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This issue's cover star is Tina of Mealmakers



H. G. Walker, DDP & Coughlans celebrate 25 years of partnership

H. G. Walker, DDP & Coughlans have forged a relationship that spans over a quarter of a century, premised on a loyalty to one another and this market, along with a passion for first-class produce.

The three businesses are huge supporters of British produce. Paul Grimshaw, Director at DDP, says “We talk with Eddie at Walkers every night and he’ll help select the best quality rhubarb, which arrives fresh from Westwoods in Yorkshire.” This ends up in Coughlans bakery, DDP’s customer of 25 years, in the form of mouth-watering crumbles, cakes, Danish pastries and tarts.

“Sean Coughlan is excellent with flavours and trying out new ideas and combinations, which we’re happy to support regularly,” says Paul. “From our grower at Westwood right through to one of our most long-standing customers at Coughlan’s, it’s an honour to be able to celebrate such a long-standing partnership together.”

Sean says; “For me the market is our lifeblood. The wonderful team at DDP assist me daily on the upcoming seasonal products that enable us to have that unique point of difference year round.”



Left to Right: Paul Grimshaw, Sean Coughlan and Eddie Barrett

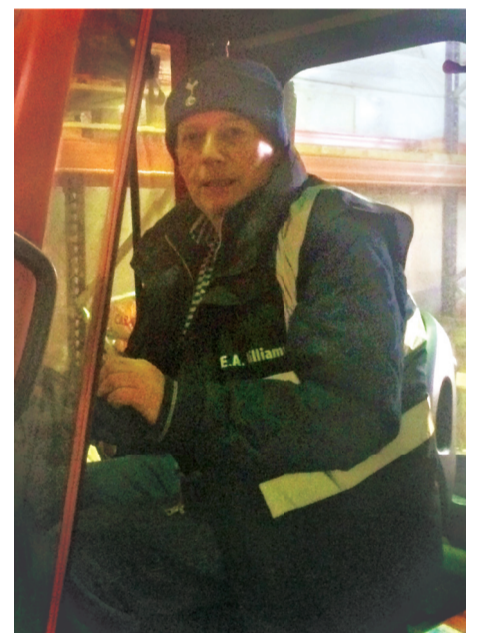


Left to Right: Hayley, with her father Bob Cooley of L Mills

Proud moment for father of the bride Bob Cooley

Bob Cooley, of L Mills in the Flower Market, had the great honour of walking his daughter Hayley down the aisle as he watched her marry the man of her dreams in a beautiful summer ceremony. Hayley and Christopher Dowd were married on 19 May in a little village in Chiddingfold, Surrey, on the same day as the Royal Wedding where the sun was shining and the weather was oh so sweet.

Bob says; “Thanks to everyone in the Flower Market who helped out with flowers on the day, much obliged and what a great bunch of guys. Thank you very much to everyone who sent their congratulations too. I was so proud and Hayley looked so beautiful.”



Above: Thomas Mole

Thomas Mole retires after a lifetime of service on the market

Thomas Mole, of E.A. Williams on the Fruit and Veg Market, has bid farewell to market life and welcomed in retirement.

“We would like to thank Tom for all the hard hours on the market and his impeccable forklift driving. We wish him well, along with his beloved football team,” said Andrew, Geof and the team at E.A Williams.

The market commemorates 100 years of female suffrage

It was a privilege for New Covent Garden Market to host the Suffrage flag in the centenary year of women’s suffrage this April. The flag is on a year-long tour of Britain to commemorate when women received the right to vote. Here are some of the women on the market standing together in solidarity inside Bloomfield at the Flower Market.



Above: Women on the market with the Suffrage flag

Freddie Heathcote receives Young Person of the Year award

Congratulations to Freddie Heathcote, of Arnott & Mason in the Flower Market, who received the Young Person of the Year award at the Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC) Awards in June. This prestigious award recognises individual excellence within the trade and is a fantastic achievement for Freddie as he marks almost five years working at Arnott & Mason.

