

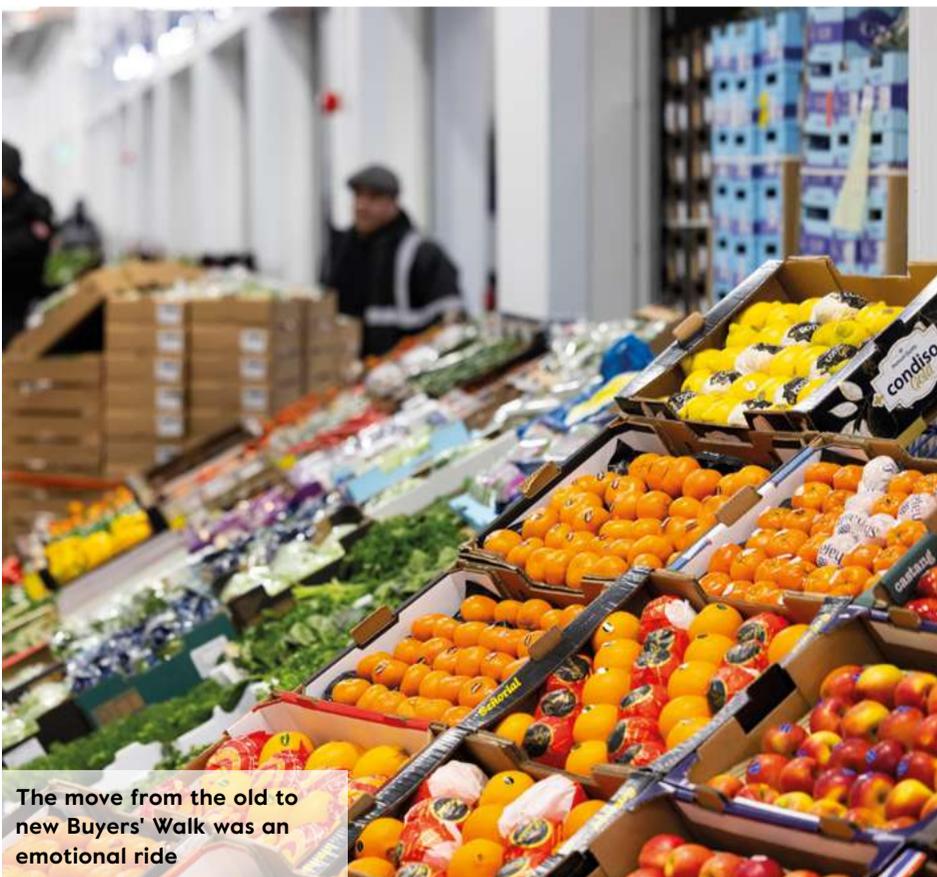
# MARKET QUARTERLY

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The move from the old to new Buyers' Walk was an emotional ride





**H**ello and welcome to the latest issue of Market Quarterly, which as always will take you through events at the Market over the last three months. Anyone who reads this newspaper will know his place never fails to deliver action and emotion, and the last quarter has certainly not disappointed on either front.

In late November, Santa and his reindeer came to the Market to stock up on fruit, vegetables and flowers in the run-up to their busy period, so we just had to take advantage of his visit and take some fun photos of them in both markets. We also used the opportunity to engage with local St George's COE Primary School, whose kids met our festive friends and then took as much fresh produce home with them as they could carry that evening. We accompanied that with some research into the role fruit and veg plays in Christmas meals across the UK and got some nice trade and national media coverage as a result.

Once we'd all eaten our own Christmas dinners and celebrated the New Year, the focus switched fully on to a truly momentous occasion in early January. Over three emotion-packed days, the last remaining part of the original Market that still functioned as a Buyers' Walk closed and the traders who had called it home moved to a brand spanking new building to reunite with the rest of the wholesalers on a bright, spacious Buyers' Walk built for the next generation. The rightful recognition of what had gone before, combined with genuine excitement about what lies ahead created a huge buzz that carried right through to the unveiling of a clock in honour of Covent Garden Tenants Association Chairman Gary Marshall on January 27th. And, as wholesalers extend their opening hours to suit a wider range of customers, that buzz will hopefully continue for some time yet.

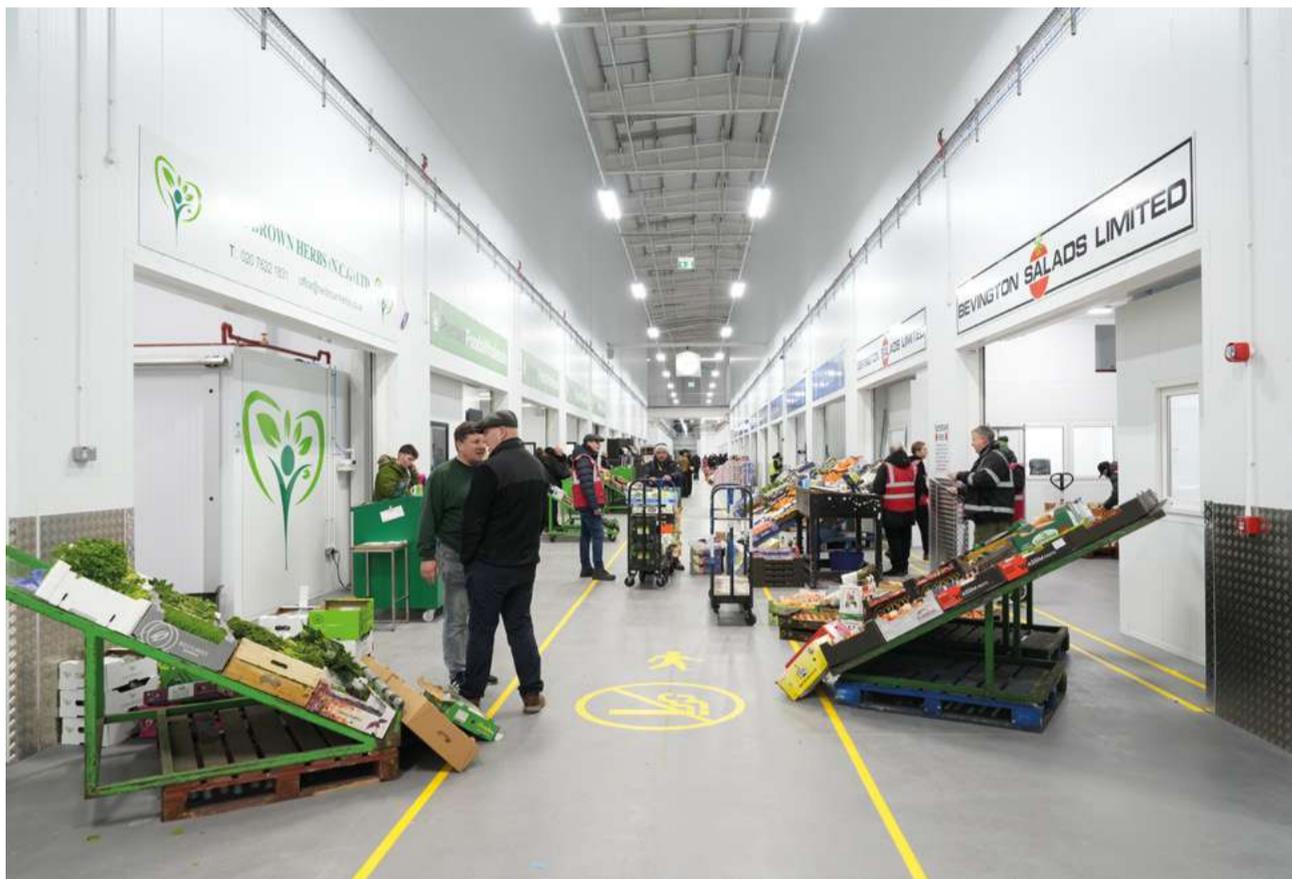
There is plenty of coverage of the new Buyers' Walk and clock unveiling inside and if you haven't watched the films we've produced to mark the occasion, scan the QR code at the bottom of this column. Our youtube page has loads of great content from the last couple of years – go on, treat yourself!

Back to the community engagement. If you listen to our local Wandsworth station Riverside Radio, you'll already have heard the NCGM advertising campaign that is supporting the weather slots on the Breakfast and Drive Time shows on Monday to Friday. Our jingle is followed by brief interviews with people who work here, giving listeners of all ages an insight to the unique environment that this Market has, and the employment opportunities that exist here. Download the Riverside Radio app to listen or find them on DAB.

We're now more than four-fifths of the way through the redevelopment programme that is transforming the Market phase-by-phase. It's not all been plain sailing, but along the way there are so many moments to savour. I hope you're enjoying reading about them.

*Tommy*

Tommy Leighton,  
Market Press Officer



## Let there be light! New dawn for wholesalers

A momentous three days in early January saw the last wholesalers trading on the original Buyers' Walk (Block C/D) of the Market move out of their units on Saturday 10th, then into new state-of-the-art facilities less than 100 metres away on Monday 12th.

A super busy weekend culminated in 15 wholesalers being reunited as one on Buyers' Walk, a relocation that has been heralded as "our time to shine".

Due deference was paid to both the buildings and the people of the original Buyers' Walk as it was given a well-deserved final hurrah at the UK's largest wholesale market - after 51 years of distinguished service. But when the shutters were pulled down for one final time, every firm's focus switched to joining up again with their counterparts who moved into the first completed part of the new Buyers' Walk 18 months before them.

The move to the state-of-the-art, brightly lit Distribution Block B represents a new dawn for the tenants and customers on Buyers' Walk, which remains the central part of the unique ecosystem of this Market. Each firm has kitted out its units in ways that support its particular business model – there has been significant investment and a huge amount of innovative strategic thought, laying the foundations to keep them at the forefront of their trade for decades to come.

Wanda Goldwag OBE, Chair of CGMA, commented: "We've built a facility that will enable our tenants to remain integral to the fruit and vegetable supply chain for London and the South East for decades to come. The facilities give them the option to re-evaluate their businesses, create working environments that enhance the way they operate and adapt to the changing needs of their customer base."

## Shane Connolly receives MBE

Congratulations from everyone at the Flower Market to long-time customer and friend Shane Connolly, who was invested with an MBE at Windsor Castle in January.

Shane received his Honour for services to sustainable floristry. Born in Northern Ireland, he set up Shane Connolly & Co and since 1989 has created timeless, artisan floral arrangements and decorations, very often with product sourced in Nine Elms. The company has also been awarded Royal Warrant of Appointment by both HM The King and HM The Queen.

Typically, Shane deflected attention away from himself, insisting: "Behind every MBE is an absolute army who deserve it equally. It is about all of my colleagues in this industry who are trying to make it

more sustainable; it is about the wonderful British flower growers who work so hard to make it possible to source beautiful flowers more sustainably, and the traders at NCGM Flower Market who proudly buy British; it is about movements like Sustainable Church Flowers, Sustainable Floristry, No Floral Foam and Sustainable Flowers Research who try to educate, nurture and encourage more sustainable practices; it is about my team at Shane Connolly & Co, who make my pontifications possible and plausible; and the cherished clients who rely on and trust us to make sustainable choices."

Above all, he added: "it is about unconditional love and support from my darling wife Candy and our family both in Ireland and England.

"Thank you to The Royal Family from the bottom of my heart for awarding this honour to me."





## Fresh Union group introduces Italian Fresh

Fresh Union, one of the fastest growing businesses at New Covent Garden Market, has strengthened further as neighbouring firm Universal Gardens joins the group, forming a new specialist importer, Italian Fresh.

