

MARKET TIMES

PAGE 2-4
NEWS BITES

PAGE 5
MOMO MAKING WAVES

PAGE 8-9
SMITH & GREEN TURNS 30

PAGE 10-11
COXY SPREADS LOVE



**MARKET HAILED
A HERO IN
INDUSTRY-WIDE
AWARDS**

SEE PAGE 6-7



It's been an action-packed quarter at Britain's leading wholesale market - find out why inside



Editor's Message



Well, another Covid-affected Christmas has been and gone and we're all well into 2022 with high hopes that the disruptive pandemic's days are numbered. The recent relaxation of government guidelines affecting the catering and hospitality sectors should only be a good thing; a step in the right direction towards British society's new normal.

In this issue, we look back on a truly momentous achievement by the Market. Immediately to the right of this column, you can read about the Hero Award we picked up in November. Several tenants of the Market made the shortlist at the FPC Fresh Awards, which is in itself a huge achievement. That the industry chose to honour New Covent Garden Market as a whole for its heroic efforts during the worst of the pandemic is particularly appropriate though, as it reflects on the cumulative effort of everyone here to keep the supply chain rolling for London and the South East, when those around us struggled. I add my congratulations to you all – once again the Market was there for its wider community when most needed.

In December, a number of tenants of the Fruit & Vegetable Market, the Flower Market and the Food Exchange combined to support a 12 days of New Covent Garden Market promotion across our social media channels. Fruit, vegetable and flower based prizes were complemented by gifts ranging from kombucha to luxury chocolate to illustrate the increasing depth of the offer across the Market site. Thousands of people participated – adding numbers to the feeds of both the Market and tenants and we've had some lovely feedback from the winners.

Talking about the widening portfolio of products available in the Market, you can also read about a new addition to the range of arches tenant MOMO Kombucha in this issue, as well as Albartross, which markets golf shoes and accessories from its HQ in the Food Exchange.

Peter Green of Smith & Green has worked in the Flower Market for 46 years and run his own firm for 30 of those. We talked with him last month to find out more about his career and how Smith & Green has evolved and adapted to remain at the top of its game. It's well worth a read.

In the week before Christmas, I also had the pleasure of spending a night 'shadowing' one of the Fruit & Vegetable Market's most regular and loyal customers as he shopped buyers' walk. Darren "Coxy the Veg Man" Cox is a fascinating character and let me in on a few trade secrets as he showed me how he goes about his business. Go to page 10 to read all about him and his family business.

I realise this is about as belated as it's gets (!), but I wish every one reading this a healthy, happy and profitable 2022.

Tommy

Tommy Leighton,
CGMA Strategy, Partnerships and Communications Team



Market community recognised as heroes by industry peers

New Covent Garden Market was named the winner of the Hero Award at the fresh produce industry's FPC Fresh Awards in November.

The award is recognition for the gargantuan efforts of the entire Market community during the pandemic, to provide a consistent supply of healthy food to people across London and the South East when they most needed it.

When the COVID-19 lockdown dramatically brought the British hospitality industry to a grinding halt on March 21, 2020, traders across New Covent Garden Market (NCGM) were hit hard. However, wholesalers and catering suppliers at the Fruit and Vegetable Market responded quickly to the capital's hour of need and combined to ensure that London's food supply chain continued to function.

The swift adaptation of traditional business models allowed them to serve consumers unable to purchase food through their normal channels. Just as importantly, a whole host of charitable efforts, both by individual firms and market-wide partnerships, ensured that those in most need during the pandemic were given access to nutritious food.

The vast majority of those initiatives were undertaken without fuss or fanfare, as the generous nature of the wholesale trade shone through and people at NCGM worked tirelessly not just to keep their own businesses afloat, but also to support the changing needs of the local and regional population.

"So many people went the extra mile and this award is recognition of the incredible work ethic and the selfless and caring nature of the amazing people in our Market," said Jo Breare, General Manager of Covent Garden Market Authority. "The award recognises our tenants, the team at CGMA, our service contractors for the

“ This award is recognition of the incredible work ethic and selfless and caring nature of the amazing people in our Market

Market and the work of our development partners during the pandemic. We all pulled together and emerged from a difficult period in a very positive place.”

Gary Marshall, Chairman of Covent Garden Tenants Association, added: "I have always been proud of the generosity of spirit in this market and it's no real surprise to me that everyone here stood up to be counted at such a difficult time. When most businesses were not and could not be sure of how they would come out at the other end of the pandemic, so many people could not have done any more. We are perceived by many to be a foodservice market these days, but in reality we cross all parts of the retail and catering sectors and we showed that again when our local and regional communities needed us most, we were there for them, as we always are."

"During my 15 years as Chairman of CGTA, we have raised well in excess of £600,000 for our selected charities, and again we've shown that we are the Market that continues to give. Thank you to everyone at New Covent Garden Market for everything they did and thank you to our customers and our suppliers for their continued support and understanding over the last 18 months. It won't be forgotten."

Pictured above: Delighted representatives of the Market got up on stage to accept the Hero Award from host Patrick Kielty and category sponsor CHEP UK



Established faces bring new name to Flower Market

A new name arrived in the Flower Market in November, when long-standing tenants Zest and Arnott & Mason pooled their significant traditional strengths to form Green & Bloom.

The two firms had operated from New Covent Garden as traditional wholesale businesses for a combined duration of over 50 years. Now, they have merged to create a partnership that will benefit their customers through additional purchasing options, increased levels of service and diversity of product offering.