Nigel Jenney, Chief Executive of the FPC, says; "Congratulations to Freddie for giving the wow factor with plants for stores, offices and individuals. His lateral thinking and grit to succeed is inspirational."



Above: Freddie Heathcote of Arnott & Mason



Above: Finley Frederick Houlihan

Smiling from ear to ear

On 5 April, Dominic Houlihan of P&I Fruits in the Fruit and Veg Market, became a proud first time dad to the adorable Finley Frederick Houlihan. Our hearts have melted – and so has Dom's.

Weighing in at 7lb 2oz it's clear to see that little Finley is already the apple of his Dad's eye. Congratulations to Dom, Sophie and the whole family.



Left to Right: Frances Hunter of Floral Angels with the Duchess of Cornwall

Floral Angels receive the Royal treatment

In June, the team at Floral Angels met the Duchess of Cornwall at the Garden Museum for British Flowers Week, the campaign from New Covent Garden Market. This gave the Duchess the opportunity to see first-hand some of the stunning floral creations from florists chosen by the market, and find out more about the great work Floral Angels do. She helped them recycle flowers ready to deliver to Trinity Hospice later that day.

Floral Angels have been based at New Covent Garden Market since 2014. They take donated flowers from weddings, events, florists and retailers to restyle into beautiful arrangements to deliver to those in need within the community. They have donated almost 20,000 bouquets to date and regularly receive flowers from the market traders and customers.

Nature's Choice appoint Vernon Mascarenhas as Commercial Director

Nature's Choice is pleased to announce its appointment of Vernon Mascarenhas as the company's new Commercial Director. Vernon brings over 25 years of experience to Nature's Choice having owned successful restaurants in London, as well as pioneering bespoke growing for chefs and developing one of the first "sustainability in growing" programs in the country.

Company Co-Director Martin Dykes says, "We are extremely pleased to have Vernon on board and are particularly looking forward to the exciting produce development that Vernon and Westlands (producer of micro-herbs) have been working on, and look forward to launching this in the New Year."



Above: Vernon Mascarenhas of Nature's Choice

Peter Green battles the heat to raise over £8,000 in 2018 London Marathon

Peter Green, of Smith & Green in the Flower Market, beat both the heat and his previous time in this year's London Marathon in April. Despite a record high temperature of 23°C on the day, Peter ran the entire way and even managed to shave 12 minutes off last years' time to finish in 4hrs 48 mins.

"The marathon was good this year but very, very hot. I'm very humbled by the support from everyone in the Flower Market and would like to thank everyone who donated. The amount raised by the market community alone was around £2,600," said Peter.

In total Peter raised over £8,000 for local charity Clockwork which supports young people with depression, a cause close to Peter's heart after he lost his daughter Molly to suicide in 2015. He recently appeared in the nationwide Lloyds Bank TV campaign #GetTheInsideOut which partnered with Mental Health UK to raise awareness on mental health.