The company, which was founded in 1999 and predominantly serviced Italian restaurants with fresh produce from Italy and around the world, has joined the Fresh Union group – based in the arches. The newly integrated firm has been renamed Italian Fresh and former owner Alessandro Assenza will continue to run day-to-day affairs and focus entirely on produce from some of the best growers in his native land.

The strategic move brings together sourcing expertise with Fresh Union’s strong logistical infrastructure, said Fresh Union co-owners Oscar Gomes and Robert Murchison. “All customers of Universal Gardens have become customers of Fresh Union and this will open more doors, expand opportunities and strengthen our ability to bring exceptional fresh, frozen and ambient Italian products to even more kitchens across the UK,” they explained. “We’ve added a huge range of amazing flavours that will sell well not just to customers focused on Italian cuisine, but to restaurants serving all different types of cuisines.

“Because Universal Gardens was literally next door to us, we haven’t had to make many changes at all so far. As well as providing an extended range to a larger external customer base, we’re going to wholesale top quality product from mainland Italy and Sicily to the market, using the experience and expertise of Alessandro and his family to source the best of the best.”

Alessandro described the transition as “an important step that allows us to grow while staying true to our values”. He added: “Joining Fresh Union gives us the support and resources to serve our customers better than ever.”

In a message to those customers, the Assenza family expressed gratitude for the loyalty shown over the years. The move to the Fresh Union group, they noted, would provide more capacity, more ambition, and even more great ingredients. As Alessandro put it: “The same people. The same quality. Now with even more to offer.”

## Market firm 15th in UK top 50 list

The Menu Partners (TMP), which has its head office and logistics base at New Covent Garden Market, is now ranked 15th in the *Fresh Produce Journal’s* Big 50 list of the leading fresh produce businesses in the UK.

Each year, the FPJ publishes its ranking of the top 50 most influential firms shaping the fruit and vegetable industry across the country. Foodservice supplier TMP reported a rise in turnover to £273 million in its latest financial year.

TMP’s Co-founder Jason Tanner says the group’s recognition acknowledges not just financial growth, but also “the strength of our partnerships, people and purpose”.

Jason added: “In a year defined by rising costs and changing supply chains, placing 15th is a milestone we’re incredibly proud of and one we see as a shared achievement.

“This recognition reflects the dedication of our teams across sourcing, logistics and service and the loyalty of the partners who choose to work with us every day. As the food landscape continues to evolve, we

remain committed to doing what we do best: delivering quality, reliability and insight, while helping our customers build menus that work for today and the future.”

On publishing the report, the FPJ wrote: “There are now no less than six fresh produce suppliers with a turnover in excess of half a billion pounds, with the top 41 in this year’s ranking all having nine-figure incomes. We are arguably seeing the emergence of a two-tier marketplace, wherein smaller, more nimble innovators coexist alongside mega suppliers.

“There are plenty of issues to overcome... It’s a period of change within the UK fresh produce industry, but as ever, the best will continue to find ways to get ahead,” concluded the report.



**JAPANESE VISITORS:** It was a pleasure for the Flower Market to welcome Japanese visitors and hopefully future suppliers in January. Hideki Kaji of JFT Himeji Seika Co. Ltd, a Japanese exporter and flower auction and Yukari Mitsui of Japan Blooms Canada, a distributor and importer of Japanese flowers based in Vancouver, came to Nine Elms to explore potential business with the Market and share industry insights with the traders here.

“It was wonderful to discover that we all share the same passion for the floral industry, even though we come from different cultures and countries,” said Yukari. “It was a pleasure meeting you, and we hope to have the opportunity to provide Japan-grown premium flowers, foliage and branches to the UK market in the coming years.”

Hideki and Yukari spoke to several wholesalers and customers of the Market, including their fellow Japanese Mo Sato-Rain, of R French, who gave them the lowdown in their mother tongue!

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





## Four famous faces leave the Market

Four of the best-known faces in the Market finished their last shifts on Buyers' Walk on Christmas Eve and were wished a very fond farewell by all and sundry.

Paul Wise had been working here for an incredible 61 years, most recently at P&I Fruits, Gilgrove and Newmans. The consummate salesman, his expertise and wise counsel will be missed by many.

Eddie and Michael Barrett are the father and son who fronted up HG Walker (a firm in the market since 1887), which decided not to make the move to the new Buyers' Walk. Eddie himself had been working here for four decades and says the highlight of those years has been to work alongside Michael over the last few years. Michael's wife was expecting a baby in January, so he'll have been getting some sleep in, in preparation for the new arrival!

And last, but by no means least, is Steve Pegrum, pictured twice and universally known within the Market community as Stevie Wells, as he had been walking Buyers' Walk for CC Wells for 40 years. See pages 12-14 for a feature about Stevie's rollercoaster career journey – he's stepping back, as son Darren takes the reins.

We're sure none of these fantastic gentlemen will become strangers and wish them all the very best in the future.



### GREEN PLAQUES

Two green heritage plaques were unveiled at the Market, officially recognising the importance of New Covent Garden's 50-plus years in its Nine Elms location.

The plaques, awarded by Wandsworth Council's Heritage Committee, were unveiled in a ceremony held early on January 14th, one each located at the entrance to the Flower Market on Nine Elms Lane and outside the new Buyers' Walk in the Fruit & Vegetable Market. Both are permanent reminders of our Market's heritage and its continuing role in London life, as a crucial link in the food and floral supply chains across the capital.

### NEW GM FOR CGMA

CGMA appointed Robert McAuliffe as its new General Manager, bringing with him more than 20 years of experience in property operations, sustainability and strategic transformation. Rob joined CGMA following a 5-year appointment as Head of Interface Management at The Arch Company, where he led operational programmes across a 5,200-property national portfolio and chaired the Senior Leadership Team. His work also involved on-estate governance, operational compliance and strategic asset management across railway infrastructure.



## Re-engaging with the Livery

In early November, Covent Garden Market Authority Chair Wanda Goldwag OBE was clothed as a liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Fruiterers, pictured.

Wanda became the latest in long line of Fruiterers connected to the Market over the centuries, but the first for some time. Many previous Masters of the livery have been from this Market and many more could trace their roots back to either WC2 or SW8.

The Worshipful Company of Fruiterers is an ancient City of London Livery Company, founded in 1463 and chartered in 1605, dedicated to supporting the fruit industry. It acts as a bridge between tradition and the modern industry, with over half its membership actively involved in the fruit sector, and promotes excellence in horticulture through education, research, charitable giving, and tradition.

"It has been a real pleasure and education getting involved with the livery," said Wanda. "It plays an extremely important role in connecting industry and the City and gives its members the opportunity to give something back. The Company supports research, provides funding for students through annual prizes and awards, helps to organise the City Food & Drink Lecture, and engages in fruit-tree planting around the country. We have nine elms flourishing by the entry plaza to the Market, for example, planted by Past Master and former NCGM wholesaler Laurence Olins."

CGTA Chairman Gary Marshall has been elected a



freeman of the Company and will become a fully-fledged liveryman himself later this year. On behalf of CGTA, he recently presented a cheque for £5,000 to the then Master, George Smith, to support his SSFA, the armed forces charity.

"I hope to see more people from this Market becoming Fruiterers in the near future," said Wanda. "It provides members with a real connection to the wider fruit and vegetable industry, as well as many more industries, and I look forward to playing a full role in supporting its activities in the years ahead."

## Obituaries

### Michael Walker

Michael Walker, who ran HG Walker with his brother Nick from the late 1970s to 2002, has passed away aged 85.

Michael grew up in Walton-on-Thames and went to senior school in Caterham.

HG Walker was established by Michael's great uncle Henry George Walker and grandfather Arthur, in 1887. Although his family's firm was already well established on London's wholesale market scene, the first job Michael took was at AG Linfield, a mushroom grower. His first wholesale market role was at RA Phillips in Brentford, where he learned the ropes before transferring to HG Walker in Covent Garden, in April 1965. His father Derek and uncle Norman were at the helm and Nick joined HG Walker in 1969, so both brothers were in place when it moved to New Covent Garden Market in 1974, and became the third generation to run the business soon after.

The firm was initially located in A Block at the new Market, but later moved to D Block, where it operated until December 2025. Michael enjoyed his time at NCGM – he was the salesman in the sibling partnership, while Nick looked after the administrative side of the business. "On the whole, we worked very well together," Nick remembers. "We were both very proud to take over the family business and continue its success for so many years."

HG Walker had traditionally been a specialist in British grown produce – the biggest in the market in Yorkshire rhubarb, for instance. Michael and Nick continued that while branching out in the '70s and '80s, to reflect widening demand from regular customers. Michael retired in 2002, aged 62.

In retirement, Michael became a very active and popular member of his local golf club and also raised large sums of money for the Alzheimer's Society, which had supported his wife Sylvia, who died a few years ago. Michael is survived by his two children, Tim and Amanda.

Since his death, he has been remembered by the Market community as a true gentleman and a first-class salesman. Rest in peace, Michael.



### David Egan

David Egan, who worked in the Fruit, Vegetable and Flower Markets for 53 years, died on October 30th, aged 82.

David John Egan was born in Lambeth on March 19th 1943. His parents moved out to first Ewell, and then to Kingston upon Thames, attending Stoneleigh West Primary School and latterly St Agatha's, in Kingston.

He started work aged 15, in the original Covent Garden Market, first working in the offices for Poupart. He moved on to Hemsley's in what was known as the Tin Market, before settling into a job as a potato merchant with his own stand in the fruit and vegetable market.

The family business, set up by David's grandfather, was John Egan & Sons at the original Covent Garden Flower Market. After it moved with the relocation, he joined his father and brother there in the 1980s. The firm provided foliage to major florists and shops in London and around the country and David took over the business when his dad died in 2001. He stayed at the helm until his own retirement in 2011, when he retired and the business closed.

David was very well-liked in the Flower Market, always smiling and happy to help and renowned as being one of the first on site each day and one of the last to leave.

He is survived by his wife Diane, who he met in Kingston at the youth club in 1959, along with their sons Andrew and Philip, their wives Alena and Angela and grandsons Liam and Sean.

May you rest in peace, David.



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



# The stats and facts behind New Covent Garden's all-new Buyers' Walk

**As 15 traditional wholesalers at New Covent Garden Market reunited on a newly opened "Buyers' Walk" on January 12th, Project Director at Covent Garden Market Authority Tony O'Reilly explained the detail behind the latest milestone in the redevelopment of the UK's largest horticulture wholesale market**

The wholesale section of Block B in the now four-fifths redeveloped Market is 205 metres in length and 64 metres wide. The roofs of the 60 units are 14.5 metres high and the Buyers' Walk section running down the central aisle is 6.5 metres wide.

The LED lighting spanning the completed block is 550 Lux, which is almost double the level of the now vacated original Blocks C/D. The entire area is fitted with sprinklers for fire protection, checker plates on walls and corners to reduce impact damage, and gulleys for wastewater on flooring that has a life expectancy of 15 years.

"For buyers, what we have now is a more spacious and brighter environment with six easy-access points and an unhindered view along the entire 205 metres, which when the wholesalers have their impressive fruit and vegetable shows out each night will make for a great spectacle," said Tony. "The 6.5 metre Buyers' Walk is a little narrower than the previous iteration, but the deeper buildings and much improved lighting create a more attractive trading environment.

"Each trader has been free to kit out their units in whatever way best suits their business, so there is a mix of mezzanines for storage and office space, false ceilings and roof-high racking in temperature controlled units that give them all the freedom to showcase their product and run their operations in their own way, to suit their product and customer profiles."