The primary aim is to provide a one-stop shop solution for wholesale horticultural purchasing across a choice of buying platforms. Business Development Director Freddie Heathcote, pictured on left, said: “We felt that the time was right for our forces to be combined, along with enhanced technology and infrastructure, to create a single entity that will give our customers additional purchasing options, increased levels of service and a far wider diversity of product offering.”

“Our aim is to make our customers’ lives easier, so they can concentrate on the success of their business and we can grow with them.”

The new business’s continued daily presence at the Market gives customers the option of continuing to visit and select their own products in person each morning, while strategic partnerships have enabled Green & Bloom to introduce a significantly expanded online store stocking 15,000 lines, which launched on January 3rd. The flower and plant web-shop gives its customers the opportunity to choose the way in which they buy a far more extensive range of products.

Green & Bloom remains 100% committed to New Covent Garden Flower Market. “We see what we’re doing as being of tremendous benefit to our suppliers, customers and the market,” said Managing Director Graeme Diplock, pictured right. “We’re securing the future of the market and of our own businesses by doing something innovative rather than standing still.”



Albartross builds its nest in Food Exchange

There are plenty of keen (and very good) golfers in the Market, but did you know that if you work here, the fastest growing British premium golf shoe brand in the world is at most a booming drive away from you?

Royal Albartross has its HQ right here, in the Food Exchange. Founder and Head Designer Alex Bartholomew launched the company in 2012 and she remains involved in every step of the brand’s creative direction and the product development process. “Our HQ is here, but we trade all over the world from our own website ‘albartross.com’,” said Alex. “Our biggest market currently is in fact the US, where our shoes are also available in the leading golf and country clubs.

“Great design and comfort are central to our success as is our insistence on high quality. That is why we only use the best

materials, and our shoes are handcrafted in Italy and Portugal. We are specialists in creating beautiful footwear that can be used both on and off the golf course.”

Royal Albartross selects from the most skilled artisans across Europe, choosing to work with talented Italian and Portuguese craftsmen who use manufacturing techniques passed down from generation to generation. Its factories are family-run businesses.

“Royal Albartross is not defined by quick trends or mass consumerism,” Alex added. “Our styles are founded in the classic aesthetics of the finest game in the world, they’re slower to change, built to last and hold their value.”

Go to Albartross.com to find out more and sign up for their email newsletter to receive 10% off your first order.

12 days of festive giveaways

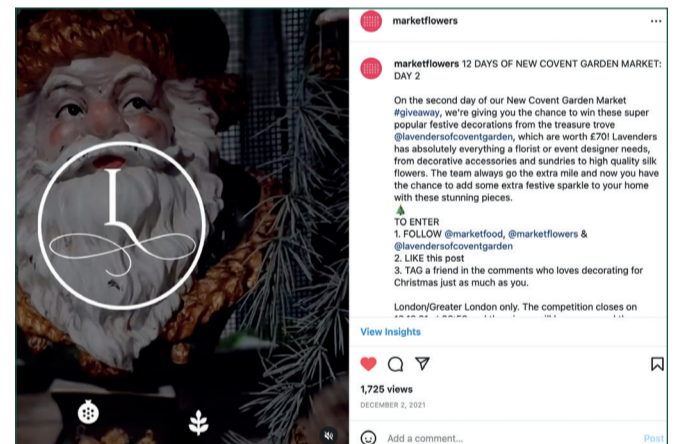
Tenants in the Fruit and Vegetable Market, the Flower Market and the Food Exchange all contributed prizes to our 12 Days of New Covent Garden campaign, which made a big impact across the Market’s social media channels in the run-up to Christmas.

More than 2,000 people entered the competition to win the daily prize by tagging and following our Instagram posts, and we gained almost 1,000 new followers in the process.

The prizes included a fresh fruit and vegetable hamper, a beautiful bouquet of seasonal flowers, a tower of chocolate treats and a box of quaffable Swig Wine and engagement with our audience shot through the roof during the campaign – averaging out at 30%, compared to the normal Instagram rate of 3%.

All of the tenants who were kind enough to donate prizes also benefited from the

exposure, saw an uplift in followers on their own Instagram feeds and were able to market themselves to a wide and varied audience.



Sue looks to trace line drawing artist from 1970s

We received a note from Sue Lovelock, whose dad owned Fisher Ltd in Covent Garden back in the early 70s, around the time the Market moved to Nine Elms. In 1972, a pencil artist named Tony Matthews went round the businesses drawing some of them and Sue has this one of the limited edition drawings of her dad’s business.

“Does anyone know or have one of these drawings or any knowledge of the artist? I have tried googling him but with not much



luck!” asks Sue. If you do, email tommy.leighton@cgma.co.uk



Mild weather allows redevelopment project to catch up

The predominantly dry weather in December and early January has enabled work on A2 block to get back on track to hit its scheduled end date of June 20th.

“We were running a few weeks behind, but made up quite a lot of time because we managed to get concrete poured on the other side of Christmas,” said CGMA Project Director Tony O’Reilly. “The weather was kind to us. That’s been good for drying out the soil and we’ve been

able to re-sequence the programming and pull back a couple of weeks already. By continuing the re-sequencing and working longer hours and at weekends, we think we’ll get right back to the original schedule.”

The structured steelwork is now all in place and the roofing has been fitted, while work is underway to fit cladding to the walls and roof, as well as solar panels to the roof. As the internal concrete slabs were poured and cured over Christmas,

the internal walls are now being erected. The toilets are tiled and almost complete and the next phase of the fit out will be able to start soon.

East Link Bridge

Work on the East Link Bridge was put on hold temporarily to allow for the busy Christmas trading period, however all of the asbestos insulating boards and glazing has been removed and the bridge is now

down to its skeleton. The next stage of the work is the concrete breakout and structured steel removal and, in view of the potential disruption this might cause to some elements of trade in the Market, the plan is to commence breaking out at 10 or 11am in the mornings, once the majority of the day’s trade has been finished.

