

MARKET TIMES

PAGES 2-4
NEWS BITES

PAGES 6-11
GOLDEN GLOBAL REACH

PAGES 14-17
BRUCE ALMIGHTY

PAGES 18-19
FLORAL FAMILY



We celebrated our anniversary in style, making waves around the world





Welcome to the first issue this year of Market Times. We label this as our Winter issue, as it looks back at the last quarter. I only mention that as that seasonal label was questioned at this time last year, but I very much doubt there will be too much dissent given the weather we've had so far in 2025!

The last three months have seen the Market recognise the wonderful achievement of 50 years in Nine Elms, and we've had a lot of fun doing it. The CGTA threw one hell of a dinner dance party and that was followed by a lovely day in the Market on November 11th. That is a day each year when we remember so much more than our own anniversary of course, but on this occasion we took the landmark as an opportunity to spread the Market's story across the globe. As you will read inside, our output achieved an incredible global reach of 4.5 billion, was published or broadcast across the world and shone a wider spotlight on New Covent Garden Market, its heritage, people, value and values than has ever been seen in the past.

Many of this Market's people were interviewed on and around the day by a host of local and national TV and online/print publications and a four-hour BBC Radio London breakfast show featured more than 20 people representing the Market in various ways. They all did an amazing job of highlighting everything that is great about this Market to around 600,000 listeners in our immediate region – or catchment area as we should call it with our commercial hats on. If you were in London and you missed it, then you're in the minority as virtually every major London outlet ran extensive pieces.

At a time when London's wholesale markets have attracted less positive press coverage, this was the perfect time to remind everyone out there – including customers, potential customers, suppliers and those in positions of influence – that the tenants of NCGM remain integral to the supply chain of fresh produce and flowers to London and the South East.

A special thanks to the pygmy hippo and gorillas of ZSL London Zoo, whose images fronted our mass media outreach. Whether they knew it or not – we did tell them! – their nonchalant munching on vegetables supplied that morning by County Supplies helped us go viral across the world's online press, as well as securing blanket regional coverage throughout the UK.

Also in this issue, you can read about: Bruce White, who came into the Market to raise money to race cars and speedily became the country's leading mushroom wholesaler; Bob Parker, whose family served the Market in various ways over several decades; and Fran Bailey, an East Dulwich florist and grower who has been a happy flower market customer for three decades.

In his regular feature, Clive Bournnell looks back on half a century of snapping Valentine's Day in the Market. And there's lots more besides.

Enjoy the read!

Tommy

Tommy Leighton, Market Press Officer



Market hosts launch of environmental report

The Food Exchange was the venue for the launch of a new report examining how to reduce the environmental impact of deliveries into central London.

Organised by Covent Garden Market Authority (CGMA) and supported by Petit Forestier, a leading provider in the refrigeration and cold chain solutions industry, the event announced the conclusions of the 'Reducing the Environmental Impact of Deliveries to London's West End' report, as well as giving attendees an opportunity to see the newest fleet of temperature-controlled EVs that can support a move away from diesel towards using electric vehicles (EVs), for fresh food deliveries into the West End and beyond.

The report has three aims – to Reduce, Remode and Retime.

Reduce: focused on reducing the number of deliveries made each day via consolidation.

Remode: looked at how deliveries are made, eg moving from a diesel vehicle to an electric vehicle or from a van to a cargo bike.

Retime: looked at changing the time-of-day deliveries are made, eg deliveries at periods when the traffic is low will be faster and spend less time in traffic, reducing emissions.

The report concluded that the daily flow of vans from NCGM to the West End cannot be reduced through consolidation of deliveries and with retiming of deliveries being dependent on the customer. Moving from diesel to EVs is the option that NCGM has concluded will have the most positive environmental impact.

To read the full report, scan the QR code on the opposite page to access the news section of our website, where you can read more on this and all of the stories in the pages of Market Times, plus additional Market news from the last three months.

NABMA visits country's best market

The Market also hosted a meeting of the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) on December 13th.

Wanda Goldwag OBE and Jo Breare, respectively Chair and General Manager of CGMA, welcomed counterparts from market landlords and managers from Birmingham, Bradford, Derby, Glasgow, London and Manchester for an update on progress at NCGM and a roundtable meeting to share and learn from common experiences, as well as challenges and achievements across the UK's market sector.

Jo gave the group a tour of the Market, outlining progress to date with the redevelopment programme and Wanda spoke about the aims she and CGMA have for the Market in the next few years, as well as her stated belief that the country's wholesale markets would be stronger if they work together to promote the value and social benefits they provide.

There was also time to give the fellow NABMA members an insight to the results



of work around the Market's 50th anniversary.

The visit coincided, of course, with this Market being the Wholesale Market of the Year, as voted for by a distinguished NABMA panel of judges – and the group was pleased to see that we are proud show off about our status with posters around the site.



Porters expands and rebrands

Flower Market wholesaler Porters Foliage expanded during December, taking on an additional unit and adding new shop signage to create a brand-new look.

Porters took over the space formerly occupied by G.B. Foliage and saw it as the perfect time to introduce a fresh identity.

“The aim was to bring the shop livery and the website design together, to create one unified brand identity for Porters Foliage,” said Bryan Porter, who runs the business. “We’ve used the same design on our web shop for a little while now and we’ve already had some great feedback. What we’ve seen since we’ve introduced our new signage is that our physical shop is now much more inviting and really makes customers want to step inside.”

Three key messages are used on the new signage, helping Bryan and his team to explain the wide assortment of stems and foliage found inside the larger premises: ‘British Foliage and stems from around the world’; ‘Foliage and moss suppliers since 1910’; and ‘Dried stems & inspiration from around the world’.

The livery also includes the website address (www.foliage.co.uk) and the email needed to place orders

(sales@portersfoliage.com), to further integrate the web shop and physical shop sites, so that customers can place orders in whichever way works best.

“A lot of our core customers are based relatively close to the Market, but there are the obvious logistical access challenges,” says Bryan. “We see a lot of customers more often than we did pre-COVID because they are not buying as much on each visit. They tend to buy what they need on any given day.”

The web shop offers customers a choice of how and when they order, with nationwide delivery coming in 2025. “To offer the facility of delivery is a way of us keeping the trade going through the Market,” adds Bryan. “We offer the best service and support, whichever method our customers choose to shop with us.”

En Route to direct fruit and veg supplies

Buyers’ Walk wholesaler Bevington Salads has launched En Route Fruit, a separate arm to the business that will deliver direct to clientele outside of the Market.

En Route Fruit’s clients can order the full range of fresh fruit, vegetables, salads and herbs online, via an app, social media, by email or telephone. The team is led by Director, Gary Marshall, who has five decades of experience in the fruit and vegetable industry, his son George Marshall, Director and Head of Sales, and Jack Gordon, Director and Head of Operations. Driving the systems and online customer experience will be Liepa Lord, Director and Head of Online, and Chris Lord, who will also head up the new company’s finance department.