Everything has been constructed to 'Very Good' BREEAM standards, added Tony, with sustainability and safety front of mind and the resin floors will be easier to clean and maintain, so keeping the look and feel of newness for longer.

"Like everyone else associated with the Market, I'm sad to see 51 years of fantastic and storied history come to an end," Tony said. "However, what we've built here has the potential to make a real difference to the tenants of this Market as they continue to adapt to the changing competitive marketplace over the next few decades."

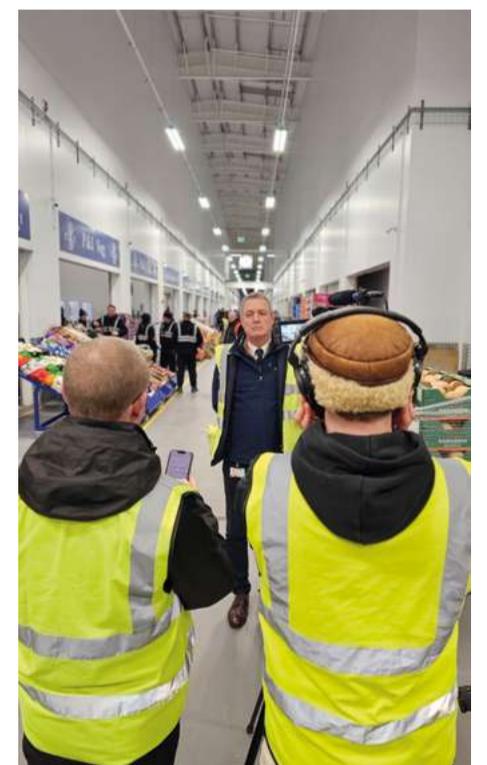
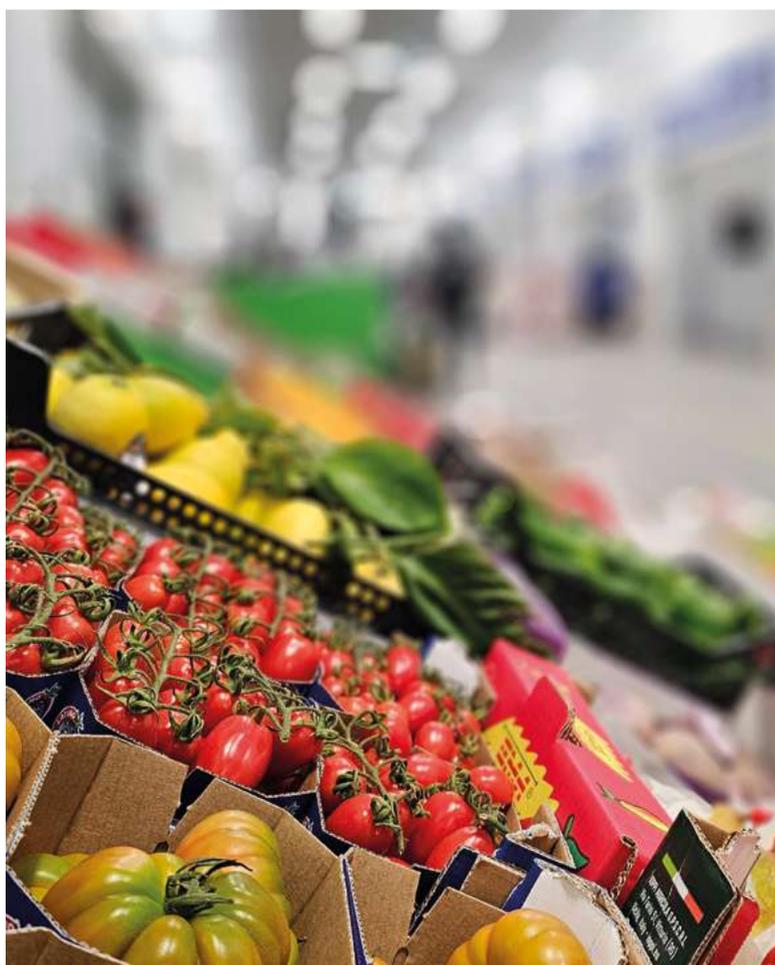
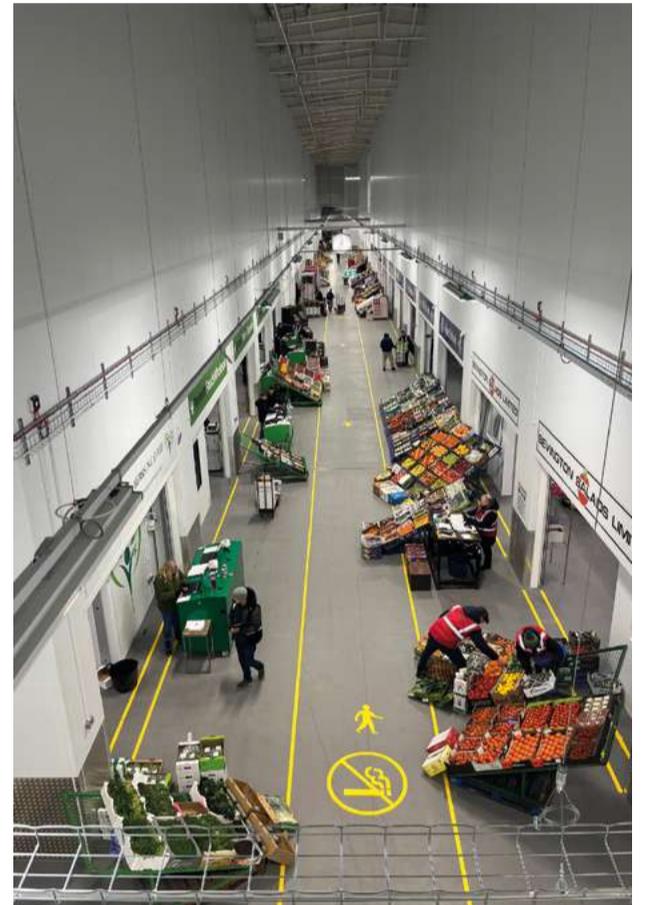


## The tenants of Block B are as follows:

301-314	Premier Foods Wholesale
315-317	Bevington Salads
318-326	P&I Fruits/Side Salads
327-329	S Thorogood & Sons (Covent Garden)
330	Mushroom Man
331-332	Premier Foods Wholesale
401-408	The French Garden
409-410	The London Herb Company
411-412	Supreme Salads
413-414	Neil Brown Herbs
415-416	Premier Foods Wholesale
417-418	European Speciality Foods
419-420	Premier Foods Wholesale
421-423	Covent Garden Supply
424	CSR & Sons
425-426	EA Williams
427-428	La Sovrana

The central aisle at the end of the block narrows to 4.5 metres as the traders occupying those units are not traditional wholesalers. They are:

333-334	Yes Chef
335-336	Field to Fork
337	Fine Food Specialist
431-433	All Greens
434	Bar Fruit Supplies



**Far left:** Tony O'Reilly, CGMA's Project Director

**Top:** One half of the newly completed brightly-lit 205 metre Buyers' Walk

**Above:** Tony faces the cameras on the first day of trading in the new section

# New facilities open up new opportunities

**We marked a significant milestone in the redevelopment programme in January, with the opening of the completed 205-metre Buyers' Walk bringing 15 traditional wholesalers back together in a modern, purpose-built wholesale environment**

The final night in the original 51-year-old Buyers' Walk was one of mixed emotions for traders, many of whom had made the building their second home for decades. It also marked the final night of trading for Bruce White, one of the oldest family names in the Market, as the mushroom specialist became part of the Premier Foods Wholesale family.

The opening of the state-of-the-art facilities two days later was accompanied by an extension of trading hours, designed to improve accessibility for a broader range of customers. Wholesalers on Buyers' Walk will now open from midnight to 7am, six days a week and Covent Garden Tenants Association Chairman Gary Marshall said the decision to lengthen trading hours follows a strategic reassessment of how the Market operates. "It is a simple but potentially transformative move," said Gary. "This gives customers the chance to visit later in the morning, when deliveries have gone out and Buyers' Walk is still fully operational and ready to deal with their specific needs. I would still recommend that customers arrive earlier than 7am, to get the best of that day's selection, but over the next few months we expect our customers to get all the benefits of the new ways we can operate in our state-of-the-art facilities."

The extended opening hours will be backed by a two-month period (February and March) of free entry for customers, adding another incentive to customers to visit and see what the new approach can do for their businesses.

## New facilities

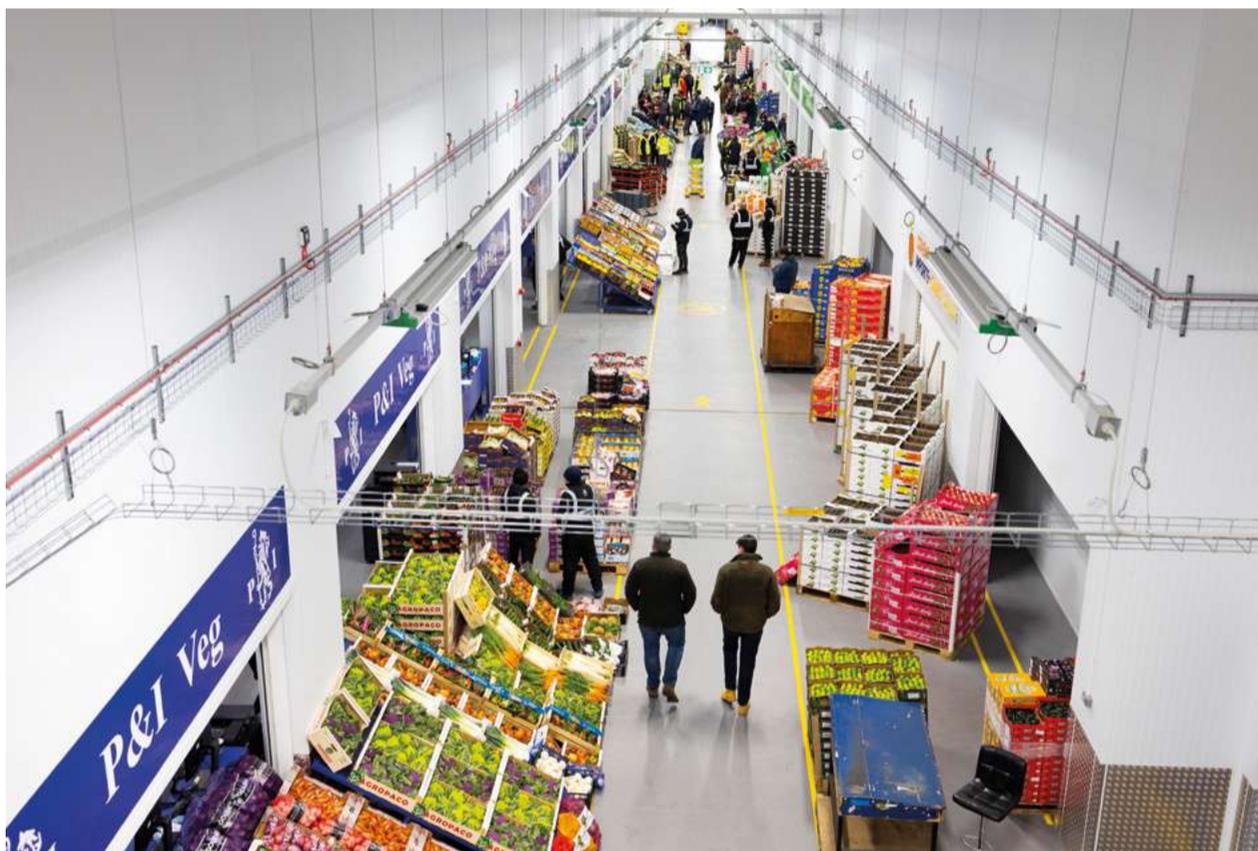
Each trader has fitted out its units to suit the product range it stocks and the requirements of its customers. CGMA's General Manager Rob McAuliffe added: "The new facility's features are all designed to keep produce in peak condition from the moment it arrives to when it's sold."