Work to demolish the bridge will be completed by the end of Spring.

Joint support for peaceful advent installation



Covent Garden Market Authority and Vinci St Modwen jointly supported ‘A forest for peace in the city’ as Window 7 of the Nine Elms Arts Ministry Advent Calendar.

The beautiful installation was the creation of Wandsworth-based artist Luke Walker, in collaboration with gardening consultant Lindsay Schuman and the staff & children at Griffin Primary School. It was installed on Merchant’s Way, the new walkway through the Market, between Embassy Gardens and the Nine Elms Tube Station.

The stunning backdrop was painted by Luke, the decorations were made by the children and, with sustainability in mind, this urban forest used container-grown trees from the Flower Market, which have since been transferred to other local locations.

Thousands of local people walked the trail in their attempt to discover all 24

Advent Windows in their local district from the beginning of December to January 5th. They were also encouraged to post their photos of the windows on social media, use the hashtags [NineElmsAdvent](#) and [#newcoventgardenmarket](#) and follow our feeds.

Luke said: “The window was inspired by the staff and students at Griffin Primary School who have turned an underused space in their school into a natural wilderness. The work celebrates how Nine Elms and New Covent Garden Market is being transformed, trying to capture the energy and dynamism such change can bring.

“Taking a moment to pause in our busy lives, to stop and contemplate what it means to be a citizen and how we can connect and protect our local environments and how, even in the busiest of places, we can find a moment of peace.”

Students back in the Flower Market

November and December saw the very welcome return of large groups of college students and their tutors visiting the Flower Market.

East Sussex based Plumpton College students had an early start on a cold November morning to ensure they were at the Market bright and early with plenty of time to enjoy the abundance of autumnal flowers, foliage and plants. The 20 students were split into two groups as they were shown through the market and introduced to traders before being left to themselves to soak up and enjoy everything.

Kingston Maurward College travelled up from Devon and stayed in a nearby hotel the night before their visit. Students were introduced to traders by long-time market customer and famous florist, Simon Lycett. Simon encouraged students to pick up bunches of flowers or foliage they liked before using those flowers in his lesson for them on how to create a large centre piece arrangement. Tutor Tracey Nadin said they loved the Market in the Christmas



season so much, but will return in May and experience the different colours, scents and textures of Spring.

Rebecca Barrett at CGMA said: “The Flower Market traders enjoy college students visiting them. They want to see more students in the market - any college that wants to visit just needs to get in touch.”

Meet the members at Mission Kitchen

Mission Kitchen’s Ivan Cardoso is hosting a weekly breakfast to introduce members to each other and extends an invite to all tenants of the Market who would like to sample some of the food produced by MK members and also explore potential business opportunities. A breakfast meeting will be held every Tuesday at 9am, in ‘The Food Exchange’. You will need to inform Ivan in advance if you wish to attend – please email ivan@missionkitchen.org

MOMO Kombucha adding new flavours to Market mix

As every Market Times reader will know, the modern New Covent Garden Market is far more than a fresh fruit, vegetable and flower wholesale site. One of the more recent additions to the fold is MOMO Kombucha, which you'll find in the railway arches.

MOMO was founded by husband and wife Josh and Lisa Puddle from their home in South East London, having been inspired by kombucha they encountered on a trip to New York. They soon outgrew their kitchen and have since brewed and bottled by hand in their brewery at the Market.

Kombucha is fermented tea thought to have originated 2,000 years ago. It is made of four simple ingredients: tea, water, sugar and a SCOBY (Symbiotic Culture Of Bacteria and Yeast). During fermentation, the yeasts consume the sugar and produce alcohol, then the bacteria consumes this alcohol to produce the acids that give kombucha its sour flavour and contribute to its health benefits.

Kombucha is packed full of naturally occurring probiotics which aid digestion and help maintain balance in the body's internal ecosystem. So, it's not only delicious but also a dose of goodness for the gut. It also contains antioxidants and vitamins that increase energy, support joint health, reduce blood sugar levels and act as a natural detoxifier.

When properly brewed it is a slightly fizzy and refreshing soft drink that is low in sugar and naturally contains healthy organic acids. Every bottle of MOMO is certified as 100% organic (by the Soil Association), fermented in a small glass jar and completely unfiltered.

MOMO's award-winning kombucha comes in four delicious flavours: Ginger-Lemon, Turmeric, Elderflower and Raspberry-Hibiscus. Josh said: "Lisa had been reading about Gut Health and had heard that kombucha was fantastic for bringing the gut and the body back in to balance as it

promotes and maintains a healthy digestive function. By the end of the New York trip we were hooked and were noticing positive changes that we felt were related to the kombucha - we had more energy and felt less bloated.

"Back in London, we wanted to continue feeding our kombucha cravings. We decided to start brewing our own and the idea for MOMO was born. From day one we have brewed each batch in a small glass jar and we always will. This is the old-fashioned way to brew and the only way to produce the highest quality kombucha. Starting MOMO Kombucha was our way of living more connected and healthier lives."

Pictured: Lisa and Josh launched their business after some Big Apple inspiration and initially focused on the core range below



Kombucha to excite beer drinkers

In January, as many Brits were trying to stay 'dry', MOMO launched "a non-alcoholic option that beer drinkers can get excited about". Produced in collaboration with Orbit Beers, the Limited Edition Hops Kombucha is equal parts complex and refreshing and 20p from every bottle sold will be donated to Ol Pejeta, a Kenyan Wildlife Conservancy.