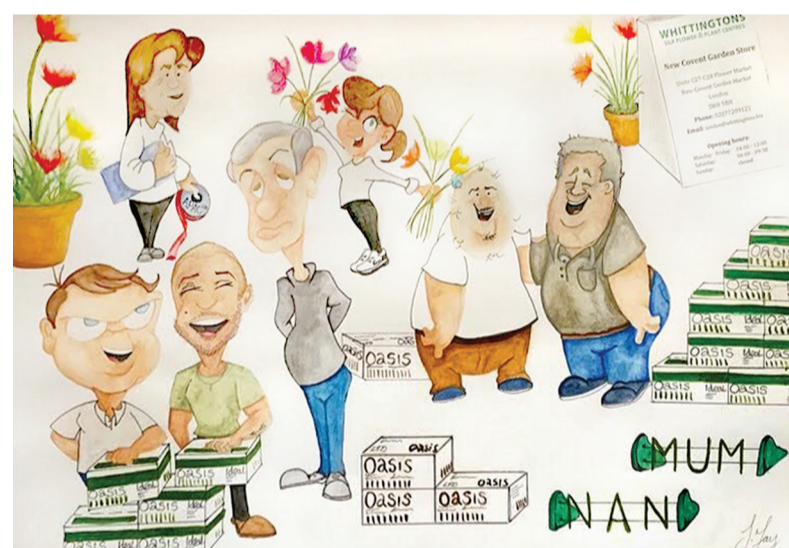
Above: Peter Green

Premier Fruits acquires Pavitt's Produce and Covent Garden Supply in 2018

Premier Fruits have had another busy year acquiring two new businesses on the market, Covent Garden Supplies and, most recently, Pavitt's Produce. The team at Covent Garden Supply have merged with Premier Catering, moving into their new home inside the Interim Distribution Units of the Food Exchange which marks an exciting new chapter for those involved.

On acquiring Pavitt's, Steve Sweeby at Premier Fruits says, "Pavitt's Produce has a reputation for quality and service, which fits perfectly within the Premier Fruits Group. All the colleagues at Premier Fruits would like to welcome the team at Pavitt's into the Premier Fruits Family."

Whilst Premier Fruits continues to look at opportunities to expand nationally, their heart and foundation will always be with New Covent Garden Market.



Artist in the making

Turns out there are other talents hidden amongst those silk flowers and sundries. John Fay, of Whittington's in the Flower Market, has been putting pen, pencil and paint to paper to produce these quirky caricatures of colleagues and friends in the market. Can you guess who's who?

Left: John Fay's illustration

Just Joe welcome new faces to the team

Just Joe recently expanded its team to welcome in Ray (Head Chef), Lucien (Assistant Chef), Massimo (HR & Training) and Brian (Kitchen Assistant), fresh talent to complement the company's focus on a development of new products including homemade pastas, veggie and vegan dishes.

Just Joe prides itself in sourcing most of its products from its home right here at New Covent Garden Market. Get in touch with the team for more info on hot and cold food deliveries straight to your office.



Left to right: Ray, Lucien, Massimo and Brian

Special mention to Oana Blaj of Premier Fruits

Premier Fruits would like to congratulate Oana Blaj, Head of Technical and Health and Safety at Premier Fruits, for passing her Level 4 Food Safety and BRC Internal Auditor exams. Congratulations Oana.



Above: Whittington's display

New products to Whittington's wedding and party range

Whittington's has recently added to its range of wedding and party supplies with eye-catching rose gold glassware, candle holders, urns and more now available in store. These were particularly popular during wedding season and look set to remain on trend for events over the coming months. Head to their shop in the Flower Market to peruse the latest.

OBITUARIES



Above: Charlie Hicks

Industry mourns the monumental loss of legendary Charlie Hicks

Industry legend Charlie Hicks, more fondly known to some as “Vegetable Yoda” due to his unrivalled expertise on fresh produce, passed away earlier this year after a short battle with cancer.

Hicks began his career at the old Covent Garden Market then later moved to its new premises at Nine Elms. He was a known champion for the small-scale growers to whom he gave a voice, described by many as that all important “link between field and fork.” After his death, tributes poured in including those from Gregg Wallace, with whom Hicks famously co-hosted the hugely successful Veg Talk Show on Radio 4. Jamie Oliver, Michel Roux Jr, and food critic Jay Rayner who described him as “the best bloody greengrocer ever there was.” All parts of the food industry have mourned his loss.

Here, Vernon Mascarenhas, of Nature’s Choice in the Fruit & Veg Market, shares some words on his late friend:

“Charlie was my mentor when I started this side of our industry. His knowledge was vast – he taught me so much about veg. Everyone knew Charlie for his wit, of which he had tonnes, but he was also a compassionate and caring man whose wife Anna and two sons meant everything to him. It’s hard to say what we’re losing because it’s so much. There isn’t really a comparison that can be made. I don’t know anyone who had a single bad word to say about him. I feel honoured, humble and privileged to say that Charlie was a true friend.”