In practical terms, this means better storage, better presentation, and better quality produce making its way to consumers across the region, said Rob. "Our tenants now have a secure, well-lit, temperature-controlled and fully enclosed Buyers' Walk. Instead of moving premium product between ambient and cold environments, everything will be kept in controlled conditions from arrival to sale."

## Enhanced quality

Gary, whose firm Bevington Salads was one of those to relocate earlier this month, explained what this means for quality: "It's better for quality and shelf life – not just for wholesalers, but for growers and suppliers too. It encourages them to send us the very best produce, knowing it will be handled correctly."

"These facilities will allow us to expand ranges and increase volumes in a way we simply couldn't before," he added. "Better storage and display naturally lead to better presentation, which means more choice and better quality for the independent businesses that feed London."



**Photos:** A selection of images showcasing our new Buyers' Walk and the final image snapped by Clive Bournsell in the building wholesalers left for the last time in January



# It's time for the Market's reunited wholesalers to shine

**After a year and a half of being split due to the redevelopment of their section of New Covent Garden Market, the fruit and vegetable wholesalers of the capital's number-one fresh food hub reunited in the final section of its new Buyers' Walk on January 12th. Having traded through upheaval, uncertainty and change, the moment represented not just the completion of the latest phase of a building project, but the start of a new chapter for the largest horticultural wholesale market in the UK**



As the new units opened, Gary Marshall, Chairman of the Covent Garden Tenants' Association and owner of Bevington Salads, one of the wholesalers moving to new premises, talked about what this milestone really means: the loss of the old building, the promise of the new facilities, customer-driven changes to trading hours, and the future of face-to-face wholesale trading.

**It feels like the opening of the final section of Buyers' Walk has been a long time coming. What does this moment mean for the wholesalers at New Covent Garden Market?**

It's hard to overstate just how significant this is. The 'split' of Buyers' Walk was originally meant to last 12 months, but in reality it stretched to more than 18 months. That period undoubtedly took its toll. We lost two wholesale companies during that time – Newmans, which closed around a year ago, and HG Walker, which stopped trading on Christmas Eve. That's never what you want to see in any market, let alone one with our heritage.

For those of us who remained in the older building, it was challenging. We were working in a structure that was over 50 years old, functional but very much past its best, while seeing colleagues trading in brand-new facilities just across the way. Maintenance standards inevitably dropped, the building looked tired and grubby, and from a customer's perspective it wasn't ideal either. Buyers had to navigate a live building site and market traffic just to move between the two sections.

So the opening of the final section, and the fact we're all together again in brand-new facilities, feels like a release. From day one, the new Buyers' Walk has been fully occupied. That's incredibly encouraging. It feels like a new dawn for the Market – and for many of us, a genuine fresh start.

This Market is part of who I am. And as we open this new Buyers' Walk, I truly believe this is New Covent Garden's time to shine.

**As ever when change occurs, there were no doubt mixed emotions surrounding the closure of the original Buyers' Walk building. How do traders feel about leaving it behind?**

There's no denying we've all felt a sense of sadness. Many of us traded in that block for four decades or more. Over the years, we upgraded our units and did what we could, but we all knew the building was old and tired.

Those walls hold an enormous amount of history. There are memories of incredible trading days, unforgettable characters, and people who were not just colleagues but family and friends. Sadly, many of those who worked in that building are no longer with us. Some of them were the forefathers of this industry – exceptional traders and buyers whose influence is still felt today. When we moved across, they were certainly in our thoughts.

In 1974, when the Market relocated from WC2 to Vauxhall, there was real apprehension. It was only two miles away, but it felt like a different world. Those buildings carried us through the next 50 years and gave us countless memories. While we're leaving the bricks and mortar behind, we're not leaving the site, the location, or the heritage. New Covent Garden remains perfectly positioned for customers across London and the South East.

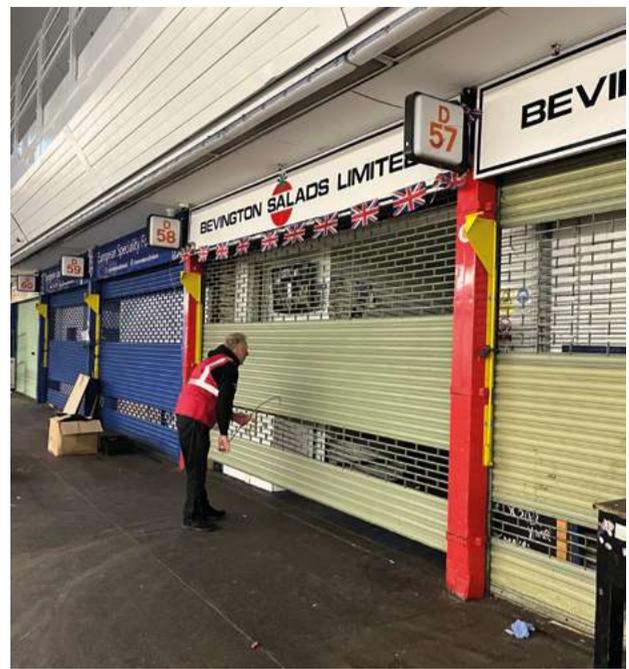
**What excites you most about the new facilities and what they can unlock for traders and customers alike?**

The transformation is extraordinary. We now have a secure, well-lit, temperature-controlled and fully enclosed Buyers' Walk. That alone changes everything.

Each unit is state-of-the-art and fully monitored. Instead of moving premium product between ambient and cold environments, everything will be kept in controlled conditions from arrival to sale. That's better for quality, shelf life and confidence – not just for wholesalers, but for growers and suppliers too. It encourages them to send us the very best produce, knowing it will be handled correctly.

These facilities will also allow us to expand ranges and increase volumes in a way we simply couldn't before. Better storage and display naturally lead to better presentation, which attracts new customers and helps existing ones grow their businesses. It's a virtuous circle.

We're also seeing a really exciting blend of people on Buyers' Walk now. Alongside familiar faces, there's a growing number of younger, highly-motivated traders. Despite our unsociable hours, we've managed to attract incredibly talented and entrepreneurial young men and women who I genuinely believe will lead the Market successfully into its next chapter.



**You've spoken before about this being a moment of renewal, even personally. Can you expand on that?**

I'm 64 years old. Most people at this stage might be thinking about winding down, but instead I feel like I'm putting a new pair of boots on and going again. And I'm not alone - there are plenty of traders here who feel exactly the same way.

On a personal level, it's particularly meaningful. My son George is now running our business, and my eldest son Bradley is returning from New Zealand at the end of January to be part of this next phase. We've also taken on a new trainee (!) - Bobby Kent, who's 69 years old and brings a lifetime of experience. Between our team alone, we've probably got 300 years of combined Market knowledge.

Without the investment in these new facilities, I'm not sure we'd have been able to retain all our staff, let alone recruit new ones. That's why this matters so much - it secures jobs, encourages new talent and keeps the Market alive.

**Buyers' Walk has always been seen as the heart of the Market. Why was it so important to preserve and invest in it?**

Giving up that amount of space to Buyers' Walk demonstrates how strongly we believe as a Market in its intrinsic value. In a world increasingly dominated by emails, WhatsApp and remote working, face-to-face trading is becoming rare - but it's also more important than ever.

There is nothing like the experience of standing in front of a pallet of newly delivered fresh produce, talking directly to the buyer, negotiating, shaking hands and closing a deal. You can't replicate that over a phone or a message. I've traded all my life, and that buzz has never faded.

I've visited markets all over the world, most recently in Melbourne, and the best examples all cherish their Buyers' Walks. They offer buyers the chance to see, smell and taste products, and to build trust in the expertise of the people selling them. That experience is priceless.

When first-time visitors come here - whether from government, trade bodies, or overseas - they're often blown away by the energy, the knowledge and the sheer variety and quality of produce on display. That adrenaline rush is something we should never take for granted and it needs preserving for the salesmen and women coming through the ranks.

**“ I'm 64 years old and I feel like I'm putting a new pair of boots on and going again**

**One of the biggest changes being discussed is the extension of opening hours. What's the thinking behind that?**

The split Buyers' Walk disrupted not just trading, but also our working patterns. While we've always prioritised our in-house foodservice customers - and rightly so - I think, unintentionally, we've made it harder for some external customers to trade with us.

Think about an independent greengrocer or street trader. Asking them to be here at 2am, work all day, and then repeat the process isn't sustainable. What we're proposing is simple but potentially transformative: from January 12th, Wholesalers on Buyers' Walk will be open until 7am on trading days for an initial six-month trial. This gives customers the chance to visit later in the morning, when deliveries have gone out and Buyers' Walk is still fully operational and ready to deal with their specific needs.

What's been incredible is the response [to this] from traders. You'd expect resistance when you tell people their working day may increase by two or three hours, but the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive. That says everything about the spirit of New Covent Garden. When times are tough and opportunities present themselves, people always roll their sleeves up.

**Opposite left:** Gary on day one in his new Bevington Salads units

**Above:** Traders leave the original NCGM Buyers' Walk building for the last time and Gary pulls down the shutters, before moving to pastures new





# Tenants unveil clock in honour of Gary

**On January 27th, a clock was unveiled in honour of the services of Gary Marshall to New Covent Garden Market**

The clock, at the heart of the Market's newly opened Buyers' Walk building, was bought by tenants primarily in recognition of Gary's 20 years as Chairman of Covent Garden Tenants Association.

Unveiling the clock, fellow trader and friend Bruce White said: "We are here not just to unveil a clock on Buyers' Walk, but to recognise a man whose time, energy, and commitment have played a huge role in shaping New Covent Garden Market for decades.

"Clocks mark more than the passing of minutes and hours. They symbolise continuity, reliability, and presence. And that makes this a fitting tribute to Gary," Bruce added.

"For the last 47 years, Gary has been a constant at New Covent Garden Market — as a trader, a business owner, a leader, and above all, a champion of this place and its people. At Bevington Salads, he has built a successful and respected wholesale firm, serving independent retailers and caterers across London and the South East with quality, consistency, and integrity.

"But Gary's impact goes far beyond his own business. For the past 20 years, as Chairman of the Covent Garden Tenants Association, he has represented this Market's tenants with tireless dedication. He has given countless hours — often outside already long working days — to protect, promote and unify a community of around 2,500 people, many of whom compete fiercely by day, yet - when push comes to shove -

stand together. Largely that is because of his leadership."

On Gary's watch, the fresh produce Market has evolved with the times, shifting from a predominantly retail-focused operation to becoming a cornerstone supplier to London's restaurant and hospitality sectors, added Bruce. Today, New Covent Garden Market has an annual turnover of £944 million.

"Gary's belief in wholesaling has always been matched by his belief in people," said Bruce. "He often speaks about the work ethic, passion and friendship that define this Market. He understands that while we trade in produce, what really sustains this place is trust, relationships and shared purpose. I sat on the executive of the CGTA for several years and on behalf of all of us in that group - I thank Gary for leading the CGTA through a rollercoaster ride over the last 20 years. He often praises his exec team for the hours of work that they put in, but his commitment and unbending dedication to the Market really has been quite extraordinary. It is an unpaid role that for many years has been treated like a full-time job and everyone in this Market has benefited."