"Beer lovers and kombucha lovers, it's time to unite," said Josh. "Orbit, based down the road in South East London, make truly exceptional beers. We were more than intrigued to start experimenting with hops in kombucha and work with these unique flavours to bring together a good-for-your gut beer inspired drink."

Hallertau Blanc and Nelson Sauvin hops provide tropical fruit and gooseberry flavours, rounded out with a tart kombucha hit. "This kombucha has a complex flavour base, mapping citrus tones and herbal, earthy notes and is completely unfiltered for a much fuller depth of flavour," added Josh.

The 330ml bottles are available from www.momo-kombucha.com/shop with x6, x12 and x24 bottle cases available.



We can be heroes

As you will have read on page 2, New Covent Garden Market was very proud to receive an award on recognition of its work to maintain the supply of healthy food to London and the South East as the pandemic ravaged less resilient parts of the supply chain. There were so many the initiatives that led to the Market being awarded this prize – but we think it's worthwhile sharing five of the highlights, in order that Market Times readers get a fuller picture of the generosity of spirit of this great Market.



In this newspaper, we often find ourselves justifiably singing the praises of the tenants of the Market, but sometimes, it's lovely to have other people to do that for us. The judges of the FPC Fresh Awards, on giving the Hero Award to New Covent Garden Market, said it was in recognition of "a fantastic response by all at NCGM during the pandemic to reinvent themselves when the hospitality sector ground to a halt overnight. The market's inbuilt fortitude and solidarity to support existing customers while rapidly developing new direct-to-customer services was exemplary. In adversity, its traders fed and flowered London. While facing challenges themselves, their generosity to the local community was steadfast."

Here are just some of the reasons they came to this conclusion, when judging the Market against acts of heroism across the entire UK fresh produce industry.

Flexible and rapid response to the needs of London

Around 80% of sales at NCGM are destined for the hospitality and foodservice sectors and every one of the tenants at the Fruit and Vegetable Market felt the effect, some more keenly than others.

Particularly at the outset, the crisis created unforeseen gaps in supply and access to food. The just-in-time model of the nation's supermarket chains was tested like never before, often resulting in a shortage of product both on shelves and through online channels. Although this was corrected over time, there was a period in which NCGM (and other wholesale markets across the UK) and their independent retail customers were able to trade as normal, while those around them dealt with their challenges.

Many NCGM tenants supported their retail customers as they created food hubs and delivery options for their local customers. With so many people in complete isolation and unable or unwilling to visit their local superstore due to the large volumes of people they would encounter and the socially distanced queues, these hubs became a lifeline – they also fostered a newfound community spirit and connections that proved invaluable to so many people who were stuck in their homes.

Not only that, but this new connection with local suppliers and the value they provide to their communities was being re-established in a way that will hopefully have an ongoing impact.

Produce donated free to frontline workers

As soon as it became evident that the pandemic was causing product shortages, Kenny Marshall began organising regular deliveries of free fruit and vegetables for the frontline staff at St George's Hospital (and later Kings College Hospital) in south London. The wide selection of fruit, veg and salad was donated by wholesalers and catering suppliers across the Market and consolidation and delivery was co-ordinated by Kenny. Bags were supplied to doctors, nurses and porters working in the ICU departments, to enable them to select the produce they wanted and take it home.

Another London hospital, University College Hospital London, also received free supplies for around two months from Bevington Salads – an initiative set-up and supported by former FPC President Nicholas Saphir. This has continued on an at-cost basis and the staff at this hospital are also receiving weekly deliveries to the present day.



Charitable Partnerships

All manner of formal and informal partnerships were formed by NCGM tenants during the lockdowns, with charities of all causes and sizes. Huge volumes of produce were donated for free, but one project both served to generate much needed business for the market and protect local jobs, and supported the people on the frontline of the crisis.

From the very beginning of the pandemic, NCGM partnered with volunteers at Harvest for Heroes to provide NHS staff with fresh produce. Everyone in the market was encouraged to play their part by providing fresh produce boxes for the cause, as Oliver Bailey and his team of volunteers at Harvest for Heroes initially aimed to raise £500,000 to give frontline NHS staff access to daily, free fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy and pasta at the end of long and difficult shifts.

Fruit and vegetable boxes sourced from NCGM were delivered to all of the major London hospitals, where staff were under unprecedented pressure and often unable to shop outside of their gruelling hours. Providing NHS staff with free boxes of fruit, vegetables, milk and other essentials, Harvest for Heroes continued to work with NCGM tenants, co-ordinated by Premier Fruits, throughout the pandemic.

Partnership with Uber Eats

Three NCGM traders partnered with the fast-expanding Uber Eats app to offer a range of nutritious produce boxes, delivered to customers' doors at the click of a button.

Thanks to this new initiative, set up in May 2020, London's consumers could now use the Uber Eats app to order hand-picked boxes of fruit and vegetables from NCGM wholesalers Fresh Connect, Fruit for the Office and West Green Foods.

Located in the Uber Eats grocery section, the range of healthy home delivery fruit and veg boxes were available to London postcodes. All boxes included information about the provenance of the produce, plus serving suggestions to help the public gain a better understanding of their food.

Direct to consumer

Within days of the first lockdown hitting, more than 30 NCGM businesses rapidly re-calibrated their offer, moving from a business-to-business offer to directly serving consumers via home delivery boxes of fresh fruit and vegetables.

The communications team at Covent Garden Market Authority (CGMA) created a section dedicated to this home delivery service on its website and supported the promotional effort throughout. It proved extremely popular – generating more than 1,000 unique user visits per day at its peak and still seeing significant traffic. There's no doubt that demand dropped as the third lockdown ended, but the model was vital during the pandemic and will remain as part of many of several traders' offers moving forward.