George Marshall said: “We are extending access to the renowned service that Bevington Salads has provided customers at New Covent Garden Market for many years to a client base that does not currently come to the Market. Our offer is aimed at high-end retail outlets and delicatessens, supermarkets and food halls - with a clear focus on wholesale pricing and wholesale quantities.

“We will bring our passion for service and people with bags of experience and expertise in what we do, and combine that with the energy, vigour and vision of the younger generation, as we embark on this new venture into the online space.”

Initially, En Route Fruit will be working within the Greater London Area and the Home Counties. Gary Marshall said the new firm will be working with a host of grower partners and brands in the UK and around the world and focused entirely on quality.

“Obviously, we know that what we are doing is neither new or revolutionary – but we are introducing a truly easy way to order online from a premium supply partner and we’ll deliver not only the highest quality produce that you’d expect from this Market, but also a high level of dependability and support that fits our customer’s business models,” he added.

To find out more, go to: www.enroutefruit.co.uk



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



Thorogood’s launches new direct-to-doorstep service

Thorogood’s, a fixture on New Covent Garden Market’s Buyers’ Walk since the day the Market opened in Nine Elms in 1974, recently announced the launch of its latest venture.

Through S. Thorogood & Sons – Direct, Thorogood’s aims to “bridge the gap” between retailers and top-quality market produce by providing easy access to the same fresh, seasonal, and sustainably sourced items that have earned the firm its stellar reputation. With a dedicated logistics team, Thorogood’s promises to ensure that its customers receive the finest produce delivered directly to their doorstep.

A well-renowned name in London’s fresh produce industry for more than a century, the company has vast experience in sourcing and selling premium-quality produce at all three of London’s fresh produce wholesale markets.

For the first time, it is now extending its offering directly to retailers: “At Thorogood’s, we’ve always been passionate about connecting people with the best that nature has to offer,” said William Thorogood, Director of S. Thorogood & Sons. “We’re excited to bring our expertise and commitment to quality directly to foodservice and retail

outlets, making it easier than ever to enjoy the freshest produce available.”

Thorogood’s offer encompasses the “full bounty of New Covent Garden Market”, he said, everything from the freshest seasonal fruits and vegetables to a wide selection of wild and cultivated mushrooms, provided by Mushroom Man, part of the Thorogood Group.

“Our produce reflects the very best of each season, sourced with care and quality in mind,” said Will. “Whether you’re seeking familiar staples or hard-to-find speciality items, Thorogood’s is your gateway to the finest produce.

“Customers can expect the same commitment to quality, freshness, and outstanding service that has long defined [us].”

For more information and to place orders, contact Thorogood’s Direct at direct@sthorogood.co.uk.



Where there's a Will, there's a new flower offer



Gardening 4u by Will opened at New Covent Garden Flower Market on January 24th and Will Hogger, the man pictured above, is behind the expanding brand and promises something “groundbreaking” for the Market’s customers.

The business is an award-winning supplier stocking a large range of British & Belgian grown, premium bedding and

houseplants, perennials and shrubs. It already operates in Chippenham, Wiltshire, a retail site that, like NCGM, is open to the public six days a week.

With more than 7,500 followers on his Instagram, Will’s products have already attracted a dedicated following. “At New Covent Garden Flower Market we’ll be offering a stunning range of premium A-grade British grown stock,” he said. “Amongst the highlights will be our Hellebore collection, which has gained several awards at UK plant shows, our West Country 5-litre Lupins, large Tree Peonies, and more than 200 types of Dahlia. All of these are grown in Herefordshire. We will also be offering a range of Belgian lines from our outdoor suppliers, which will include hardy shrubs, specimen plants such as topiary, Jasmine arches, Palms and larger designer plants.

“We’ve matched the quality from the Netherlands and even exceeded it in certain areas,” added Will, who will also offer deliveries directly to customers. “Our point of difference is offering British-grown stems at the same price or less than the cost of imported flowers.”

Contact Will - will@gardening4ubyll.co.uk or 07783 501126.

Dubai delegation on fact-finding mission



CGMA hosted a delegation from DP World’s operations at Jebel Ali Free Zone (JAFZA), Dubai, UAE — one of the world’s largest and most successful free zones.

DP World operates a diverse range of wholesale markets in the zone, including

those for horticulture, meat, fish, and automotive.

The delegation was particularly impressed by the updated facilities being built during the ongoing redevelopment of the market estate.

Obituary

John Bunney - 1947-2024

John Frank Bunney, better known to the New Covent Garden community as ‘John Connell’, died in December, aged 77.

He was born to Margaret and Frank Bunney, in Southwark on October 13th 1947. Mum had taken on the family business in 1944. The firm had been in The Strand and part of the original Covent Garden since 1826, when it was set up by Mary Connell, John’s great aunt, who then handed it on to his aunt Jane. When it passed into Margaret’s hands, it continued to trade under its J Connell name.

By the time John joined the business as its fifth generation, aged 18, J Connell still specialised as it had from the outset in watercress. Under his stewardship, the firm spread its wings and began wholesaling a fuller range of fruit and vegetables, adapted to the changing marketplace and moved to Nine Elms in 1974. The business began to deliver more of its produce into the catering trade. It became John’s life; he put his heart and soul into building it and in turn became much loved and respected within the market community.

John’s daughter Gina became the sixth generation of the family in the Market after dad quite literally shot himself in the foot and put himself out of action for a few months. She came in to work alongside Marcus Rowleson and stayed for 13 happy years. John retired himself in 2011 and the business was run by Marcus, in partnership with Grenville Snowdon as part of The French Garden, before being renamed as Le Marché in 2017 and becoming a firm that supplies the ‘FTSE 100 of the catering world’.

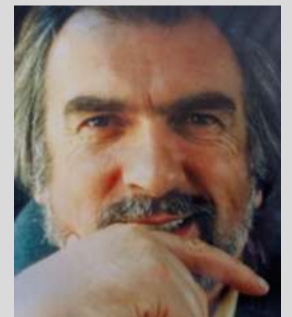
John had an incredible classic gun collection, which was highly valued when auctioned off at Sotheby’s. He was passionate about antiques and ran two shops, in Greenwich and Gravesend. He owned hundreds of classic cars and bikes over the years, his driveway often filled with Rolls Royces, Jaguars, Bentleys and other classics of various vintage. And he had a wide collection of classic signs relating to the motor industry too, which now adorn the walls and garages of his three daughters.

His home was also full of memorabilia from his favourite place – the Market – and John has a treasure trove of memories from both Covent Gardens. He was fascinated by the history of the Market and regularly wrote to his friends and colleagues with interesting facts and historical references that related to them, their families or firms.

John married his wife Janet in 1971 and they had three daughters. Gina’s sisters are Esther and Daniela and between them they have six children. He and Janet split in 1996 and John found new love with Maureen, with whom he shared a very happy time until she sadly passed in 2013. His final years were blighted by Parkinson’s and then Dementia, though he was surrounded throughout by family. He died on December 18th. “We loved and adored him and he leaves a huge hole in our hearts,” said Gina.