In memory of Harvey (2001–2018)



Left to Right: Brad with his son Harvey

We are deeply saddened to share the news that long-standing trader Brad, of Zest in the Flower Market, recently lost his son Harvey. Harvey had a long term illness and passed away on 6 August aged 16 years old. As always, the market community have united to offer their condolences and support. Our thoughts are with Brad and his family at this extremely difficult time.

“A massive thank you to everyone in the Flower Market who has supported us

in the last few months. We appreciate the collection that you gave us. Thank you especially to Graeme and Kathy for allowing me to have time off work so that we could spend time together with Harvey as a family in his last few months. We are forever grateful.

Love Brad, Lorraine, Rob, Ryan and of course our Harvey”

In memory of Peter May (1946–2018)



Above: Peter May

Robert Hurren and the team at Covent Garden Supply honour their long-time colleague and friend, Peter May, who very sadly passed away on 28 May 2018.

“Peter May, a long term trader of the old Covent Garden Market and New Covent Garden Market, sadly passed away in May. Peter loved market life – he was always one of the first to arrive and the last to leave every day.

“Peter was a true gentleman, well liked both inside and outside the market. Another character of New Covent Garden Market who will be sorely missed. Rest in Peace,” said Robert Hurren of Covent Garden Supply.

Women on the market

2018 marks 100 years since women received the right to vote. In both commemoration and celebration of this landmark, we interviewed eight women to get their take on what it means to be a female working on the market today.



Above: Amy Edsell

Amy Edsell – Icebox

Amy Edsell is the Sales and Marketing Director at Icebox where she has worked for the past five years.

“Going from a corporate events company and being very smartly dressed, then coming to my interview here was like a breath of fresh air. It felt like coming back to my roots. A lot of people get put off stepping on fruit and veg on their way into work in the morning whereas I was like ‘yes! I feel at home!’”

“What I love most is how interesting the role is. I get to speak to a huge variety of people from every walk of life. Everyone knows what ice is but it’s about selling it as a product. Without having someone to sell the sculptures, we’d still be delivering just cubes so it’s a huge part of the business.”

“People who want to work for us need to have the hands on, roll-your-sleeves-up attitude. We work hard but it’s friendly and a lot of fun. It’s about 70–80% men as it’s very operational heavy, with the sheer muscle needed to be able to carry the bags of ice and sculptures, but it’s more female orientated on the sales side.”

“I suppose as females we have the art of conversation down. You know as soon as someone rings up what kind of ice sculpture they want by the way they say it. For quite a lot of parties, they’re either wanting willies or boobs, so maybe as a female it’s easier to get the words out than if it’s a brash male on the other side!”

Cristina Mocanu – Premier Prepared

Cristina Mocanu is the Operations Manager at Premier Prepared where she has worked for the past three years.

“Jason Tanner bought out our company in Dover a few years back so I moved to the main Premier office to work on accounts. I was studying as an accountant then, but we used to have a prep kitchen down in Dover so I knew how things were and what you needed to do to earn money. Jason asked me to go in to Premier Prep for two weeks and do whatever I liked to make it work. Two weeks passed, then another... After two months, he invited me to join full time.”

“Change was massive. I started with around 35 staff and a small turnover. Now, I have 99 staff on the payment run and we’ve managed to almost triple turnover. We had machinery that the staff weren’t using so I started introducing it into as many of

the processes as possible. Now, instead of processing 10 kilos by hand in a few hours we can do it by machine in five minutes. I really enjoy it because I run it like it’s basically my company.”

“When I came over to Prep and started dealing with all male customers, the way they talked could be harsh. I used to get shocked and upset. A few months later, I became one of them. I came to the conclusion that to survive in the market I had to. I’ve been told I am harder than many men. If I have to give you a telling off to do your job right, then I have to do it. Then we go have a beer. We can be friends outside but at work, we’re at work. If I wasn’t strict I wouldn’t stand a chance.”