Market heroes help local breakfast club

Our traders did not become heroes during the pandemic, of course. Here are details of just one of the many ongoing charitable causes they support on a daily basis – The Breakfast Club at Holy Trinity Church, Clapham Common.

Originally a Food Bank, which featured an extensive fruit and vegetable stall and also supplied dried and canned goods, the reshaped project has been set up to offer guests tea, coffee and toast as well as eggs and pastries. It retains the free fruit and veg stall and, says one of the organisers Janie Yang, the stall has always been a major draw.

"It encourages those on low incomes, whose children have free school meals, and the homeless, to collect lovely fresh produce for their families. There is always a very good offering of fruit and vegetables that can be eaten raw - which is useful for those with no cooking facilities," she adds.

"The Club is very well attended and offers a welcoming and safe place to meet friends and also to be listened to. "We started looking after 12 families and now 170 people come each week. Most have at least one child, but many have 3-4 children so it is pleasing to know they are getting fresh healthy food, and nothing is going to waste."

Many problems are resolved and guests feel they can have helpful, impartial advice on all sorts of things from housing to help looking for jobs. More than anything, they feel that someone is on their side and they are therefore not alone.

"We have Church donations and government funding to buy some staple goods at wholesale prices," says Janie. "Then we rely enormously on a few very empathetic and generous New Covent Garden Market traders, to sort out produce that is not suitable for their customers, slightly past its sell by date but perfectly useable. We trim it and display it beautifully and in a small way prevent a good deal of waste. Our clients are really delighted when they see what is on offer and it is uplifting for them to feel we all care and that things that may be unaffordable are given with such generosity.

"Here are some of our heroes from the Market:

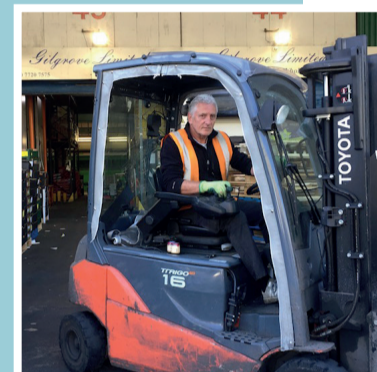
We buy some produce from **Alan at Mealmaker** and from **Lay's of Chelsea**. This is at wholesale prices and frankly it puts the largest supermarket to shame profiting out of Meal tokens. Our guys in the market also very generously give us any excess produce that has been rejected by the chefs of the restaurants they supply. Once we had Portobello mushrooms that were too big for the burger buns!

Other donators are **Paul from Yes Chef**, **Damian from Life on the Veg**, **Simon at Greenfield Mushrooms** and also **Gary and Paul from Gilgrove** who are especially generous with fruit. We are especially grateful to **Alfie and Nick at Lay's** who always look out great produce for us, along with a few witticisms to cheer us in the early morning. We bring back all the crates and boxes to Lay's or Mealmaker, where they are stored and re-used - thus completing a second use cycle and avoiding the costs of recycling production and landfill.

"Even when times have been hard with little left over produce, our heroes at New Covent Garden have still very generously given us fresh produce that makes a huge difference to our guests' lives. They really have been so warm hearted, kind and have all gone the extra mile to help people in need.



Pictured: Paul at Yes Chef loads up the car with fresh, nutritious produce ready to go directly to Holy Trinity Fresh Food Bank



Pictured: Gary (pictured) and Paul at Gilgrove give TFB loads of top notch fruit, which is "extremely well received" by people living on the streets



Pictured: Alan Edwards at Mealmaker has supported the project from the beginning and now sells some goods to organisers



Pictured: Nick Lay (pictured) and his uncle Alfie, at Lay's of Chelsea, are "very generous and always sort out some fantastic fruit"



Pictured: One of the wonderful TFB volunteers displays a tray of mushrooms donated by Simon at Greenhills



Peter reflects on a lifetime in the Market

Peter Green is your classic 'Covent Garden, man and boy' and has worked in the Market for 46 years. January 21st marked a special milestone for his business though as Smith & Green, which he set up with his great mate Billy Smith, turned 30. Peter talks to Market Times about his career

How did you end up in the Flower Market and how did Smith & Green come about?

My dad Phil was a director of Sam Cook, a chain of greengrocers with 86 stores at the height of its powers, which bought all of its produce from Covent Gardens old and then New, and also had its HQ in the Market. I used to go to the Market with him and always knew this is where I'd end up, but thought I'd be working in the fruit and veg market. Dad also bought flowers for Sam Cook and said I should have a year in the flower market first because it fitted in better with his hours, then get myself a vehicle and move over to the fruit and vegetable market. I left school in Warlingham on the Friday and started as a standboy at William Newton's in New Covent Garden on the Monday.

After my stint at Newton's, I did seven years as a porter at J Foster, where I got to know the Country Orders ropes, and then became a buyer for A Chapman Flowers. The guvnor Arthur had a heart attack and I ran the firm for him for a couple of years and that's what gave me the skills to be set up my own business.

The move across to fruit and veg never did happen. After that first year, I was offered an interview at Bradley and Wooderson (in the fruit and veg market) a year later, but I'd made friends and was settled. I've never regretted it for one minute.

My dad took early retirement in 1981 because he saw how the trade was changing and didn't think Sam Cook would be able to compete with the supermarket chains. People thought he was mad, but within two years the whole chain had shut down. He flew as a bombardier/navigator in Wellington Bombers in the second world war and was a prisoner of war in Poland for four years. All he ever said about it was that it was bloody freezing and that when he retired, he was going to live in the sunshine! True to his word, he bought a place in Spain and spent most of his time out there before he died, aged 98, in 2019.