His many friends at New Covent Garden Market would sincerely echo that sentiment. RIP John.

The family asks that any donations in John’s memory be made to Parkinson’s or Dementia charities.



Premier Foods Wholesale rises up UK charts

Market firm Premier Foods Wholesale (PFW) was one of the biggest climbers in the *FPJ Big 50 Companies 2025*, moving up five places to 38th with an annual turnover of £110.7 million.

FPJ, the trade magazine also based at NCGM, publishes an annual list of the largest companies in the UK fresh produce industry – the top five remained unmoved from 2024’s list, namely AMFresh, IPL, Dole UK, G’s and BerryWorld.

PFW celebrated its 25th anniversary last year as the only one of the top 50 firms that is based in a wholesale market.

Founder Jason Tanner said Premier had experienced a challenging period, due to

the higher costs of goods and labour, as well as weather issues affecting crops in the UK and Europe. However, its impressive financial performance was bolstered by both new business wins and the growth of existing customer relationships.

The company has invested significantly in the last three years to support its ambitious growth plans and last year saw it open its brand new 40,000 square foot wholesale facility at NCGM. The group has also launched its own vegetable and salad brand Jameela, with investment in a Rwanda packhouse underpinning work with local growers to provide vegetables to sell to UK customers under the brand.

RED is the colour

Valentine's Day, like Mothers Day, Easter, and Christmas, is a special time for the Flower Market each and every year. For business, these set-piece occasions are absolutely critical and the Market never disappoints, perennially coming to life with an array of colours and character that you just don't get anywhere else



The big difference with Valentine's Day of course is that one colour dominates and as February 14th approaches, it is RED, RED, RED. Roses are [mainly] red, as we all know, but the undisputed colour of love abounds in plants, blow-up hearts, ribbons and all manner of beautiful foliage.

It's a great time to be a cameraman, of course. With the predominant redness of the occasion constantly in mind, my eye, and camera are professionally drawn to anything and everything that says 'It's Valentine's Day' in the Market.

In the first of this issue's images, the BBC weather presenter Carol Kirkwood is spotted in amongst the red roses - by herself, the picture would be all about Carol, but getting the TV camera in picture out of focus on the left side of my own camera frame makes sense of the story of Carol being at New Covent Garden to film her live Valentine's Day TV weather forecast segments. TV broadcasters flock to the Market on the day of love - it fills their programmes with a sense of joy, as it does my lens.

The rest of the photos show different aspects of Valentine's Day over the years. The making-up of red rose bouquets - whether by the trolley-load or in more individual designs, always creates an evocative image, especially the shot of Kim never once stopping her work while being snapped. And the spontaneous picture of Julie and Tom smiling at the camera, with the giveaway sign of an "I Love You" heart balloon. Graeme and Mo are busy fulfilling orders, an anxious look at the gas bottle being used to inflate plastic hearts showing an unsung part of the service the Flower Market 'team' provides to clients otherwise focused on buying thousands and thousands of stock red roses.

So many of the photos I take are enhanced by the quality of the flowers in frame - in this instance the singular rose and the mini forest of roses. Again - I really don't think you'd find the uniformity of quality anywhere else.

And one for my friends, the wholesalers at the end - it's always fantastic to capture that "All Sold" notice across buckets of roses!

For more than 50 years and now 50 years in Nine Elms, I've been keeping the feeling of Valentine's Day within my camera frame and the Market allows me to do that without the fear of non-Valentine visual distraction.



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 02/25

Golden anniversary goes global

On November 11th, the Market united to celebrate 50 years since the 'New' was added to Covent Garden and the UK's leading fruit, veg and flower wholesalers decamped en masse to Nine Elms

As the images here illustrate, tenants and customers alike were offered a glass of fizz and a *50 years in Nine Elms* cup cake and asked to smile for the camera. The sense of occasion drew a plethora of media outlets to the Market, to mark the occasion and let their listeners, readers and viewers know that NCGM remains in fine fettle as it reaches half a century.

National coverage included BBC and ITV News, *The Mail Online* and *The Independent*, with multiple hits on news sites like MSN and Yahoo. Local ITV and BBC News crews and Associated Foreign Press (AFP) also visited the market to interview spokespeople and traders, including Gary Marshall, Chairman of the Covent Garden Tenants Association, and Wanda Goldwag OBE, Chair of Covent Garden Market Authority.

The centrepiece of the morning's activity in the Flower Market was the BBC Radio London breakfast show, hosted by Salma El-Wardany, which spent four hours broadcasting to its 600,000 listeners from the Market floor. It was a fun and informative trawl through history that also highlighted everything that is good about the current day NCGM, from the vast and diverse customer and supplier base, to the incredible array of skills, character and expertise within our midst. Twenty-two people, who represented the Market in many different ways, spoke to Salma live on air.

Featured on the back page of this issue, you'll see that we also garnered huge amounts of coverage through harnessing the relationship the Market, through County Supplies, has with ZSL London Zoo and its animals.

The PR and marketing effort was a big success and due to the global nature of online news syndication these days, the Market received unprecedented levels of exposure. Well over 500 pieces of online, broadcast and print coverage have been tracked, across 20+ countries and the estimated global reach of our stories was an astronomical 4.5 billion.

The ZSL London Zoo collaboration – embellished with evocative photos of pygmy hippos and gorillas eating fresh produce from NCGM – was responsible for a large proportion of the articles and Wanda Goldwag said: "It was fantastic to see our Market's name and County Supplies' fantastic produce being featured around the world as we celebrated this milestone moment. These images brought to life how New Covent Garden Market has been the beating heart of London's food supply chain for 50 years.

"From the animals at London Zoo, to the highest-quality restaurants and hospitality businesses across the capital, providing the freshest produce to our vibrant city is so much more than a job for our wholesalers, it's their passion and their livelihood. For many of them, it has also been a baton to pass on through generations.

"We're incredibly proud to represent a diverse market with so much history, and our commitment to nurturing the Market and supporting the communities it serves has never been stronger."





Fun for all at 50th



The New Covent Garden Market 50th anniversary Dinner and Dance took place at the Royal Lancaster Hotel and as the photos illustrate, what a great night it was for the 490 attendees



The landmark milestone was a perfect time for the first dinner organised by the Covent Garden Tenants Association (CGTA) since the global pandemic put a temporary stop to such gatherings. CGTA Chair Gary Marshall said: "It was a wonderful chance to celebrate this great Market and it brought us all back together for a night of fun and laughter."

Gary was second on stage, after TV presenter and Market supplier Chris Bavin warmed up the audience with a rousing opening address. The Chairman's impassioned speech included a toast for the "originals" in the room who had worked at the original Covent Garden site and shout-outs for every one of the long-serving men and women in attendance. "This market inspires longevity," he said. "We have the type of tight knit community that you rarely find these days, led by men and women who have committed their whole careers to New Covent Garden."

He touched on the challenges that the Market has faced in the last 50 years and said: "Through hard work, skill and dedication, we have retained this market's relevance and maintained its service levels. We've taken quality to a new level, and we've upped our service levels too, to meet the demands of the catering, foodservice and hospitality sectors as they have expanded and improved in London."