The clock ensures that commitment is marked permanently. "This clock will be seen by traders, buyers and visitors every day. It will stand as a reminder of reliability, leadership, and service - values Gary has embodied throughout his career," Bruce concluded.

In response, Gary said: I am so proud and humbled to

“ Gary's commitment and unbending dedication to this Market has been quite extraordinary

be the recipient of this permanent feature in Buyers' Walk - a place that has been a mainstay of my life for so long - awarded to me by a group of people I have been lucky to work alongside and call friends for most of my life."

He profusely thanked everyone who has supported him on his journey through Market life and added: "I consider it an honour and a privilege to have worked at New Covent Garden for 47 years. Like any profession, the fruit and vegetable trade has its ups and downs and this place perhaps delivers more than most. To have a clock named in my honour on the new Buyers' Walk - it's overwhelming.

"There are plenty of moments when you ask yourself if all the meetings, the battles, the sacrifices are worth it. That clock answers that question for me. It says yes - absolutely yes."

# The story of Stevie Wells

**A 40-year journey came to an end on Christmas Eve for Steve Pegrum, aka stalwart customer of this Market, Stevie Wells. We talked to him about his time as a buyer here and how the Market has helped to shape his business**

There are people who pass through a market and there are others who become part of its fabric — woven into its routine, its humour, its unwritten rules and its memories. For more than four decades, Stevie Wells has unquestionably been one of the latter: a buyer, friend and character, a storyteller and a man who has conducted his business in his way; the right way.

A reasonably conservative calculation suggests that Steve has spent around 11 years of his life either in the cab traveling to and from New Covent Garden Market, or walking and buying on Buyers' Walk. So, as he prepared to step back from the nightly duties at New Covent Garden Market, he told his NCGM story — one of long-standing relationships and a profound love for the trade and the people that have not only underpinned his livelihood, but enabled him to do the same for his entire family. It is a story about what Market life can give to the people who devote themselves to it, and in Steve's case, about the immense contribution he has given back.

## Humble beginnings

Steve's story starts in Islington, where he was born above a hairdresser across from the clock tower. "Dad was a milkman, mum was a school cleaner. They were pretty humble beginnings," Steve says. "Dad didn't give anything away. We struggled for everything we got."

By the time the family moved to Leigh-on-Sea in Essex, the seeds of Steve's future were already sown. In his early teens he had a paper round to supplement helping dad on his milk round. One night, waiting yet again for newspapers that arrived late, he decided to go all in, walked to the greengrocer on the high street and asked for work. "He asked me when I wanted to start. I said Monday. And that was that. I loved it," Steve remembers. And so, a schooling dipping cabbages, sweeping fridges, learning about the produce, stacking boxes and serving customers began, instilling a work ethic that never left him.

His future wasn't set in stone. His dad pushed him to "get a trade", so Steve trained as a precision engineer. For a while it stuck, but fruit and veg had already entered his bloodstream.

Although he didn't know it at the time, the owner of the greengrocer was also his future father-in-law and having met Maureen, the world of fresh produce inevitably drew him back in, first in Essex and then after a life-changing move, in Norfolk. They sold their home and their brand new XR3. And they replaced them with a £100 Vauxhall Viva that had just failed its MOT and a neglected house that had been empty for over two years.

The young couple took on two stalls of their own and worked alongside Maureen's dad's business, before merging their stalls into the larger business and becoming responsible for three shops — one in Norwich and two in Dereham.

Maureen's father diversified, with a nightclub in Norwich, and left Steve and his two sons to manage the fruit and veg side of the operation. "Unfortunately he took his eye off the accounts," says Steve, "and when the nightclub failed, he ended up bankrupt. The shops were sold to cover some of the debts, but they were still significant.

"Maureen and I were given the choice of sinking or swimming and we took over the business with her two brothers."

There, the young couple took on her father's retail market business that was by then in dire straits financially and made the sort of all-or-nothing decision that defines many market families.

They committed their future to raising CC Wells from the ashes, embarking on a mission to reinvent and reinvigorate the stalls — and pay off every penny of debt that came with them.



**Above:**

Steve on one of his last nights in the Market

**Right:** With son Darren in Dereham

**All other pics:** Steve with some of the salesmen who became friends over many years



When Steve recalls those early years, he's realistic. "We did three years solid. Sunday markets too, so seven days a week. No holidays. My mum would come up to take the kids out because we were always working."

The debt his father-in-law left them was enormous for the time: £225,000. A small fortune even today, but in the 1980s, an astronomical sum of money to pay back while establishing new foundations. "At times I thought we were mad taking it on. But we paid every penny back," Steve says, adding that the desire to be free of debt became a theme that runs through his entire working life.

## Consistent approach

At their peak, Steve, Maureen and her two brothers ran 14 stalls — and the standouts were in Sheringham, where at their busiest they had a vast 40-foot set-up with up to 12 staff serving, pallets stacked around Maureen who worked strapped in to a money belt, selling punnet after punnet to people heading to the beach.

"It was busy, busy, busy," Steve smiles. "Our son Darren — who now runs the business — started there when he was eight or nine, shooting potatoes up, clearing rubbish, doing whatever needed doing."

At one point they were taking two 7.5-tonne lorries into Sheringham every Saturday, plus an arctic or two mid-week from their London market suppliers.

And all of this while still trying to pay back that mountain of inherited debt.

"My mum told me to look after the pennies and let the pounds look after themselves and my dad said don't



buy anything you can't afford," he says.

"It sounds obvious, but those are the foundations of how we've run the business and too many people either can't or won't follow those principles.

"I came back off holiday once and took £35,000 in cash into New Covent Garden on a Monday morning to pay my bills. You wouldn't do that now, but that was the world we were in then."

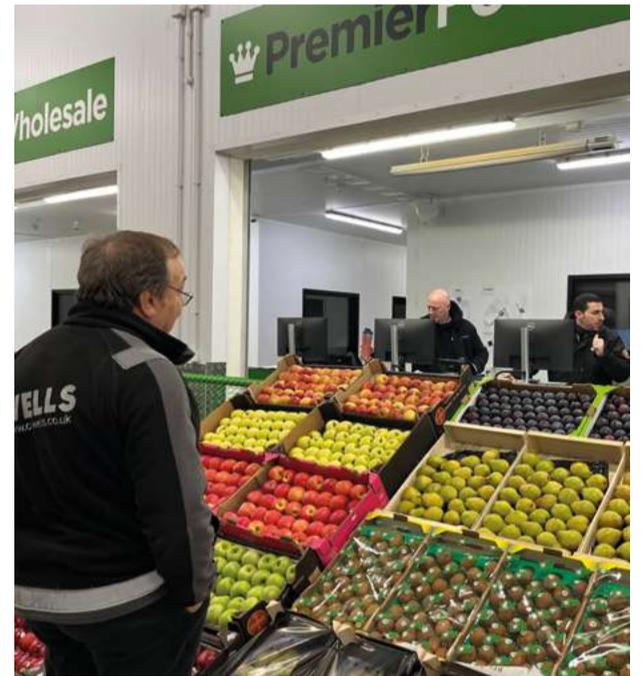
Steve adds that sticking to their guns has been crucial to their ongoing viability. "We've always run the business the way we want to run it. We're not a big company, so we don't bend to the wishes of every customer. If you fit into our route, then that's great, but we've never gone chasing business. If someone comes to us and it makes sense for us, of course we've taken it on.

"The situation we took on made us who we are. It gave us resilience, hammered home the importance of cash management, customer service, tightly controlled logistics, quality control — everything that has underpinned our business and our relationships ever since."

## The Market bubble

Relationships, of course, have been an equally important part of Steve's success. The heart of New Covent Garden Market is its people, he says, adding: "The Market is a bubble, a world of its own."

As a traditional buyer who shops the entire Market to optimise his nightly chances of a 'nice little earner', Steve has known pretty much everyone and anyone who has worked in Nine Elms during his time. He talks emotionally about great friendships on Buyers' Walk and beyond, with the likes of (in no particular order) Geoff Lamb, Paul Emmett, Michael Walker, Ian Taylor, Gary Marshall, Jason Tanner and Roger Garber.



He can reel off several holidays – in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and the Caribbean – where he has bumped into wholesalers from the Market; hearing ‘Stevie Wells’ called out in far flung places has become a regular feature of his time away from work. He has holidayed with several NCGM wholesalers and had his bill picked up in restaurants around the world by several more.

Steve has had his fallings out over the years – who hasn’t?! – but some of his most enduring relationships have emerged from those misunderstandings.

And as he has got older, the younger generation have learned who Stevie Wells is and what he stands for, with many insisting on calling him “Mr Wells”.

“I didn’t want that,” he says, “but I appreciated it. It’s respect.”

What Steve values most are the favours done discretely – the trust, the arguments avoided, the help given without conditions or expectation. “I’ve been lucky,” he says. “And had quite a few strokes of luck. I think I’ve earned them though. I’ve always tried to be straight. Maybe that’s unusual, but it’s how I’ve always worked.”

### The art of buying

The art of buying has changed in the last 40 years, and not all for the better, says Steve. But the culture of buying, the back-and-forth, the integrity, the judgement of what will suit your customer and also turn you a nice margin, is alive and well.

Steve embodies the craft seen throughout the Market. He tells stories of clearing 36 cases of damaged cherry vine tomatoes for £4 a box because he knew how to turn them into value by re-punneting and carefully repacking them; being thanked for pulling a salesman’s pants down, as it was a good lesson for them; of buying boards and boards of clemson spotting an opportunity no-one else seemed to see; of arguments with salesmen who skimmed a layer or two off the agreed number of boxes they’d sold, assuming he wouldn’t notice; of seasons where Cape fruit was so good you didn’t need to open a box; and of the subsequent diminishing quality of South African fruit, improvement of imports from other countries and the struggle British growers have to be competitive.

Many buyers who frequent Buyers’ Walk are content to stick to buying. But, with efficiency always front of

mind, Steve spotted an opening years back and built a very successful back-haulage operation that ensures his vehicles are full on their way both to and from the Market. Although he says the deliveries he makes are not particularly lucrative, the service has been hugely important for local growers wanting to deliver from the region into London, and long-term logistics relationships with some of the largest brands on the floor at NCGM could never do any harm to relationships with traders in Nine Elms.

As with the rest of his business, Steve has put the hours in to make it work, with strict and unwavering principles attached. “Turn up on time. Be straight. Don’t rob the senders. Do the job right,” he says of what has become way more than a side hustle and a great vehicle for door opening and brand visibility for CC Wells.

### The accidental explosion

Most businesses that have been evolving over 40 years will have plenty of sliding doors moments, but one relatively recent twist-of-fate has had a huge impact on the CC Wells journey, leading to the creation of the retail business at its Dereham warehouse that has quickly become one of the strongest parts of the firm.

It began with the realisation that the market stalls were no longer able to front up the business. Steve found some additional work with Premier Fruits, which enabled him to keep busy, but his brother in law was not happy with the change of direction and chose this time to go his own





way and leave CC Wells, taking four of the stalls with him. Then came a chat between social media phobe Steve and son Darren.

“I asked Darren whether we could tell people on Facebook they could buy from the warehouse — because we were no longer on the Friday market. He put a post out. The response was like a bomb going off!”