How has your business evolved through the last 30 years?

There were around 10 firms in the Market doing Country Orders when we started. That was a national delivery service for floristry and I'd been working with it before, as had Billy, my business partner.

New Covent Garden was still the central hub for the flower trade all around the country and Smith & Green was among those firms sending flowers across England Scotland and Wales on a daily basis. We would load up and deliver for the 7am train and the packages would be in Swansea by 10.30am. It was a fantastic service and the Market must have been one of British Rail's biggest customers. But it moved from BR to Red Star and then to Lynx, before eventually someone decided it should be done by road and the whole thing fell apart.

I'd lost all of my customers in two months - so much product was late, damaged or just went missing. I sent some flowers to a lady

Pictured above and right: Peter and his son Jack, who has worked with his dad for more than a decade now



“ Anyone in the flower industry who doesn't come to New Covent Garden at least once a month is a fool to themselves



in East Anglia for her wedding and they arrived three days after she'd got married. We obviously couldn't continue like that and we had no real control over it, so we decided to concentrate on local business.

Billy had a delivery round in Essex, around 15-20 shops, and we picked up some hotels and we were doing more and more delivery. Losing the Country Orders work was a blow, but we knew it wasn't the end. The shops in Essex have long gone now too, but Smith & Green was up and running and we had diversified sufficiently to ensure we had a future.

Somewhere around the turn of the century, we began serving Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle. The Palace florists tested us out on smaller bits and pieces at first until we became their major wholesale flower supplier from 2003. We got the Royal Warrant in 2011 and we're still providing the Queen and other members of the Royal family with flowers to this day. It's a fantastic honour.

Some of the biggest five star hotels in London have also become customers of ours and when Billy retired in 2011, Paul Winyard became my new business partner. He was a veteran of the Country Orders set too and had established business with customers on Jersey, which he brought into the fold. My son Jack came into the business at that time too. Until Covid, we had a team of five. But in the last couple of years, there have just been

the three of us. Jack and Paul do most of the delivery work, while I keep things ticking over at the Market.

I've never sold anything that wasn't ordered. I get in at about 2am and about half of the product is delivered in from Holland and the rest I then go out and buy on the Market. In a normal year, I'd have spent between £400,000 and £500,000 on the Market, but the last couple of years have obviously been a bit different. We suffered like everyone – I actually took more money on the first day of January this year than I took in the whole of January 2021. I think pride and resilience has got most of us in the Market through it – we don't want to just give up.

Your dad was obviously a big influence on the direction your life took, but who would you pick out as your greatest influences since you've worked in the Market?

I've learnt off so many people, but I suppose the three I'd pick out are Arthur Curtis at Chapmans, who taught me how to run a firm, Johnny Corderoy, who taught me how to buy and Billy, who taught me how to be with people and talk to people. I worked with Billy for 35 years and we never had a row, he always had a smile on his face and never had the hump. He's not well now, but what a fantastic man he was.

How do you feel the Market is set up for the future?

I do feel a bit sad that the trade has dwindled how it has over the years, but this is still the best flower market in the country and I don't see the amount of trade done here getting any less now. People love buying flowers – you only have to go to Colombia Road on a Sunday to see that.

And I'm very positive about where this market will be once the redevelopment is done and the surrounding areas are all built up around us. I can see it remaining as a very successful wholesale market on weekdays and becoming a retail destination on the weekends. There may be a few less firms, who knows, but they will be making a good living.

Why should people come to buy their flowers at the Market?

This market cannot be beaten by any internet supplier for two main reasons:

Time – I can deliver more quickly than any firm selling over the internet – you ring me up at midnight and place an order and if that product is available you'll have it by 7am

Outside of work

Peter is a lifelong Chelsea follower and a big enough England cricket fan to have travelled to Australia to watch the Ashes. He tragically lost his daughter Molly though and his priorities have changed. Molly's horse Rome was left without his friend and rider and Peter knew she would not have wanted him to find Rome a new owner. So he took up riding and since he has entered jumping and dressage competitions, as well as emulating Molly in riding Rome in the Queen's New Year Parade.

You only need to talk to Peter for a few minutes to know how much the riding experience he may never have had has meant to him.

Not content with one pursuit that would scare the living daylights of most mere mortals, he has also taken up marathon running and raised tens of thousands of pounds for charities that are close to his heart – Clockwork, which was set up in his daughter's name in Oxted, suicide prevention charities Papyrus and The Mental Health Foundation, and Matthew's Friends.



Expertise and experience – come to the market and you can see what you're buying. Buy online, you see a picture, not what you're going to get – come to the market, you can see, touch and smell the flowers, or buy from me and I am your eyes. You know what you're going to get from me because I've got 46 years' experience of being my customers' eyes.

In my opinion, anyone in the flower trade who doesn't come to New Covent Garden at least once a month is a fool to themselves. It's not all about the Dutch telling you what price you have to pay and you accepting it – here you can compare and contrast products and people, see what's available and when and form your own judgements on who and what is good value or otherwise. And you can do that with a bacon buttie and a cup of coffee and enjoy socialising with people and a bit of good-natured banter while you're at it. I can't see what's not to like, but I suppose I am a bit biased!

Coxy shops the Market for WOW! factor

Having started out in the trade aged 22, Darren 'Coxy' Cox has long been known as Coxy the Vegman in Suffolk, where he's not just the fruit and vegetable guru for the local population, but also a sometime radio and TV personality. He's been buying the majority of his fresh produce from New Covent Garden for nearly a quarter of a century and we caught up with him one night in the Market to find out more

"My brother ran fruit stalls in Ipswich, that's how I got into it," says Darren. "I was helping him out and planned to do a YTS course, but he said you can go and earn £25 a week on your YTS or I'll pay you £150 a week. It wasn't the toughest decision I ever made!"