"There are also plenty of our retail customers in the room tonight," he said. "We've watched that sector evolve too, there are far fewer outlets, but the quality that they provide their customers with is truly incredible and incomparable to what it would have been when this market was in its old WC2 location."

dinner and dance



The celebration took place on November 9th, on the weekend that the people of Great Britain remembered the sacrifices of their forefathers. Gary took the opportunity to remember “some of the amazing market people we’ve lost recently” and said every one of them had “made a significant contribution, left their own mark and become a valued member of the family we have here”.

An emotional and poignant award was made posthumously to Damian Fowler, who sadly passed away earlier in 2024. “Over the years, we have presented the “Big” Lifetime Achievement Award, for services to our Market,” said Gary. “Damian was an amazing supporter of our Market, a friend to so many of us. He gave so much of his time, that sadly turned out to be unfairly cut short, to New Covent Garden.”

Grenville Snowdon received this honour in 2018, and he flew in from Australia to present the trophy to Damian’s wife Jess.

Gary thanked the sponsors of the event, chiefly Golden Sponsor Chiquita, Sir Richard Evans’ Hemingways Experience and Orderlion. John Mainwaring of Chiquita drew the winning Golden Ticket in a free raffle to win an incredible holiday at Hemingways Kenya resort.

Everyone also had the opportunity to contribute to the charity fund by participating in the silent auction, live auction or by buying a plaque on The Garden Wall.

The CGTA had raised more than £750,000 for its selected charities over the last two decades – thanks to the generosity of Market firms, sponsors and many supporters within the Market’s fantastic community, in 2024 another £75,000-plus has already been raised. Every plaque purchased for The Garden Wall will add more money into that pot.

This year’s charities are Anthony Nolan, Trinity Hospice and Parkinson’s UK. “The three charities are all close to our hearts for various reasons and the generosity you have all shown over the years has made a huge difference to them all,” said Gary.

He concluded: “I’m just entering the 20th year of my time as chairman of the CGTA and while it hasn’t always been straightforward and at times it hasn’t been much fun, it has always been a privilege to represent the tenants of this Market. I want to thank you all for believing in me, supporting me and above all for being so passionate about the Market and what we all do.”

Golden celebration

Tenants and guests got together to mark the 50th anniversary of the opening of New Covent Garden Market on November 9th and, as ever, they did it with some style!





Bruce maintains drive to succeed

In the late 1980s, Bruce White followed several generations of his family into the Market for one reason – he wanted to earn enough money to become a racing driver. He soon sped to that goal, but alongside his successful racing career, Bruce has also built an eponymous business that for the last three and a half decades has been one of the premier outlets for mushrooms in the South East of England

When they first entered Covent Garden Market in the 1860s, the White family were established growers with a 650-acre farm in Iver and a farmhouse located almost exactly where the M25 and the M4 now cross. They grew mountains of vegetables and smaller volumes of fruit and became a mainstay in the Growers' Pavilion in the old market.

"In those days, to have a plot in the Growers' Pavilion was a big thing," says Bruce, the fifth generation to run the business in its various iterations. The first was ES White, run by Bruce's great great grandfather, Edward, the original farmer of the clan. When his son William George took over, the firm became WG White, working from the same farm and on the same plot at Covent Garden. Bruce's grandfather George was the next to take the reins and retained the WG White name, but he never worked in the market – preferring to employ people to sell for him.

Bruce takes up the story: "When my dad, Bill, took over the farm, he did work on the market, as WG White & Son. He was given the farm very young and in the 1960s when you had a farm that size, you were a big hitter. He was given everything and lived a playboy lifestyle, it's fair to say. He would go to a nightclub nearly every night in a dinner jacket, then rock up to work at the market. He went on cruises when only the aristocracy did that, he raced cars and basically lived an amazing life. He wasn't a bad person at all, but unfortunately, he wasn't a particularly good businessman, spent more than he earned and the farm went bust in 1967.

"The real pity was that had I been born six months earlier than I was, the farm would have automatically been passed down to me as I was last in the line. But I wasn't and we had to sell the farm, which was a terrible shame. Dad had enough money left to buy a house and thankfully, the one thing he kept business-wise was the plot on the Growers' Pavilion."

Bill decided to focus on mushrooms, as it was a year-round product, there were lots of small growers all over the UK and relatively few specialist mushroom traders at that time. "He did OK and was determined not to make the same mistakes with money a second time around," remembers Bruce. "He built the business and kept it at a low level, moved into the Growers' Pavilion at the new market in 1974 and worked alongside the growers, as well as hagglers like Bobby Kent and Johnny Connell."

“ I was 17 and came to the Market, saw a lot of people making very good money so thought 'this might suit'.



Driving force

Bruce was born in 1968 and had developed his own passion for motor sports by the time he left school at 16. "All I wanted to do was race cars, or at the very least design them," he says. "I became a draftsman but quickly decided there was no money in that. I was also playing a good standard of rugby when my dad said why don't you come and work for me and raise yourself some money to follow your passion?"

"I was 17 and I came up to the market and saw a lot of people making very good money, so thought 'this might suit'. I didn't like the hours, particularly trying to fit in rugby training and matches for Marlow and Bucks around them. I'd drive the lorry to training, go and load mushrooms up from several

Above: Bruce in his unit on Buyers' Walk and driving two of the many classic cars he has raced down the years
Opposite: The mushroom trade has changed significantly since Bruce entered the fray and he has moved expertly with the times



farms (all by hand!) and then go straight to work for 1.30am.

"Me and dad were very close, but working together was a disaster. He wanted an easy life – to be in the pub at 5.30 in the morning, but I wanted to earn as much money as I could. We argued a lot. Side Salads was just starting up on the Growers and I was very friendly with a guy called John Sawday, who set that firm up with Bill Lowe. John offered me a role as junior salesman, on £360 a week with a Golf GTi company car – well, that was good enough for me, so I left the family firm. My dad retired and shut down WG White.

"That would have been 1987. Side Salads was massive in iceberg lettuce and I was doing the mushrooms. The mushroom growing industry was moving to Ireland at the time and there were three big firms, two of whom Barney Greenhill had tied up in the market and one of which was Kernan Mushrooms. They wanted to get into London, so started supplying me. It was phenomenal product, much better than the English and the right price and I was selling pallets and pallets of it. I suppose inevitably, after about 18 months I thought 'I should be doing this for myself'. I still had the itch to race cars and I still couldn't afford it."

So, it was time for the White name to return to the Market's tenant list after a brief hiatus. A unit was available on the Growers'



Peter Green – Smith and Green Wholesale Florists

"I've been working here for 49 years, and now work with my son Jack. This is what I love about the Market: I've met so many interesting characters over the years... some good and some not so good! Whichever, it's been nice to have got to know them all."



Dave Gibbs - DG Wholesale Flowers Ltd

"Every day is different in terms of the people who I meet, the flowers we handle, and the weather of course. I started working in the old Covent Garden Flower Market when I was eight years old, helping my family. I vividly remember closing the old Market on a Saturday and then opening at Nine Elms on the following Monday."