Above: Cristina Mocanu



Above: Katie Meddings

Katie Meddings – Arnott & Mason

Katie Meddings works in Sales for Arnott & Mason where she has worked for the past two years.

“I previously trained as a florist but I’ve always been in this industry. I started in 1981 at H. Evans as the first female salesperson in the Flower Market. They all thought I was an undercover police woman – it was that unusual for women to come onto the market!

“Waking up early was always drummed into me from a very early age. I survive on very little sleep. I don’t think it’s a career that would suit everybody – the anti-social hours and managerial roles aren’t as readily available. Most people come into the business because of family, and you hear about it through word of mouth.

“There are a lot more women now and it’s a lot friendlier. The customers say it’s nice to see someone with a smile on their face. Plus, they can read my writing! It helps if you know your subject too. It was because of my plant knowledge that they wanted me to work at Arnott & Mason. I think I’m a good communicator, I’ve got a sunny disposition and I keep everyone happy. People come back and ask for you which is nice. I just love the buzz here – I’ve always loved it.”

Mary Walker – P&I Fruits



Above: Mary Walker

Mary Walker is the Office Administrator for P&I Fruits where she has worked for the past 10 years.

“Paul, Ian and I used to work at Pouparts together. I was there for 19 years. Then those two left to open their own business on the market, I rang Paul up one day to sell him some cherries and he offered me a job here at P&I Fruits – something I think he regrets to this day! It’s about six women to 44 men here. Women have always been outnumbered by men. As the years have gone on, more women have come into the market. I suppose times change. And all the older ones are dead!

“I’ve done a bit of everything here really but now, it’s mainly the accounts. I couldn’t

have a normal job. It’s a different way of life to working anywhere outside. It’s not like going to work – it’s like a comedy show! It’s really laid back and you can have a laugh but you need to be very hard skinned. And not take any notice of what people say. If you’re sensitive, it’s not the place to be. If you get a little shy 18-year-old out of school, they wouldn’t know what to make of it really. You either take to it or you don’t.

“I do think the men are more protective of the women. It’s like they can say what they like to us but I don’t know if they’d let anyone on the outside do the same. It’s another world here. One I’m glad to be part of though.”

Ashleigh and Georgia Kington – Fresh Connect



Left to Right: Ashleigh and Georgia Kington

Ashleigh and Georgia Kington are sisters who work together at Fresh Connect. Ashleigh’s worked on the market for 13 years as Sales and New Business Manager, and Georgia for 10 years as Operations Manager.

Ashleigh: “I started here when I was 17 years old. Generally, my role has been back office rather than buying. Most buyers are male as it’s a male dominated market but I wouldn’t say that’s why I didn’t do it, it’s more the hours. I don’t know how the guys do it. We’ve both done night shifts though. You need to know what goes on within the whole business to do the job.

“You need confidence to get ahead, especially in this market. You need to really know your role, the company you work for and to understand everyone else’s role – that’s how you get the respect. When I first started, there were a lot less females. There’s more women now, generally in the office based jobs. I think the market still has quite a long way to go but we want to progress, we want to change. We don’t want to get left behind.”

Georgia: “I was quite adamant I wasn’t going to go into a family business but it’s all Ash and Dad would talk about so I wanted to see what it was about. Now, I’m managing about 55 people. I struggle with men respecting me and being told what to do. Sometimes I think ‘if I was a man, would I get this attitude?’ but it’s also because I’m new to the role. I’m not timid about telling people what to do.

“HR is something I’ve helped improve with my HR Manager. We’ve issued everyone contracts, everyone signs their job specs and has a one-to-one. We don’t often end up recruiting externally but in the future I’d like to recruit outside the market, to try and get a really solid team together.”