Over the next decade or so, Darren learned his trade working for various fruit and vegetable businesses in Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich, but he has since built his own empire around his first market stall, which was set up just over 20 years ago, in Sudbury, virtually on the county line separating Suffolk and Essex.

Appropriately enough for a business that sells plenty of apples, there is now a bunch of Coxes working at Cox's Fruit and Vegetables, as Darren's four sons, Charlie (26), Fred (25), George (23) and Henry (19) all work with him in various guises, something he loves – most of the time!

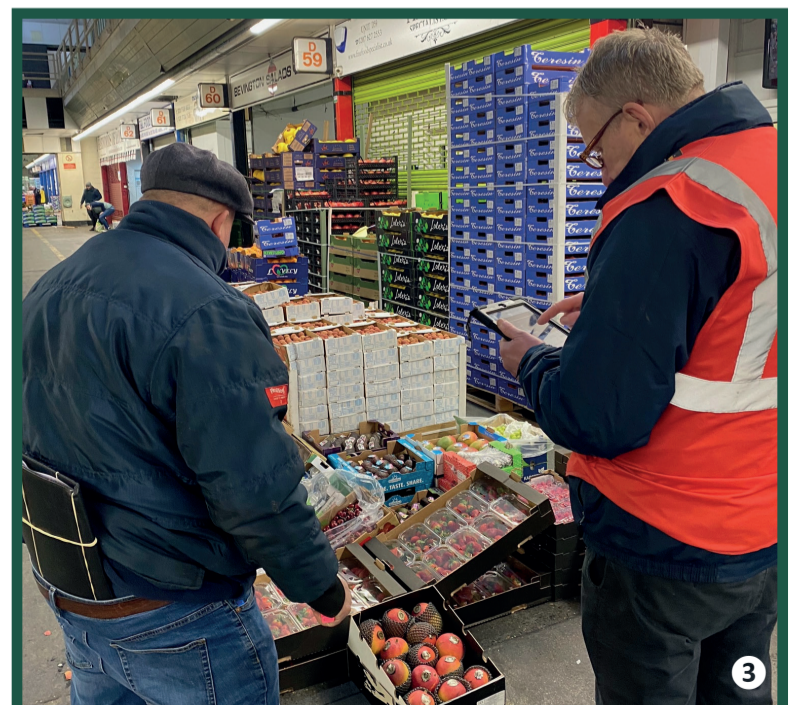
There is plenty for them all to do. In the last few years, the company has added a Chelmsford stall and a second Sudbury stall to its armory, as well as Cox Bros, which delivers Covid-inspired Cox's Boxes direct to local consumers from a Sudbury warehouse, and most recently Coxy's at Spencers, which runs out of Spencers Farm Shop in Halstead, Essex.

"The family's been based in Sudbury for nearly 30 years and we'd predominantly still call ourselves street market traders," Darren says. "We run two stalls in Sudbury every Thursday and Saturday and one in Chelmsford, on Fridays and Saturdays. Since I set up that first stall I've been coming to New Covent Garden several times a week and now Charlie shares the nights with me – he generally comes Monday nights and Wednesday nights and I do Tuesdays and Fridays, although we do come in five nights a week fairly often. We have two 18-tonne lorries and a fleet of vans."

Foot soldiers

Darren and Charlie purchase in what could be termed the traditional fashion. "We're foot soldiers," Darren says. "We walk up and down, up and down. I used to be an early buyer, but as my business has got bigger, I've gone later – we can't be in at midnight and then run the stalls all day. Until recently, we'd get in as late as 4-5am, but now if we're not there by 3am, we're late."

They know exactly what they are looking for and, says Darren, this has changed significantly since he first paced Buyers Walk. "Twenty years ago, someone would come to their local street market to look for something cheap and cheerful, now they come to me for product that is top quality and not something they can really get in a supermarket. Our approach is to go in with at least the quality of Tesco Finest or Sainsbury's Taste the Difference and offer a little more value than the supermarkets do. We tend to go for a fair amount of the WOW! stuff, the great big pomegranates or oranges for instance that are unusual and catch people's eye.



“Obviously, pricing can be a challenge at times – it certainly has been lately, but that’s where our expertise as buyers comes into play. Our customers understandably don’t necessarily understand why fruit and vegetables cost what they do, or that I am buying from a ‘live’ market.

“Of course I’m always looking for the best quality and the best price,” he adds, “but it’s really important to recognise that price is not always the be-all and end-all and to think about the varying requirements of your own customers too. I could have paid £2 for cherry tomatoes recently, but I ended up paying £9 because that product met my spec. You can’t explain that to people who don’t know why or how it works.

Five Ps

“Because a lot of the product sold by the wholesale markets these days is programmed, there are definitely less of buyers like us around. Both when I’m buying and selling, I work around five Ps – and not necessarily in any order. They are Price, Presentation, Product, Person Selling and Position. To explain that, you can have the best product in the world, but if you’re in the wrong place to sell it and it’s not the right price, you haven’t got a chance.”

Talking about positioning, Cox’s Boxes sprang into action when the local population needed regular, nutritious food boxes at the height of the pandemic and the business continued to thrive even when restrictions were lifted. And as well as fruit, vegetables and a full range of food and drink at Spencers Farm Shop, which the family purchased towards the end of 2020, there is a gift shop and a 50-seat café, which is a new string to the Coxes’ bow. Until the family got involved, they were suppliers to the farm and now, as well as managing a successful retail outlet, Fred runs a multi-faceted business.