Freddie Heathcote – Green & Bloom

"It's never boring working here. I'm always looking at new product and constantly learning. The variety of produce and the requirements of our customers keep the job and the Market entertaining. I gain a lot of satisfaction from keeping our customers happy and seeing them return again and again."



Pavilion, but Bruce had just bought a flat and didn't have the £4,000 he needed to take it on and start the business up. "I had a meeting in a service station on the M4 with Brian Cartwright, the marketing director of Kernan's, to make sure they would support a 22-year-old start up," recalls Bruce. "He really put his neck on the line for me. There were two banks in the village I lived in and I went to the first with a business plan and asked for a £4,000 overdraft. The manager said 'one question - how much are you putting in?' to which I naively replied 'nothing'. He told me that had I been investing, he would have matched it, so I rewrote the business plan, went to the other bank and said I needed £8,000 and that I was putting £4,000 in. They said yes (I never did put a penny in!)."

Festive leg up

"I opened on November 1st, 1990 as Bruce White Ltd and one of my mentors was Stevie Turner, a lovely man who had a fantastic business. He used to do a lot of Christmas trees, but had just lost a salesman and asked me in my first week if I wanted to do the trees. He said 'they're hard work, get in early, get out early, only do the expensive ones and don't give them away'. I was new, so I did it, started the third week of November and just hit it for two and a half weeks and followed his advice. It was all cash in those days (we don't do any now) and when I got out early, as advised, I sat in my flat with £30,000 in cash all over the lounge floor. I worked everything out and realised I'd earned ten grand in my first three weeks' trading, which was unbelievable. So after just over a month in business, I paid the overdraft off, bought my first racing car - a Renault 5 - and started racing!

"I did OK with the Renault 5, then got asked to race other categories. I started racing Caterhams, which was a big stepping stone up to GT Cars, and won the British



championship in 1997. I raced a Porsche in British GT for a bit and raced Radicals for a few years. It was mostly in the UK, but also around Europe and I loved it. I spent a lot of time at Silverstone and Brands Hatch. I still played rugby, but the work and racing made it harder to train and the standard dropped a bit, so I gave up. A massive mistake really and when I went back to playing later on, it was never quite the same." >



Garin Auld
- CGMA

"I grew up in central London and always knew of New Covent Garden Market but had never visited until I started working here - it's like London's best-kept secret! It's an amazing place to work. Meeting new people, and constantly learning more about the wonderful produce and products are the things I enjoy most about being part of the NCGM team."



John and Alfie Lay
- Lay's of Chelsea

"We've both been coming to the Market since we were five years old... we're in our 70s now! We loved the old Market and the profession itself - we're in a serious business and we all respect each other, but we still enjoy a lot of banter. We answer more questions in a day than most people get in a year and we still love doing it!"



John Hardcastle
- Bloomfields

"I love the Market as it's always been a part of my life. I used to live above the old Covent Garden and look out onto the Flower Market. I've worked in three different versions of the Flower Market and have been here in Nine Elms since the day it opened. Hopefully I'll also be in the fourth version when we move to the Food Exchange building in 2027."



In the early days of the business, it was simply Bruce and a porter, before he took Cliffie on. "He was one of the nicest guys you could ever meet," says Bruce. "We worked so well together, before he sadly passed away at 52. It was great fun up here, we had such a laugh and I thought the Growers' Pavilion was the greatest place on the planet to work. The main market was ultra-competitive, but we weren't like that. If iceberg was a fiver, then everyone was a fiver, no more no less. There were some very big companies here then, but all our customers were small and we used to beat the market a lot of the time as we'd be in early."

Bruce White Ltd grew, but there was never an emphasis on rapid expansion. "A bit like my dad before me, I never really wanted to get too big – there were a few companies going bust at the time, but I was earning decent money and I never wanted to be in a position where I'd knock people."

"I was just doing mushrooms at first, then got involved in salads. Kernan's got taken over by Monaghan's, where Barney Greenhill had the exclusive stranglehold. He sold more mushrooms than anyone here, but Brian Cartwright became the marketing director at Monaghan's and he decided that they would supply both of us. Barney wasn't too chuffed, but I was doing a good job and in the end, I kept that business longer than Greenhill's did."

“ The roles of the salesman and the buyer are completely different now.

Mushroom growing continued to evolve. "A lot of the British growers had gone and although the Irish were doing a good job, we'd started to look to Belgium and Holland, before around the turn of the century, Poland was the talk," explains Bruce. "That was before Poland joined the EU and I was the first here to get involved. The Polish product was good and while the market value was still being set by the other countries, it was cheaper from Poland, so for 2-3 years, we had a really good living out of it. I still believe we have the two or three best Polish suppliers and being in at the start has really helped us there. We definitely have the best - and they only supply us in London."



A new partner

Wayne Patrick, pictured above left, has been Bruce's business partner for the last seven years, had worked for Greenhill's and then The French Garden. "We'd been friends for a long time, even though we were essentially competing as the two biggest fish in the mushroom business in this market," says Bruce. "We never trod on each other's toes and we'd often help each other out at the end of a week, so we were completely clear of stock. We'd talked about working together for some time, before in the end I said 'it's simple, if you can come in and double the size of the business, you can have half of it'. I knew I'd be no worse off and we'd be really strong together. That's exactly what he did; we knew that to be really competitive, we needed to be buying trucks of mushrooms as the smaller firms were starting to struggle. You don't earn good money by buying a pallet here and a pallet there."

"In seven years, we haven't had one cross word; we've built the business up together. We did it all by the book, we're now the biggest mushroom wholesaler in the UK. We're the only wholesale firm that buys full trucks – we do about 120 pallets of mushrooms a week and all the cultivated mushrooms are Polish. It's turned out to be a really good move."

The range and quality of the product the firm sells now is a far cry from where it all started, says Bruce: "We only sold open and closed mushrooms, then cup and button and the flats came in, but it's only in the last 20 years that more volume of the more exotic mushrooms has come into play. Over the years, some of it has been us driving new product into the market and some of it has been buying to meet customer demand. We saw the changes here before a lot of the other markets would have as we're the catering market and the restaurants wanted different stuff to the retailers. It's still like that – wild mushrooms are really big for us, whereas they wouldn't be in other markets."



Kosmas Ntaiou
- OCS

"I've worked here for nine years. I've had several different roles in the Market and am now Security Officer. The environment now is amazing – it feels safer and a better place to work. We have to have good relations with people and I think they are happier now. It's important that we all respect each other."



Mo Sato-Rain
- R French and Sons Ltd

"I feel very lucky to be a part of the Market. I simply love flowers and here, you see the different colours and varieties and learn about the background of everything we sell. I love the diversity of the flowers we sell and our customers. There's a great mixture of old-school and newer businesses, and you can really see the Market changing and evolving for the future."