Women on the market continued



Above: Sophie Hanna

Sophie Hanna – Sophie Hanna Flowers

Sophie Hanna owns Sophie Hanna Flowers where she has worked for the past 35 years.

“I was about 20 when I first opened my flower shop in Sydney. God, it was different then. Being a woman and running a business... There was an element of chauvinism, yes, plus they didn't rate floristry very highly. I moved back 15 years later and bought a shop on Gloucester Road but I decided shop life wasn't for me – too restricting. And I had people pinching my flowers up their skirts!”

“I came here not long after it opened at Nine Elms. I had two arches – a prop hire business in one, and a floristry business in the other. It was great. It's a very friendly atmosphere here – I've never had a bad experience. You come in on a cold morning and it's all 'hi, hello, how are you?' It really is a good feeling.

But you have to be that sort of person. You need not to be shocked, to have a thick skin. If you just get on with it, they'll respect you in the market.

“I would love to write an article to these poor old grumpy people to say, *Really, don't give up work!* It's the one thing that will keep you young. Working in the market cheers you up. I think the Flower Market wholesalers are terrific. They don't take any notice if you're female, gay, whatever. They might have 20 years ago but nowadays, not at all. I'm a great advocate for the market in every way. I love it.”

Paige Garrett – European Salads



Above: Paige Garrett

Paige Garrett is the Junior Sales Assistant at European Salads where she has worked for the past 2 years.

“All my friends have big jobs in London. We understand that now's the time to start preparing for our future. I'm quite driven, always trying to learn and ask questions. Business was my favourite subject at school. Dad wants me to know every part of the company so that when I'm older and eventually take it over, I've done everything.

“Being up here, working nights, you get a nice wage. I did work experience here when I was younger but I hated it. I was like *'I'm never going back to that market'* and here I am! But I was 15 at the time and I didn't really get involved, I just sat

on the desk getting cold. I thought, this time I'll give it a proper go.

“A lot of people see me as the boss's daughter and that's it. The reality is I've got to work extra hard. Dad has higher expectations of me compared to someone else. You really have to stick with it. As soon as I got to know people it became the best place in the world. It's that click moment. It's the kind of job where you walk away at the end of the day with a smile on your face.

“I don't want to be a housewife or stay at home mum, I couldn't do it. When the family does eventually come along, I'm not going to give it all up. The market will still be a part of me.”

Claudia Frewin – Classic Fresh Foods



Above: Claudia Frewin

Claudia Frewin joined the market in 1998 and was Sales Director at Classic Fresh Foods. She retired from the market earlier this year and now lives in Cornwall with her husband.

“I started working at Classics in 1999. I was just helping out to begin with. When the main buyer left, I said I'd do it full time. Andrew (Thorogood, Director) thought it would be too much for me, dealing with all the blokes out there at that time of night. But I said: *'try me'*. I learnt the job myself. Once they got over the fact I had a chest... I was the only woman on the market doing that role. They felt like they needed to protect me but I could certainly give as good as I could get. They were a bit scared of me, too. If they didn't get me the quality I wanted or the delivery on time, I'd be like a little banshee down there. I wouldn't take any crap!”

“I've helped Classic become a more professional environment, rather than the market-stall attitude, and I've had one of the longest retentions of staff of all the businesses. I looked after them if they did their job well. They'd come to me with their problems: *'She's chucked me out, I need a place to stay...'* *'I put diesel in the van instead of petrol...'* It's constant, every day. They call me mamma. I never had children, I didn't want any, but I ended up with them!”

“Women packers was definitely a step in the right direction for us. It was unusual to have them, as it's quite heavy work, but we tried to ensure we had a bit of diversity. Women get on with the job more, and create a more nurturing environment. Men tend to behave better around women too. On this market skill, talent and loyalty is appreciated so if you've got that you'll get recognised and progress quickly.”

Getting to know the Post Office

We chat to Raj Patel about his experience working at the Post Office where he's spent almost three decades.