They weren't ready. With two sets of small scales, nowhere near enough fridge space and no real customer service system in place, it was a rude awakening when customers poured through the doors. Nothing if not resilient, the family and the rest of the team did what they have always done — they rolled their sleeves up and dug in for dear life — and once again came up smelling of roses. In an age when supermarkets undeniably dominate, Wells had re-created something more human: small-quantity, personalised fresh food shopping. And a second bomb was about to go off.

“During COVID, demand went through the roof. We doubled the fridge space, created systems and established routines that still stand us in good stead now,” Steve explains. “The warehouse was filled every day with fresh produce sourced from NCGM the night before and often topped up during the afternoon. It was crazy for a while, but we adapted and made it work.”

### Something for everyone

One of the reasons the Wells business has thrived is its multi-tiered offer, at the extremes of which are a range of high-end premium produce, and a counter offer of good-quality, affordable bagged or punneted. The middle ground is a consistently broad range of produce that offers something to everyone. “People come from miles around,” says Steve. “We've got customers who want the best grapes anyone can grow and we've got people who want a bag of pears for a pound. And both groups deserve good food.”

It's not just clever retailing; it's a philosophy of inclusivity that stems from years on the market stalls and a belief that no-one should be priced out of buying fresh and nutritious food.

The warehouse has become a community fixture, a friendly place to go for older members of the local population and a place where many of the residents on the adjoining estate pop in for a daily shop and a natter.

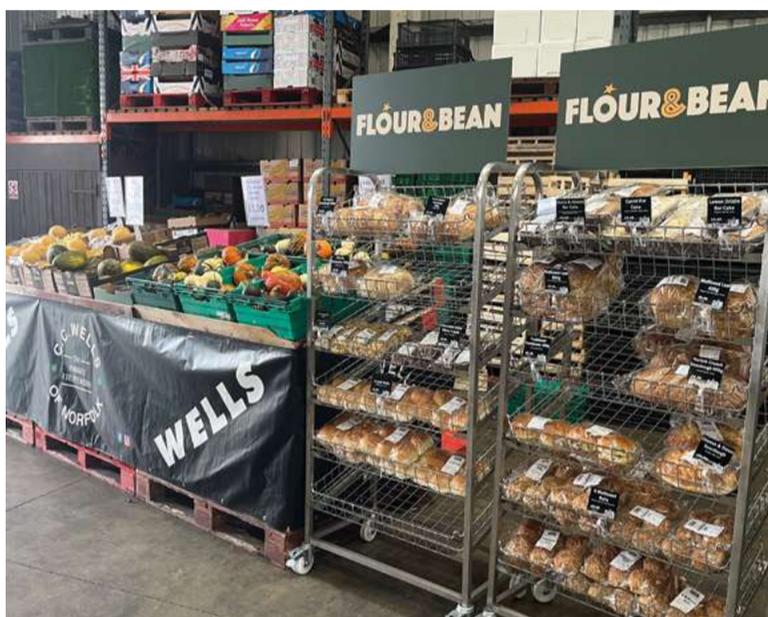
Every Wednesday, CC Wells sets up at a local care home, and it does the same for others. “It doesn't matter if the care home residents want two leeks and two bananas. Or four carrots. Or two apples. It's all fine. It gives them independence,” says Steve. “Stuart loves doing it — it's our community too.”

### Family ties

No part of this story is complete without Maureen, the children and their entire family.

Every member of the clan has worked at some time in the business and every other team member becomes a de facto member of the Wells family. Darren, who has been working hard since those days in Sheringham, has quietly been taking on more of the operation in recent times, determined to scale up the business further as his father steps back. His uncle stepped back from the business last Christmas due to ill health and his aunt left at the same time.

Steve will still do invoices, still watch the paperwork, still check the buying. “It'll keep my brain ticking,” he says. “And I'll do holiday relief. But not like before. The next chapter is in Darren's hands.”



**Photos:** The CC Wells retail business in Dereham has been a huge success and a lifeline for the local community



### Why now?

Steve has lost his father and mother recently, watched relatives age painfully, and seen close friends struggle with ill health. As comes to us all eventually, he has begun to feel the weight of time, and recognised the value of using what remains — hopefully many more years, of course. “I don't want to be doing the hours anymore,” he admits. “There's only so many years for us on the planet. Me and Maureen want to spend them together. I'm going to miss it and I'm not going away completely, just changing the routine of my life.”

### The Market he leaves behind

Steve's retirement coincides with the completion of the new Buyers' Walk, a modern environment replacing the gritty charm of the old Market buildings. “I liked it how it was,” he says. “I think it's the right time for me as the Market is changing and I've been around long enough to value the past and not really see the potential of these changes. I love the Market and the people here, and it has been a very important part of my life, but it's not what it used to be for me.”

He does recognise the inevitability of change though. “What makes the Market tick isn't so much the buildings, the facilities or the product, it's the people and the relationships inside it,” Steve says. “As long as that survives, so will the Market.”

“I'm quite an emotional man and I knew visiting the Market for the last time on Christmas Eve was going to be very difficult. I will probably be back to cover people's holidays now and then, but it's the end of an era and a big change in my life.

“I will miss it and I think lots of people will miss me too. I've been a good customer for a long, long time — the CC Wells business will go on and our new buyer Gary will do an excellent job as its face in the Market, but there will not be another Stevie Wells!”

### Legacy

When Steve walked out of the Market for the last time as a regular part of the furniture, the significance was obvious to everyone who knows him. We've seen it many times before, of course, but a generation of knowledge leaves with him and another slice of experience and old-school instinct and methodology exited Buyers' Walk.

It was inevitably a very sad day for a lot of people, but Steve sums it up with typical understatement. “We didn't come from anything special. When Maureen and I took the business on, we almost had less than nothing. But we've had a good life out of this. And we've enjoyed it.”

Every few years, outsiders predict the death of London's wholesale markets. Supermarkets will kill them, logistics will replace them, imports will bypass them, etc, etc... Yet New Covent Garden Market remains a £1bn powerhouse, feeding London and the South East daily.

Why? Because of buyers like Steve Wells. The hard-working, loyal people who show up night after night, who support growers, suppliers, salesmen and their customers. People like Steve who honour debts, teach their descendants to graft like them, and trade with skill and integrity. These are the people who become part of the Market's soul.

As Steve and Maureen step into their next chapter, the New Covent Garden Market community tips its hat to a man who gave it everything and in doing so, became a big part of its history.

# The backbone of British fresh deserves greater recognition

**Sarah-Jayne Gratton, who edits Freshtalk Daily for the industry's trade association Fresh Produce Consortium, wrote a heartfelt column about our sector recently. Market Quarterly wanted to share it with our readers, as we feel it captures the essence of why this sector remains so vital to the UK's food and floral supply chains**

"There's a familiar pattern in our industry.

When fresh produce is celebrated in the mainstream, the spotlight tends to land on the ends of the chain: the grower in the field and the retailer at the shelf. In florals, it's the romance of the bloom and the artistry of the florist that naturally catches attention. And of course, those roles are fundamental.

But in the middle of it all – quietly, tirelessly, relentlessly – sits the engine room of British fresh: the fruit, vegetable and floral wholesale sector.

These businesses are the backbone of the UK's fresh produce, cut flower and plant industry. Not in a sentimental sense, but in a practical, measurable, day-in-day-out way. They are the people who make fresh available everywhere, not just where it is easiest to sell. They connect growers and importers with independent retailers, caterers, hospitality, processors, foodservice operators, market traders, schools, care homes and community kitchens. They keep the nation stocked with freshness, and they do it under constant pressure, in a system where perfection is expected and problems arrive with no warning.

If you want to understand how the fresh sector truly functions, you don't start at the marketing campaign or the planogram. You start at 2am, in a warehouse, with forklifts humming and temperature-controlled doors opening into the dark. You start where a late delivery becomes a rescue mission, where an unexpected quality issue becomes a rapid re-plan, where supply gaps are bridged with relationships, knowledge and experience.

## Wholesalers create resilience

Fresh supply chains are not neat. They're living systems, shaped by seasonality, weather, crop conditions, shipping disruption, labour availability, packaging changes, compliance demands, market volatility and consumer behaviour that can pivot overnight.

Wholesalers sit at the centre of all that complexity and make it workable.

They do the hard graft of ensuring continuity:

- balancing supply and demand in real time
- maintaining quality across mixed lines and short shelf-life products
- ensuring temperature integrity and food safety standards
- adapting ranges for customers who don't operate at supermarket scale
- providing market intelligence day by day — not in quarterly reports

And crucially, they provide access.

Not forcing everyone into the same narrow model, but supporting a rich and diverse marketplace: independent greengrocers, convenience retailers, street markets, speciality shops, florists, garden centres, hospitality venues and more. In many towns and cities, wholesalers are effectively the gateway to fresh for smaller businesses — the difference between a thriving local offer and a shrinking one.

## Unsung heroes in high-stakes world

It's one of the paradoxes of wholesale that the sector can be both essential and overlooked.

Wholesalers often work behind the scenes, without the branding or consumer-facing visibility that other sectors enjoy. Yet their reputation is built on something far more demanding than visibility: reliability.

And that's not easy in 2026!

Margins are tight. Expectations are sky-high. Compliance is rigorous. Customers want flexibility and speed. Logistics can be unpredictable. Labour is precious. And of course, sustainability targets and reporting pressures are reshaping decisions across the supply chain.

Despite all of this, wholesalers keep delivering. Not just product — but continuity, trust and service.

They are the sector that takes the chaos of global supply and translates it into a dependable box of strawberries, a mixed salad line, a tray of tomatoes, a perfectly conditioned rose, or a seasonal pot plant — ready to sell, ready to delight, ready to meet standards.

And they do it not once in a while, but every single day.

## Quality starts here

Quality doesn't begin at the shelf; it begins with understanding. Understanding the product, the customer, and the conditions required to protect both.

Wholesale teams hold an extraordinary depth of expertise in product handling, ripening, storage, shelf-life management and condition. They make judgement calls that don't sit neatly in spreadsheets. They rely on experience, trained eyes, and knowledge passed down through teams that truly understand fresh.

In florals particularly, the wholesale world has always been both science and craft. Managing hydration, temperature, ethylene sensitivity, conditioning processes and transit times is not "nice to have" - it's the entire difference between a bloom that lifts a room and one that fails before it reaches the vase.

And in fresh produce, wholesalers have long been the bridge between agricultural reality and customer expectation - managing variations in crop, climate and appearance while keeping standards consistent.

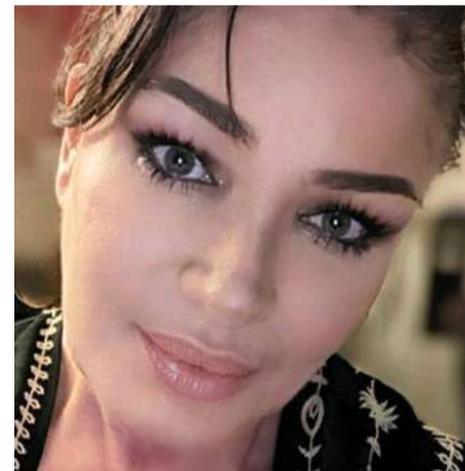
This is where the reputation of British fresh is defended and sustained.

## Community champions

The best wholesalers don't just operate in markets. They operate in communities.

They're employers. Skills developers. Family firms spanning generations. They are part of the social and economic fabric of towns, cities and regional trading hubs. Many supported their customers through Covid, through inflation shocks, through supply disruption — and often did so quietly, without applause, because it was simply what had to be done.