Alfonso Picaro
- La Sovrana

"Working in the Fruit and Vegetable Market during the night, it's like coming into another city while everyone else is sleeping. It's a huge safe place for everyone who works here. We're all friendly and even though there is competition between different businesses we stick together and support each other. There is a thin line that bonds us all together."



Above: The team at ES White in the 1890s
Right: The firm again, this time believed to be in the early 1900s
Opposite bottom: an ES White empties coin from the 1880s
Right: Glamorous Bruce and wife Catherine at the recent CGTA Dinner and Dance



"I'd say we were maybe 50:50 retail and catering when I started, but the customers have changed and the way they buy and pay has changed. The roles of the salesman and the buyer are completely different now. The seasons were so important – understanding where the gaps were and where it was possible to make hay as a salesman or speculate and buy forward as a buyer was key. Not that there's a great science to this game, but that knowledge was so important. It was a brilliant time – there's nothing like reading the market right and getting a good deal. Now the seasons generally overlap, the prices don't fluctuate like they used to and most buyers log in and order what they need on that day. We'd often tell customers when product was going to go short in advance and advise them to buy ahead, but now if they want 32 boxes of button mushrooms, that's what they want and it's very hard to shift them. It's become more of an order-taking job, which removes some of the fun. But that's just how it is."

Eighty per cent of the business is mushrooms and the rest is salads and veg. "Our own brand Bulldog Mushrooms has worked really well for us as it differentiates outstanding product, adds Bruce. "We've got who I think is the best cauliflower grower in the country as a supplier, but the packaging wasn't doing the product any favours, so we paid to put it in the Bulldog boxes and it looks fantastic. We did the same with savoy cabbage. People still buy brands and if your product looks great, it makes a huge difference."

Bruce's working hours have changed significantly. "We used to start at 1.30am and the main market opened at 4am. We worked harder then than we do now, but we didn't half play hard and everyone here lived that life. I'd always go out on a Friday night and then be playing rugby all weekend. I'd leave the rugby club at 9pm have a couple of hours kip and come in. Now I leave home at 8.30pm to get in for 10pm, although I only do three days a week in the market these days."

Family life

Bruce is married to Catherine and they have two boys. "Catherine has been amazing. I can't really believe how lucky I am," he says. "I was already working here when we met and she's been married for 30 years to a man who works these hours and has also spent a lot his spare time playing rugby or racing cars. Both of the boys were born on a Friday, both times I've gone to work that night and come home to take her to the hospital and both times, I was racing cars at Brands Hatch that weekend. Amazingly, both times

I won and the first time, I clinched the British Championship that Sunday. I've got a lovely picture of me with Patrick and the trophy when he's two days old! The same thing happened when Robert was born, it must be some kind of record."

"So, it has been a bit stressful at times, but she is so understanding. We've got a great marriage and family life, but she's let me get on with things and that's pretty cool really."

There was never any push to bring Patrick or Robert into the family firm. "As soon as I stopped working with dad, we were fine again. He was an amazing bloke, my biggest supporter. But because of the experience working with him, I didn't see my boys coming into the business, I just wanted them to do whatever they wanted to do. All I wanted was for them to be my best mates and they are. My eldest son is an accountant and my youngest is in digital marketing. I suppose it's a shame in a small way as they could have been the sixth generation, but they are both happy and doing very well and that's all that matters to me."

The market life has suited Bruce though, he admits. "It's a good business and it's been very kind to me. I'm 56 and I'm still racing cars – in the last 10 years, I've raced historic Porsches and Lotuses. I still win the odd race, we won at Zandvoort recently and a big race at Spa in 2022. I get to race great cars at nice circuits and this business has allowed me to do that. I am so grateful."



Max Cansdale
 – Petals at Bibendum

"I've been a customer at Nine Elms for many years and I have a unit on the first floor of the Flower Market, so I've come full circle. I love the community at the Flower Market more than anything – being able to come in and know everyone, who greet you with a smile and a friendly greeting means a lot."



James Harwood
 – Harwoods of London

"I've been working here for about 11 years now. I like the atmosphere of the Market. When it's family, like our firm is, it's about doing what needs to be done. I do anything and everything. You get some really good job satisfaction."



Josh Hyam
 – P&I

"I've worked here for about four months. My old man bought me to P&I. I love it – it's good. It suits my hours. I would rather have my daytimes [free] than the night. It is a whole different world down here compared to day jobs."

Fran's florist family

Fran Bailey's love of flowers and floristry stems from a childhood spent with parents who ran a Yorkshire nursery and garden centre. After moving to London as a freelancer more than 30 years ago, her career and company has evolved, and Fran has been a customer of the Market ever since

Fran's father Jacob Verhoef came to the UK in 1952 to work in the flower industry, at a time when English growers were first cottoning on to the opportunity to tap into advanced Dutch horticultural expertise. "He came over to manage a nursery in Yorkshire. When the owner retired, he took it on and it became The Dutch Nurseries," says Fran. "My mum Audrey was a big part of the business and they built a house on the land, so in my early years, I was surrounded by carnations grown in glasshouses and outside dahlias."

Jacob is still going strong, at 96. Fran recalls: "He was breeding and growing plug plants to sell to other growers and he was very successful. When the oil crisis hit in the early '70s, ironically the competition from Holland was too much, so while I was still young he converted it into a garden centre and flower shop. He still grew a few acres, and I used to water plants and get my hands dirty."

"I don't remember wanting to be a florist, but I ended up flunking my exams and going to the Welsh College of Horticulture, in Mold. The college was lovely and we had all the grounds with cut flowers and foliage, so it was a great grounding. I went there wanting to do landscape design or growing, but swapped courses to floristry when I realised that was my really what I wanted to do."

On finishing her course, in the early '90s Fran moved to London and set herself up as a freelance florist. After short spells in Chiswick and Islington, she's been in South East London for more than 30 years. "I've worked with some really good florists in some lovely venues – my favourite memory was probably working with Ming Veevers Carter – but most of the time I worked as a freelance for Dee Hine Floral Design. I was 29 with two kids when Dee decided to sell the business, but my dad had always told



me to look out for an established business that is for sale."

So, Fran bought that business. "It had some great contracts like the Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery and because the event organisers knew me, it was quite an easy transition. Those were different times when you didn't have to pitch for jobs every year. That world changed and because I was relatively small, I lost a lot of business to larger operators who started to get all the work. At the same time though, the area around East Dulwich was on the up and North Cross Road had a nice Saturday market and a few little independents were opening up. There were three other florists on Lordship Lane at the time, would you believe, but we all had different styles and could offer different things to different people. So, in 1998, I took the site on, established The Fresh Flower Company and after working on weddings and events at first, opened my first flower shop in 2006. We've built up a really loyal bunch of customers."

"I opened Forest in East Dulwich in 2013, right at the beginning of the houseplant boom. I had a workshop down the road and to help pay the rent I opened up half of it to sell plants. There weren't many other outlets for houseplants at the time and The Fresh Flower Company was fine, for a while it seemed everyone wanted plants."