“ You have to be accepted to be part of this community, it takes a long time but once you're in, that's it



Above: Raj Patel of the Post Office

“I could write a book about this place. I could write about every single person.” In the 29 years he's been working at the Post Office, Raj Patel has, by his own admission, seen and heard “everything.” There will be no divulgement into what exactly ‘everything’ entails because it's safely locked in the vault. “It won't come out of my mouth. It's that person and me that knows it, and that's it.” And there will certainly be no book – even if it's one we're all dying to read.

Change underway

In due course, the Post Office will move to its new home on the ground floor of the Food Exchange. Change can bring uncertainty but Raj is optimistic for the possibilities. “I have to move with the times now. I'm looking forward to it and the Post Office will be more accessible in the new building. I think people will be more inclined to use it.”

With Natwest closed it's the only place on the market that offers banking services, along with other free services such as click and collect, next-day and return deliveries, a bureau de change, travel insurance, passport applications, and the market's sole ATM.

A community hub

Still, the Post Office is a lot more than a transactional space where notes get stashed and coins get counted. It's comfort and familiarity. A private place where people come to offload. Perhaps it's the fact so many personal documents and confidential information changes hands in this

room on a weekly basis, but there's an unspoken, wholly unquestioning, trust and assurance between Raj and the people he sees every day.

“Some of the companies who bank with me will leave me with their details and walk away. I have their receipts, their credit cards, I have everything. It's incredible. What place in the whole of the UK can you go and have that kind of trust?”

A problem shared

Raj has become something of a self-appointed Agony Uncle to the market traders, many of whom he considers as close as family. “They come in here to have a cup of tea and a chat. We talk about their problems. I say ‘Okay, so. What are you going to do?’ I know their deepest secrets, I know more about them than some of their partners!”

He's a confidante for many and, he professes, “I've enjoyed having that trust.” The flipside to this closeness are the losses he's had to endure over the years. “I know hundreds of people who've died. It's very, very difficult. I miss them terribly. Every day I think of them. It's like it's my own family.”

Breaking in

The relationships he's formed and the trust he's solidified didn't happen overnight. He explains what it was like to start all those years ago. “With Rufus the cleaner, we were

the first coloured people in this market. And there were over three or four thousand people working here at that time. It just wasn't as accepted. There's quite an old fashioned, old school mentality. There still is and you have to be accepted to be part of this community. It takes a long time but once you're in, then that's it. They will not let you go!”

Market solidarity

Nothing signified his acceptance more than the uproar that ensued when the Post Office was forced to shut down for a short period 10 years ago due to government cuts. “There was a major hoo-hah because all the banking services were affected. But the whole market came together – the CGTA, CGMA, drivers, forklift guys, every single individual was saying ‘We'll find a way to support you. We will do this for you.’” As a result, the Post Office re-opened as a branch, which is now locally funded by the market community. “I feel honoured to have that kind of loyalty,” says Raj.

He describes the Post Office as being “like a little village on its own within the market” but that essence of community is something that runs thick throughout. “The best thing about this place? The camaraderie. I value that. And we look after each other. We care for each other.”

The Post Office is located inside Unit 7 on the West Bridge.

Well-seasoned vs fresh faced: the market

“
It’s a people’s business... I deal with people, not companies

We get a glimpse of the market through the eyes of one of our most seasoned traders, Paul Wise, 67, who works at Gilgrove in the Fruit and Veg Market.



How long have you worked on this market?

52 years. I started when I was 15 in 1965. My father had a wholesale business and brought me into the market. I loved it. I loved the atmosphere, the people, the business. I still do. That hasn’t changed and that’s why I’m still here.

What did you start off doing?

I was the gopher, the runner. I used to make the tea, apply for the transport, help load the lorries. I was the boy that did everything in the office. From there, I went to work for a Spanish importer for four years, doing normal 8–5 hours. I learnt a lot from the guy I worked for, it was a good experience. But I preferred it on the market. So I came back and got a job on the wholesale side.