They also play a critical role in reducing waste across the chain: through flexible redistribution, mixed formats, pragmatic ranging, and a deep understanding of how different customers can use different grades and sizes. Wholesale is, in many ways, the ultimate circular-thinking space — because it deals in real-world outcomes, not ideals.



“ Wholesale is in many ways the ultimate circular-thinking space

## Celebrating wholesale excellence

Which brings us to this: recognition matters! Not because our wholesalers need ego strokes (if anything, this is the sector most likely to shrug off praise and get on with the job). But because celebrating excellence strengthens the industry. It shines a light on best practice. It helps businesses attract talent. It encourages investment. And it tells a story that deserves to be told: that Britain's fresh industry is powered by people who make the impossible look routine.

That's why the FPC Fresh Awards 2026 opening for entries is such an important moment — particularly for wholesalers across fresh produce, cut flowers and plants.

This is your opportunity to step forward and be recognised for the work that underpins the entire supply chain.

If you are a wholesale business — or if you work with one that consistently delivers outstanding service, innovation, sustainability progress, customer care, or sector leadership — don't let 2026 be another year where wholesale excellence is simply assumed.

The FPC Fresh Awards 2026 are now open for entries from wholesalers, and we genuinely hope to see the wholesale community represented in force. Because if ever a sector deserved a stage, it's this one.

Enter now: [www.fpcfreshawards.co.uk](http://www.fpcfreshawards.co.uk)



# How to turn curiosity into a thriving food brand

**From fighting food intolerances as a child to becoming a food entrepreneur as a parent, Roseanne Olanrewaju (known as Ro) has proved that with the key ingredients of imagination and determination – plus a dash of support from New Covent Garden Market (NCGM) – you can create a recipe for success**

“Mission Kitchen is a wonderful community to be part of... I've learned so much from other members

For years Roseanne looked in on the kitchen from the outside before realising she could stand the heat. She now has a thriving food brand – RO's – that is stocked in Whole Foods, Selfridges' Food Hall, and a host of independent delicatessens across London and the South East. But let's start at the beginning of Ro's journey.

## Forbidden fruit

As a child, food intolerances kept Ro at arm's length from cooking. While other children hovered around the stove, Ro stood in the doorway, observing her Mum's culinary skills, curious, and hungry to learn. Scotch bonnets, flour, spices – all forbidden. But that distance only sharpened her fascination. Cooking became the “forbidden fruit,” and once she was finally allowed in, that early curiosity would grow into a West African-inspired food brand.

A lifelong foodie, Ro began cooking seriously between the ages of eight and 10, baking cookies and experimenting wherever she could. Her interest wasn't just in flavours; it was deeper than that. Living with multiple intolerances meant she constantly searched for alternative ways to recreate foods she loved. Learning how ingredients worked and how to replace them became second nature.

Food, says Ro, was the one subject she never tired of. And once she learned something new, she wanted to teach it. That instinct led her to train as a pastry chef,

working at the historic Criterion Restaurant in Piccadilly Circus, where she learned to make everything from scratch. But even that dream came with obstacles. Inhaling flour aggravated her gluten intolerance, forcing her to step away from professional pastry kitchens. Instead of giving up, she changed direction.

## Using teaching to share her knowledge

Teaching cooking became a unique outlet for Ro — a way to pass on hard-earned skills she could no longer fully use herself. With a diverse heritage hailing from Cameroon, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, three different cultures with overlapping produce, fascinated Ro, particularly how a single ingredient could be transformed across cultures (in this case her 'hero' ingredient, Scotch Bonnet peppers). West African food stood out, not only because of its depth of flavour but because it wasn't widely accessible in ready-made form and caters to food intolerances.

Then came the pandemic.

Like many people, Ro suddenly had time to reflect. Former students, clients, friends and family began asking for recipes — especially for the West African dishes they loved but didn't know how to recreate. Rather than sending instructions that would never quite stick, she had a simple idea: why not make the base for them?

## Experimenting with frozen then ambient

The first versions were frozen pastes made at home and shared informally. But transporting frozen food was impractical and Ro knew that to be taken seriously, she needed to take herself seriously too. That meant proper testing, shelf stability and, crucially, a professional kitchen.

Ro discovered Mission Kitchen in 2021, just as its doors

opened. Before launching her own brand, she worked as a chef with Mama Leys, a community-led food organisation producing thousands of nutritious meals for Southwark and Lambeth residents; a grounding experience that reinforced her commitment to affordable, honest food. Quietly, alongside this work, Ro began refining her own recipes.

The early branding was as humble as it gets: jars with home-printed paper labels, a handwritten ingredients list, and no certainty that anyone would buy them. In December 2021, she took those jars to Portobello Road Market through a small-business scheme by the Portobello Business Centre. Tucked away near a Spanish grocery store (the long-established R Garcia and Sons), she worried nobody would even notice her stall. “I was lucky as it was Christmas, so people were in the mood to buy,” says Ro, adding: “It was such a worthwhile experience as I got important feedback on how my products tasted from people who clearly loved their food, plus I learned an important fact that day: people will buy almost anything from you as long as you're passionate about your product and you speak with confidence – I ended up selling my entire stock.”

The lesson wasn't just that people would buy, it was why they bought. Ro wasn't pushing sales; she was offering a taste of authentic West African flavours, asking for feedback and sharing her story with confidence and enthusiasm. Customers responded to the authenticity.

## No 'hidden' ingredients

Encouraged, Ro went back to the drawing board. In January 2022, she began working with designers, refining recipes, and shaping a brand rooted in one uncompromising principle: the food had to be as clean as possible. No additives. No hidden ingredients. Nothing she wouldn't feed her own children. Her guiding benchmark was simple – could her African grandmother have made this at home and stored it safely?

The brand name came together just as simply. Pressed for an answer on official paperwork, she chose “RO's” a play on her own name, something familiar, warm, and giftable. What began as a rushed decision became a perfect fit. “I had a long list of nine names originally, opting for RO's in the end for two simple reasons – it was my name plus a rose looks delicate but its thorns pack a punch, just like my sauces.”



### The Mission Kitchen experience

Ro became a paid-up member at Mission Kitchen – the shared kitchen space on the first floor of NCGM's Food Exchange building – in October 2021. "My time at Mission Kitchen has been invaluable as I've been able to network and take advantage of lots of opportunities that would never have come my way. Mission Kitchen offers regular talks with industry experts, opportunities to meet buyers from independent stores and offer opportunities to expose your products to corporates and individuals across the UK. It's a wonderful community to be a part of and I've learned so much from other entrepreneurs," she says.

Not just what to do but – equally as important – Ro learned what not to do, seeing other's pitfalls and deciding not to rush her brand until she was confident in her product.

It was June 2022 when Ro started making her new ambient hot sauces and the official launch was at a Commonwealth market at Duke of York's Square in Chelsea, celebrating the Queen's Jubilee. This time, Ro arrived with a proper website, professional labels, and two hero products: a jollof paste inspired by family recipes, and a fiery pepper sauce built around the very ingredient she'd once been allergic to – Scotch Bonnet. Once again, she sold out.

### Slow-cooking proves the best 'growth' recipe

Growth since then has been deliberate rather than explosive. Balancing family life, homeschooling, and production meant she chose not to chase every opportunity. Instead, she focused on learning, iterating, and leaning into the supportive Mission Kitchen network of fellow small businesses. The Market supplies all of RO's ingredients (except for her Scotch Bonnet peppers, the supplier being a closely-guarded secret). "I first started working with former Market firm Sheringham's because they were in the Food Exchange and I could go down and pick my fresh produce – they were very supportive of me and were instrumental in my success," she says. Sheringham's didn't mind that Ro only wanted small quantities and could see she was a new business owner who needed a little help. "When Sheringham's closed, we switched to another Market wholesaler, AA Produce, who again have been a great help," she says. "They know me now and understand that I must have the very best produce or it's getting sent back!"

### Independent deli opens the door of opportunity

Gladwell's Deli & Grocery – based in nearby Camberwell – was the first shop to stock RO's products. It was a product tasting session for RO's at Gladwell's that led to contact with supermarket retailer Whole Foods Market, via a forager (foodies who find and recommend small brands to retailers). Whole Foods seemed like a great fit for RO's sauces and pastes. Unfortunately, Ro didn't have the correct SALSA [Safe and Local Supplier Approval] accreditation, a food safety certification scheme designed for UK small food and drink businesses. But, as luck would have it, one door closed and another opened.

The tasting at Gladwell's led to online platform DELLI Market approaching Ro. "I was apprehensive at first," she says, "but I got with DELLI Market and started supplying them in 2023, and my business took off. Showing my products to a wider market led to a lot of independent delis getting in touch and soon I was supplying delis across London."

### Selfridges adds the next layer to the brand - packaging

Next to come calling was a shop on Oxford Street: Selfridges' Food Hall. "It was summer 2023 and Selfridges asked if I could send them some samples," says Ro, adding. "They were amazing, helping me with my packaging and design, showing me examples of other brands and giving me tips on how to make my products stand out." Ro took her time – a now familiar theme – and wasn't to be rushed. Eventually, once Ro was happy with the new-look packaging, Selfridges gave Ro's products "a generous space in the world foods' section" in the department store's legendary ground-floor Food Hall.

Despite the earlier disappointment with Whole Foods, another opportunity with the supermarket knocked at Ro's door. "Whole Foods was looking for female entrepreneurs who were in the 'world food' sector, and this time they were keen to make it work. I took on a co-packer who helped me to produce the increased quantities that we needed to supply a multi-store retailer. We produce around 50 litres at a time at Mission Kitchen, whereas my co-packer can produce multiple batches of this size, each time."

### Debut in Whole Foods takes RO's to the next level

February 2025 saw RO's products debut in all seven Whole Foods Market locations and sales have been strong. Ro says: "We're able to do promotions at different Whole Food locations, which has been amazing for brand exposure, and it nearly always translates into sales."

Today, RO's products are polished, gift-ready, and confidently rooted in heritage. RO's sauces and pastes are now available from [www.roskitchn.com](http://www.roskitchn.com), DELLI Market, Whole Foods, Selfridges, 10 independent delicatessens across the capital, plus delis in Oxford and East Sussex. Not bad for a full-time-Mum with just an idea and bags of authentic passion.

### What's next?

Ro is going to take time to celebrate her success thus far, but long term she's looking forward to a potential partnership with a nationwide supermarket chain, such as Waitrose. But Ro knows stepping up production means further innovation and challenges to overcome. Ro says: "I want to expend further but I know the heart of the business hasn't changed. It's still about curiosity, care, and making food that tells the truth about where it comes from."

Ro's story is a reminder that small beginnings, even constrained ones, can become powerful foundations. Sometimes, the long way round is exactly the right way. However, she is also keen to acknowledge the contributions of her extensive village. "I'd like to thank our customers for their purchases and invaluable feedback, family and friends who made introductions, the business founders who shared tips, and the organisations that provided support," says Ro. "Most of all," she adds, "I'd like to thank the community I've found here at NCGM who have really supported my journey."



# Fresh Union: A dynamic new force making waves at the Market

**In just four years, Fresh Union has emerged as one of the most dynamic businesses at New Covent Garden Market. Founded in 2021 by Rob Murchison and Oscar Gomes, the company has rapidly evolved from a modest catering supplier with a single rail arch unit and five employees into a multi-division enterprise with a product portfolio of more than 2,500 lines, a 65-strong team, and an expanding fleet of branded vehicles delivering across London and the Home Counties**

What began as a bold move in the uncertain, post-pandemic trading environment has developed into a market success story driven by quality, innovation, and a strong sense of community. Today, Fresh Union is not only known for its diverse supply of fresh, frozen, and prepared produce, but also for launching distinctive new brands that reflect the company's creative energy and connection to its customers.