Of course, others cottoned on to the trend and soon there were plenty of high-street and online plant outlets to compete with. A second Forest opened in Deptford in 2017 and kept the look and feel of its predecessor, but also sells cut flowers. Fran says: "That is run by my eldest daughter Alice. We also have a warehouse in Deptford, which is mainly for stock but occasionally is used as a workshop and we also run monthly floristry classes."



Above: Fran in Forest and the exterior of the East Dulwich store and workshop
Left and opposite: Alicia, Rose and Fran hard at work on the day's arrangements



Not surprisingly, COVID changed things again for Fran, as a rent hike made the original Forest's location untenable. However, as fate would have it, further along North Cross Road another option arose and while the plant side of the business isn't quite as busy as it used to be, it moved into what used to be a café and added coffee and a larger range of homeware and gifts into the mix. "In the flower shop I like to be really purist – no balloons, chocolates etc... – but in Forest, we've been able to expand the offer and separate the sister shops," she says.

The pandemic was responsible for an even bigger transition for the business. "I'd always had the itch to get back into growing," says Fran, but it's hard enough making a living as a florist and growing in London wasn't an option. I'd always bought a lot of English flowers, visited nurseries and supported growers, but I never thought I could do it," Fran admits. "During the first Lockdown, I separated from my husband. We both found new partners and mine lived in Kent. It allowed me to think more about diversifying the business and we found a plot of land with a barn in Deal.

"The Barn only has half an acre. The season runs from March to October, starting in the spring with tulips, ranunculus and anemones. Early summer we are cropping sweet peas, roses, larkspur and cornflowers and then into the autumn we finish with dahlias, zinnias, grasses and rudbeckia. Already, during the season I'm able to supply roughly 20% of the flowers my business needs. I don't sell anywhere else. I'm realistic, I think. I can't just buy English for weddings, as brides have very eclectic tastes and specific requirements and you have to manage those expectations, but also give them what they want in the end. If I need to supplement 80% from The Barn with 20% from the market or another grower, then I'll be flexible, otherwise I'd soon come unstuck."

Fran and her partner started out living in an old wagon at the farm. "It's never going to be Grand Designs, but we've got one room of the house done now, with a stove in it!" she laughs. "I love it and stay down there two or three days a week growing, before coming back to London for the latter part of the week when we have weddings on.

"When I'm in London, I spend most of my time in the workshop, though I still do plenty of events alongside the shop work. I love being out and about in my white van, basically being the gofer in the business – a skip on wheels! I'm trying to get work down in Kent as well as there are some great venues down there too."

Market connections

Fran has been buying flowers, plants and foliage from New Covent Garden Flower Market for more than 30 years, essentially since she rocked up in London. "I'd feel there was something missing if I didn't go at least once a week," she says. "I used to be there three or four days a week, but that's changed a bit as my business has changed.

"I know you can get deliveries from Holland, but I just need to see the product and chat with the guys to know what I can get hold of in the next few weeks. It's a vital part of my business and if I wasn't there, I'd feel really disconnected. The knowledge of the traders is supreme – I deal with everyone and go to different firms for different things, of course.

"As everyone knows, prices are really high at the moment, which is a worry. I've always focused on the higher end of the market as you just can't compete when supermarkets are selling bunches of flowers for cheaper than I can buy them. So, I sell the best quality, swallow the prices where I can and try to educate the customer about what they are getting. It makes it tougher when the prices I pay rise significantly, but I'm lucky that a lot of my customers do understand and are really supportive."

The British growing buzz emanated from the period in Lockdown when florists in the UK just couldn't get deliveries, and Market traders were unable to sell them. "Everyone jumped on it and the fact that Flowers from

the Farm has over a thousand members illustrates the impact it has had. I think people have realised the reality of doing it and the hard work involved. Thankfully most people are still doing it, but you need a reliable customer base," Fran says.

"A few of the guys in the market have asked if I would be interested in selling to them. I'm definitely not big enough to do that and we have our own outlet. I was looking to expand at first, but it's hard work."

Florist family

As the business has evolved, so too has the team of people working within it. "I've got a great team – four of us in The Fresh Flower Company's North Cross Road workshop and 10 working for Forest," Fran says. "My three daughters have all been involved in different ways, sometimes reluctantly! My eldest Alice worked in East Dulwich for some time and is a really good florist - she set up and runs the shop in Deptford and is particularly good on the cut flowers side of things. We're on the same wavelength, but she's definitely more organised, better at paperwork and dealing with staff!

Happy Customer



"Maddie did an RHS course and loves getting her hands dirty. She's helped me a lot down at The Barn. She has just gone off to Patagonia, to volunteer for a second time on an organic farm in Chile. She loves doing that, but I would hope she'll be back with us when she returns."

The youngest, Thea, was perhaps the most reluctant to join the family business, but the idea may be growing on her. "I've never exactly pushed them into it, but it's been a way to earn some cash and you either love it or you don't," Fran explains. "Thea's a lovely sociable person and is great with the customers. Helping me at The Barn in all weathers is less of her bag, but she's said she's going to do it, so we'll see how that goes!"

Books by the Baileys

Fran and her daughters have had several books published on their favourite subject: Alice, top, and Maddie, bottom, authored *The Houseplant Handbook*, *The Hidden Histories of Houseplants* and *The Hidden Histories of Flowers*, all published by Hardie Grant. Fran wrote the *RHS Practical Houseplant Book*, *RHS Practical Cactus and Succulent Book* (both published by Dorling Kindersley), and *The Healing Power of Plants* (Penguin).



In the next issue of Market Times, we'll feature The Farewell Flowers Directory, a nationwide initiative set up in 2024 to connect people to independent funeral florists offering natural, beautiful and compostable floral arrangements across the UK.

Bob looks back on the best of times

Bob Parker followed his mother Ethel and three brothers into the Market in 1970 and enjoyed a lengthy career here, which incorporated an interesting period as chairman of the NCGM branch of the T&GWU. Here he looks back on his memories, including being part of the seismic move to Nine Elms in 1974



“ The sounds, the smells, the people - it was great fun. It was a great life!

Several members of your family have worked at the market, can you tell us a bit about the Parkers of Covent Garden?

My three brothers – Billy, Georgie and Jimmy – were all in the services. Billy was in the Navy, attached to the Americans and out in Japan during the war. He came back and Georgie was conscripted into the Army – he was a guard in Spandau. Jimmy went in the Army too, he was out in Egypt. After they’d finished with the services, they all ended up in the old Covent Garden as porters.

But my mum – Ethel Parker (nee Holland) worked in the market well before them – she used to shell peas for Baileys after the first World War. That’s when she and my dad met, when he came out of the Army, and they ended up having 12 kids! If he was still alive, one of my brothers would have been 100 a few months ago, but I was the last one. I never knew my dad, as he died when I was 18 months old, in 1945.

I left school in 1958 – I was a carpet fitter, worked in a clothing factory and various other jobs. I never really thought about following my brothers into the market, but I was out of work when Jimmy called me one morning and told me to come and meet him at 5am the next day. I went to the Transport & General Workers Union office and they said ‘you start tomorrow’ – that was it.