“Every one of the guvnors of the firms in the Market has a heart of gold

George, who works with Charlie and Darren on the wholesale and retail market side of the business, has also established a popular Christmas tree business over the last four years, which trades successfully from the farm and proudly provided the town council with its 33-ft tree in 2021. Henry is training to be an electrician, but he’s also working with his dad and brothers during the weekends and Darren hopes he will one day come into the fold.

“You’ve got to love what you do. It’s an extremely challenging profession and we often talk about the DODs – our dilemmas of the day. Whatever they are though, you just have to get on and deal with them,” he says.

Relationships and care

As the Cox stable has grown in size, the family has become a far bigger customer at the market and the traders at New Covent Garden are often there to help solve those DODs. That’s appreciated by Darren. “I like New Covent Garden because of the fantastic relationships I have built up there and the fact that I get well looked after,” he says. “I buy from everyone on Buyers Walk and because I’ve been coming a long time and I’m a good customer, certain firms will accommodate me and go that extra mile to ensure that I get what I need, whether that’s the use of their canopy to load up when it’s raining or a particular product that they know I’d want. It makes a massive difference.

“I love the banter too – I think the only other place you’ll get that sort of thing is on a building site. Most of the guvnors of the firms and the salesmen I trade with every week are undoubtedly hard-nosed businessmen who won’t give an inch, but deep down, every one of them genuinely has a heart of gold.”

Although as a business, he knows he gets looks after by certain firms because he’s a longstanding customer, Darren also believes that he’s not given preferential treatment as a buyer. He says: “I don’t think they deal with me any differently to how they’d deal with a newcomer. Of course they respect me as I respect them, but it’s a fiercely competitive time and everyone is fighting for every pound. That’s exactly how it should be.”



Pictured:

1. Darren and George with a pallet of sprout stalks, cannily pre-ordered to beat the Christmas rush
2. First stop of the night is at P&I to check off the order
3. On to Bevingtons, where Darren is checking out the soft fruit and citrus
4. A stop at Gilgrove allows Coxy to cross out a few more items on his carefully prepared list
5. Several more lines were purchased from Thorogoods - Darren shops with every firm on buyers' walk at some time during the night

Happy
Customer

★★★★★

Peter aims for best in practice

Peter Nolan is Assistant Market Manager / Facilities Manager at Covent Garden Market Authority.

In a nutshell, Peter's role supports CGMA General Manager Jo Breare on the day-to-day running of the Market, working collaboratively with people both internally and externally to ensure best in practice procedures are adhered to and that the Market operates effectively.

Amongst Peter's many responsibilities are ensuring that CGMA is adhering to all health and safety legislation, managing workplace transport and vehicle safety and also making sure that the Market meets its obligations on high-profile issues such as the environment, water and electrical safety and waste management and hygiene.

We asked him to expand on these three core areas.

What are the key things you're looking at regarding H&S at the moment?

There are always plenty of things going on, but right now, the Fork Lift Truck Registration is due out and so we are looking at ensuring everyone reads and complies with the rules and completes the forms. We sent an email out to the key contacts at every company in the Market recently, including the documents that you need to fill in, and I'd urge everyone to take the time to read the detail. It's not overly complex, but it is very important.

How big a job is managing workplace transport and vehicle safety?

One of the reasons for the creation of my job was to deal with this, but I have to say that the scale of the issue is nothing like what I was expecting. Thankfully, even though the market operates predominantly in darkness, with minimal space and large amounts of movement, incidents remain extremely low; much lower than you might imagine. Vehicles clearly get damaged from time to time, but in my time here, there has only been one incident involving a pedestrian and both parties were at fault.

The key thing of course is that no-one gets hurt and due to our enforcement of the market regulations and the skills and adherence from drivers across the Market, we are achieving that. The enforcement policy is there for a very good reason and the fact that it works illustrates exactly why we should continue to follow it.

How is CGMA ensuring that it meets the obligations outlined above?

This broadly comes under the Environmental Sustainability and Governance (ESG) banner and again, I'd say that CGMA does far more than it perhaps gives itself credit for in this respect.

Particularly because we are undertaking this redevelopment programme, we are constantly looking for not only quick wins, but also initiatives that will have real long-term benefits both on efficient and effective use of all kinds of energy and the disposal of waste in evermore environment-friendly ways.

Many of the Market's tenants are already doing their own individual things to reduce their footprints and increase their efficiency as businesses, but one of my roles is to help CGMA and our tenants to find ways we can all work together to make the Market as environment-friendly as it can possibly be.

Personal Fact File

Place of Birth

Liverpool

Career Experiences

Appropriately enough, considering where I am now, my first job was as a runaround at Edge Lane Fruit and Veg Market in Liverpool. We just used to turn up and see who had some work for us, humping boxes around. I'm pretty sure they let us help because they felt sorry for us! Then, I joined the Royal Navy, and after leaving the Navy, I had 15 years' experience in building services/facilities management across retail, banking, the NHS, and real estate before I came to CGMA.

How does working at New Covent Garden compare?

I think it's an interesting mix of the experiences I had between working for my previous company, which was a landlord with a service charge – albeit for some very large and well-off businesses – and my time working with the NHS, where we were essentially working with the government. There are elements of both here and it's certainly an interesting environment to work in.

Lives in

Chislehurst, Kent

Family?

Three kids and a dog

What do you like to outside of work?

I try to spend as much time outside as possible to try and tire out three kids and a dog!

What are your favourite fruit, vegetable and flowers?

I like to grow my own, so anything that will work in the garden really.



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