oak Lodge School – who all have special educational needs – have visited Mission Kitchen to learn more about the food companies and the people behind the brands. "I've been lucky enough to meet the students and explain how I started and how I run the business. I also supplied delicious brownie samples for them to try – and they loved them!"



here's to
50 years
 together!

We are bananas for another 50 more!



50
 years in NINE ELMS
 NEW COVENT GARDEN MARKET

NEW COVENT GARDEN MARKET