As you will have read on page 3, the latest move was to purchase next door neighbour Universal Gardens, rebrand that part of the business as Italian Fresh, and add specialised Italian sourcing expertise to its impressive portfolio. This strategic purchase adds to a string of ambitious initiatives that have transformed a business founded in uncertain times into a market mainstay in a relatively short space of time.

## A risk that paid off

"We set the business up in May 2021 when the country was just coming out of its third lockdown," recalls co-founder Rob. "There was talk of another lockdown in the July, but thankfully that didn't happen. It actually worked in our favour because so many businesses were emerging from the pandemic and trying to get back on their feet, but we were starting fresh without any baggage or debt."

Murchison and Gomes were both well known at the Market, having spent years working for firms such as Sheringham's and The Menu Partners. Their decision to strike out on their own reflected not just entrepreneurial ambition but also a belief in the enduring strength of New

Covent Garden Market (NCGM) as a hub for London's food trade. "We're really keen to see the heritage of the Market continue," says Oscar. "We want to make sure that people stay here and that Fresh Union plays an important role in the next generation of New Covent Garden."

Their early focus was clear: high-quality products and customer service, rather than competing on price. The strategy proved successful. From a small start with a handful of core lines, Fresh Union has grown to serve more than 300 customers, ranging from chefs and caterers to hospitality groups and food retailers. Around 70% of its produce still comes directly from NCGM, reinforcing its ties to the Market community while ensuring freshness and traceability.

## A team with shared values

One of the key ingredients behind Fresh Union's success has been its team. Around 90% of its staff have previous NCGM experience, and many were friends or former colleagues of the founders. "We're lucky," says Gomes. "Most of our team is made up of people we've worked with before. They share our values and our ethos—it really feels like a family business where everyone is pulling in the same direction."

The company's collaborative approach extends beyond the management team. "We ask people doing every job to get involved and give feedback," adds Rob. "Sometimes what the drivers tell us is as important as anything else. We know not everything will go right every day, but the key is to learn and improve constantly."

That mindset has created a culture of openness and adaptability, something that has been crucial during periods of fast growth. The firm now operates from several units, including Block A1 and four rail arches, and has diversified into multiple divisions—Freshly Imported, Freshly Prepared, and a Frozen arm that was established through the acquisition of Attila Frozen Foods in December 2024.

## Growth through diversification

The acquisition of Attila marked a major milestone for Fresh Union. A well-established name within and beyond the Market, Attila came with a loyal customer base and strong supplier relationships, including major brands such as Lamb Weston and Aviko. "The Attila name is well respected, and we don't plan to change it," says Rob. "It's a great fit for us, and we see significant room for the frozen business to grow in the next few years."

At the same time, Fresh Union's Freshly Imported division has expanded its reach through international sourcing trips. The founders have visited Peru, Turkey, Costa Rica, Belgium and Italy - often on government-funded trade missions - to build direct relationships with growers and exporters. "We're always looking for new options that set us apart," says Rob, who just got back from Fruit Logistica in Berlin with the team. "Travelling to meet suppliers has been a great way to find the right partners."

One of the most notable outcomes of this global outreach has been the creation of Avoluscious, Fresh Union's first proprietary brand. Developed through an exclusive partnership with a Peruvian avocado grower, Avoluscious is a chunky guacamole product that has quickly become popular among the company's sushi and poke clientele.

"When we met the grower in Peru, we realised he was a great match for us - similar in size and with the same commitment to quality," says Oscar. "We developed the product together, and he now supplies us exclusively. It's worked really well; Avoluscious has been a big hit."

The success of Avoluscious has encouraged the company to keep developing new lines and exploring further brand opportunities. "We add new lines every week," says marketing and procurement lead Leila Gomes. "We're bringing more of our preparation work in-house and looking at launching additional own brands - prepared mangoes are next on the horizon."



## Playful, cheeky, and authentic

The most recent addition to Fresh Union's portfolio is the launch of FU We Make Juice, a cold-pressed juice brand that has already attracted attention for its bold personality and commitment to freshness. Produced and bottled on-site at the Market using fruit sourced entirely from Buyers' Walk, FU We Make Juice represents both a product innovation and a statement of intent.

Described as a "passion project" by Cherrie Murchison, who developed the brand and its identity with the in-house team, the range currently includes lime, lemon, apple and orange juices, with pineapple joining the line-up shortly. Each juice is produced using cold-pressing methods that preserve natural flavour without added sugar or concentrates.

"We're really excited," says Cherrie. "It's totally natural and very sweet. We've kept the process simple because freshness is everything to us. We could pressurise it and extend the shelf life, but we'd rather prioritise taste. It only lasts six days, but the flavour makes it worth it."

Every aspect of FU We Make Juice reflects the Fresh Union ethos - locally sourced ingredients, attention to detail, and a strong sense of fun. The bottles and labels are all UK-made, and the branding has been designed to resonate with the company's chef-driven customer base. "We're trying to give our brand a new personality that reflects who we are and who we serve," says Cherrie. "It's playful, cheeky, and irreverent. We're having fun with it."

The Market has responded enthusiastically. Within its first month, 60% of Fresh Union's 300 customers had already bought the juice, which has proved particularly popular with bars and restaurants using it for cocktails. "The feedback has been very positive," says Cherrie. "It looks great on the counter and people love the story behind it."

## Rebrand supports strategic direction

The launch also coincided with a wider rebrand of Fresh Union's identity. The company's delivery vans are being wrapped in new, humorous designs that reflect the light-hearted tone of the juice brand, while still embodying the professionalism and quality that underpin all its operations. Front and centre of the rebrand have been two unmissable pink vans that have been running routes for the last few months, with liveries featuring playful messages and intriguing visuals; eye-catching enough to stop pedestrians mid-scroll and make drivers do a double-take. It's marketing on wheels, but with Fresh Union's trademark wink.

The redesign is more than a visual upgrade, it's a statement, says Cherrie, who again led the creative direction. "Fresh Union vans are on the road every day, delivering premium produce and goods to partners who expect the best. So, the company asked itself a simple question: If we're going to be out there every single day... why not do it in a cool, cheeky way?"

Ernesto Hernandez, Transport Manager, adds: "We wanted our vans to reflect the energy, personality, and confidence of Fresh Union. We work hard, we deliver excellence, and we do it with personality. The new design celebrates that. It's bold. It's fun. And it shows that being the best doesn't mean being boring."



"We want people to notice us and know who we are, of course," explains Cherrie. "But we also want to put a smile on people's faces. We have had so much great feedback - the clients love it and have all had a good laugh about it, which means it is serving its purpose already. We want to give lots of people a reason to talk about, understand and remember us and we will be converting more of the vans in our fleet to this livery during 2026."

## Staying grounded

Despite its rapid expansion, Fresh Union remains deeply rooted in the values of the Market. Its team of buyers - led by long-time Market man Bogdan - work six days a week to secure the freshest and best-quality products. The company's continued investment in the Market community is also reflected in its future plans. Applications are already in place for units in the penultimate phase of the NCGM redevelopment, scheduled for occupancy in early 2027.

"To be honest, the redevelopment hasn't affected us as much as we thought it might," says Oscar. "Parking's been manageable, and we're looking forward to the new space. Our Freshly Prepared unit is already busy, so the extra capacity will make a big difference. We have no intention of leaving the Market - this is where we belong."

The founders' dedication to NCGM's ecosystem - its traders, suppliers, and traditions - is matched by their modern,

“ We want to give lots of people a reason to talk about, understand and remember us

forward-looking business model. "We deliver six days a week, but we work seven," says Rob with a smile. "It's no different for anyone else in the Market - we love market life."

## Quality, community, and curiosity

At its core, Fresh Union's success is about people and purpose. It's about a shared belief in quality over quantity, in building trusted relationships, and in embracing change without losing sight of where you came from. Whether it's sourcing guacamole from Peru, developing a playful new juice brand, or expanding into frozen foods, every move reflects a balance of ambition and authenticity.

"We're constantly looking for opportunities," says Rob. "But whatever we do next, it will always come back to the same principles: quality, service, and people. That's what Fresh Union is built on."



## ON THE MAP

# Broadley speaking

**Craig Broadley, co-owner of Quality Plants, is the latest in our series of market people who have put New Covent Garden Market On the Map**

### What does New Covent Garden Market mean to you?

New Covent Garden Market really is my life. I've spent more than 40 years here. It's a home, a community, and a place where I've built relationships that have lasted decades. Like many people here, it's what I've done for most of my working life, and it's shaped who I am.

I'm not afraid of working hard, like many traders in the Market, and I enjoy being busy and involved. When it's your own business, you don't mind staying behind and tinkering about.

It doesn't feel like a job in the traditional sense. I've lived through recessions, market changes, Covid, and all sorts of challenges, but the Market has always been a constant. It's where I belong.

### When was the first time you visited New Covent Garden Market?

My first visit to the Market was in 1984, when I started working here. My brother-in-law already worked in the Market, and he got me a job interview with his boss and I got the job straight away. I never worked in the old, old market, though I remember visiting the old Covent Garden area when I was younger. By the time I arrived, the Market had already moved to Nine Elms, and that's where I've been ever since.

### What was your first Market job?

My first job here was as a salesman with a plant wholesaler called Norman R. Cole. The owner was called George Best, like the footballer, although everyone knew him as Danny Best. Apparently, back in the old days he earned that nickname by walking around singing Danny Kaye songs!

The hours were terrible – very early starts – but the money was decent for the time. I didn't really think about careers back then; it was just a job. I went in for a trial, and that was it. I stayed there for several years, working with plants, which is something I've done my entire Market career. I've never worked in cut flowers – plants have always been my thing.

### What was your first business called?

My first – and only – business is Quality Plants, which I started in 1988 with my business partner Dave Knight, who sadly passed away in April 2024. We bought into an existing Flower Market company called Quality Plants (Chanceworth) Limited, which was originally owned by a Dutch-English owner.

After Dave passed away, the business continued with me and Dave's son Dean. Fortunately, Dean was already involved as a salesman with the company, which meant the transition was manageable. Nearly four decades after setting the firm up, I'm still here, still running Quality Plants, and still just as passionate about what we do.

### What has changed the most in your Market career?

A huge amount has change. When I started, there were far more English growers supplying the Market. Norman R. Cole sold a lot of UK-grown plants back then, but sadly those growers have almost disappeared. Today, around 95-97% of my stock comes from Holland, with a small amount from Denmark.

The way we buy and sell has also changed. I don't buy from the auction system; I buy directly from growers. It costs more, but it gives consistency, which is vital for my customers, particularly contractors who need the same plants week in, week out.

Deliveries are another big change. We used to offer deliveries all over London as a standard service, but driving around London now is difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. We still deliver, but only to selected regular clients and always early in the morning, before traffic builds up.

Brexit has probably had the biggest operational impact. What used to be next-day deliveries from Holland now take three days because of plant passports, inspections, and paperwork. You just have to adapt, accept it, and keep moving forward.

### What's the secret of your success?

Moving with the times, sticking to what you believe in, and looking after your customers. Loyalty is massive for me. I've got customers who have been with me for years because they trust the quality and the service.

I believe in going the extra mile. If a regular customer rings me in the afternoon and I can help, I will. Routine is also important – early nights, early starts, and discipline. I've done this for so long that it's second nature.

At the end of the day, it's quite simple: no customers means no business. Work hard, stay reliable, keep people happy, and don't stand still. That's what's kept me here for all this time.



“ I've lived and worked through lots of change, but the Market is where I belong