We were all attached to different companies - Billy was RE Jenkinson’s, Georgie was Southside Importers, Jimmy was with Dan Wuille and when I started in 1970, I was on JI Emanuel in James Street. He was a good gunvor, one of the best on the market in my view. He was strict with his two boys, but treated us very well.

My son Dean also came into the market. He didn’t fancy getting up at 4am at first, but in the end he took the plunge and he’s still here, working for Bar Fruits.

What did the workforce think at the time about the relocation to Nine Elms in 1974?

It was brilliant working over there. The sounds, the smells, the people – it was great fun. It was a great life. We were next to Bevingtons, Mack & Edwards and the Nag’s Head pub, which we all used, of course!

One of the main problems was the theatres – people would be parking their cars up and getting in the way of our night men at 11pm. We could see why the authorities wanted to move us.

No porters wanted to come here though. Why would they? Every turn they did was on a trolley or a barrow. Down to Leicester Square or The Strand. The only firm I knew that had a forklift was up on Long Acre, where there was a banana warehouse. There were hardly any, if any, pallets.

When we first came for our forklift training a couple of weeks before the move, a lot of the older boys realised it wasn’t going to be for them. There were about 900 porters who made the move – at JI Emanuel in the old market we had 16 porters, but only 12 came here including the three night men. As time went by, more and more work was done at night, so it shifted.



Far left: Bob towards the end of 2024

Left: The badges of father and son Bill and Jim Hounsell, who both worked in old and New Covent Gardens for decades. Every porter had their own number

Above: Porters and management, seen in still image and a painting on the wall of Bob's house

Above right: Bob has a room decked with Market memories and memorabilia

Most of the men who came here stayed 'til they reached retirement age and then it was down to the discretion of the guvnors if they thought you were still capable of doing the job. As the years went by, the numbers began to dwindle.

When we arrived here, it was chaos at first because none of us knew how to drive a forklift and we all had to come over here to be tested. The training was, let's say, rudimentary! And the test was to drive in to Springers, pick a pallet up, turn around and put it on top of another pallet. It took 10 minutes and I'm not sure it mattered if you succeeded or not, you passed!

How did everyone adapt from the traditional ways of old Covent Garden?

It didn't take us long to make the transition. Driving forklifts in the rain and snow was better than pulling a trolley up and down hills, it turned out. So, it was a lot nicer. There were obviously people who didn't like the change – hundreds of them – and it's the same now with the redevelopment.

You don't want your way of life changing. If you want to change something down there, that's up to you, but leave my bit alone! The people who are here now will be saying the same things in 30 years, but the market will still be here.

The new buildings do look nice. You have to accept it for what it is, whether you like it or not.



You became chairman of the T&GWU's branch at New Covent Garden Market. How big was the union then and why did things change?

It was a closed shop when I came into Covent Garden. The unions used to be a massive part of it all; we all know they're not here any more.

I had been involved for a few years when they wanted to change the T&GWU to Unite and we voted against it. But I became the chair when it was Unite; for years before that Tony Buckle and Jonny Watts led the T&GWU here.

I used to have it all written down, but all our records got destroyed – by accident, when we were asked to leave our office by the landlord. All the names and history were in those two cabinets that were lost, such a shame. Jonny Watts was immaculate – he took a degree in computer technology in his 70s and every day he went home and recorded everything. The information on there was priceless, but that computer has gone too, I believe.

Jonny was so clever, he never got annoyed, his voice when he spoke to you never changed. I got out of my pram once or twice (!), but he never did.

Jean Tatum was our secretary for over 20 years and she played a massive role too. Jean was at every meeting and she never missed a beat.

We have had some difficult guvnors here. Some of them were very good businessmen, but not nice people to deal with. When we used to sit down and negotiate wages and

conditions, Gary Marshall was one who could always see both sides of the argument. As I say, I wouldn't want to name names in a negative sense, but there were others that were murder, very anti-union, but Gary came from a different place.

Our downfall unfortunately was when about half a dozen porters went behind our backs and told the guvnors what they wanted to hear. That was the end of it. I remember the last meeting in 2012 when I packed up and told everyone we needed to form a new committee. I said I'd stay on while it was sorted out, there were about 80 men left and not a soul came forward to take the role on. I called it as the last meeting and told them they'd have to get in touch with the Dagenham branch.

You were still portering until you finished about a dozen years ago, weren't you?

I loved working in the Market, never had a bad word to say about it. I was working for Geoff Lamb at Tealing's when I packed up as a porter at 69 or 70 and can honestly say that every morning I looked forward to going to work. How many people can put their hand on their heart and say that?

I just enjoyed coming in - the atmosphere, the noises, the porters were out of this world. We had some great men - Jimmy Frankham, Jimmy Hayes, Davie Small, the Watsons – all lovely, lovely people. There were a few naughty people too, but that was all part of what made it interesting. We had the very best and some of the worst!"



Hippo hippo hooray for the Market

Hungry animals at ZSL London Zoo were among the many happy customers of New Covent Garden Market who celebrated the 50th anniversary of the UK's leading wholesale market brand early on November 11th.

While we were toasting the Market's milestone moment with fizz and cupcakes in Nine Elms, wildlife at the world-renowned zoo in north London enjoyed a breakfast of high-quality vegetables and greens provided by County Supplies, the NCGM catering supplier that counts ZSL London Zoo's animals and cafés amongst its long list of prestigious clients.

Pygmy hippo Amara tucked into a nutritious pile of kale, frisee lettuce and chicory, while Western lowland gorilla Alika enjoyed a selection of corn, peppers and aubergine, while Effie and baby Venus also fed on cabbage and bell peppers.

We worked with agency Sunny Side Up and a PA photographer to capture these incredible images that capture the animals' routine feeding antics 50 years to the day that the Market opened in its new location. Blissfully unaware though they (probably) were of this fact, Amara, Alika, Effie and Venus played a huge part in enabling us to let the world know about New Covent Garden Market and what we stand for.

By later the same morning, the images

and our story had been picked up by media around the globe and over the following few days, our tracking tells us that the package was used on roughly 400 occasions, across at least 20 countries and five continents. At home, the UK's regional and national media lapped it up – thanks to the pull of the photos there wasn't a person who didn't have the chance to read about the Market, what we do, what we represent and why we're still vital to the food and floral supply chains.

Rob Hurren, Founder & MD, County Supplies Ltd, said: "Since 2021, we have been incredibly proud to supply the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) with fresh produce for over 600 animals. We work closely with ZSL to ensure the animals receive food that is close to what they would naturally eat in the wild.

"Staying true to our core values of sustainability and service, all our produce is delivered in returnable crates to minimise waste, and we only supply the tastiest produce to keep the different animals well fed and entertained throughout the year."

CGTA Chair Gary Marshall was also able to include a reference to the story in more than one interview in the broadcast media, telling TV and radio viewers that the animals at the zoo are as "fussy" as any of the chefs at high-end London restaurants when it comes to their fresh fruit and vegetables!