What’s your earliest memory of the market?

I must have been, I don’t know, eight or nine? Going back to 1960 with my father taking me up on the Saturday morning to the market. And the first thing I noticed about it was the smell. A sort of rotten veg smell. It was so distinctive! You could be asleep but you knew you were at Covent Garden. It was the people, the buzz of the business, and everything seemed larger than life to me. I found it exciting then. And I suppose from that moment onwards there was never any doubt in my head what I was going to be doing.

How has the market changed over the years?

A lot of the produce came on rail trucks and was taken off,

put on a lorry, taken to us, and then we manhandled it off. There was no palletisation, no forklifts. Everything was done by human labour with trollies and barrows. There was no mechanisation whatsoever. Human labour. And it was long hours as well. You’d start at 4am and sometimes not go home until six or seven at night.

What’s your favourite thing about the market?

The interaction with so many different types of people from so many different backgrounds. It’s fun, it is. It’s a people’s business and that’s what I like. I deal with people, not companies. There’s people I’ve dealt with now for 30 or 40 years, where I’ve served the grandfather, the father and now I’m serving the grandson. This business has always been like that.

What’s kept you committed all these years?

I enjoy it. To be able to do something that gives you a good living and to enjoy what you’re doing is a bonus. Because a lot of people get a good living but they don’t enjoy what they’re doing. Every day they get up and go ‘ugh...another day in work’. I don’t think like that. I said the day I walk from that carpark and feel with leaden feet ‘I’ve gotta leave’, I will. But it’s never happened. It’s never happened.

And it’s a very insular place. Markets. They all are. Everyone knows everybody. It’s a community on its own. You’ve built up long term relationships with so many people over the years, you know about them, about their family,

about their holidays... they’re part of your life. And in its own way it’s a comforting place, if you understand me, because you are in a community where if you do something wrong say, like your hair looks different or you’re wearing odd shoes – people will take the mickey out of you. That’s gonna happen. But that’s what it’s all about. It’s a nice environment to be in.

What’s something you can share about the market that nobody else would know?

There’s not many of us left who can remember what it was like in the old days. The volume of produce that went through Covent Garden Market was phenomenal. I mean, phenomenal. We’d have 15–20 lorries of produce a day coming in. Now, it’s four or five. We were handling so much it was untrue. But Covent Garden and Spits (Spitalfields) were more like distribution centres for the rest of the country. We served the wholesalers in other markets – Coventry, Birmingham, Sheffield, Bournemouth, Brighton. London alone had five wholesale markets.

If you could be remembered for one thing what would it be?

That I was professional and did the job properly. That I did it right.

through two different lenses



I'm ambitious,
I want to potentially
own Zest one day

We get a glimpse of
the market through the
eyes of a fresher faced
trader, Luke Gilbert,
24, who works at
Zest Flowers in the
Flower Market

How long have you worked in the market?

It'll be four years in September. Graeme (Diplock, owner of Zest) is my stepdad. He wanted me to start when I left school but I went and did my own thing first. I studied engineering while I was at school and got my diploma but after a few years I'd had enough. I was getting paid rubbish money so I started looking for another job. Graeme had someone who'd just left and he said they had space if I wanted to come up and try it. So I came and gave it a go.

What did you start off doing?

Stand tidying, all the buckets and stuff like that. I did a few days in the office as well to see that side of it. Then the book work, going through tickets, accounts, seeing what's been paid and stuff like that. After a year I started doing sales and now, I do all the buying too.

What's your favourite thing about the market?

There's always a good atmosphere in here and everyone has a laugh. You build friendships with customers so you feel like you're just up here with your mates. And there are lots of girls! I'd recommend it to other young people because it doesn't feel like a proper job, you're just having a laugh. But I'm ambitious, I want to potentially own Zest one day.

What's the biggest challenge?

Before I started here I knew nothing about flowers. So I was learning what they were then one day Graeme gave me a book and the invoices, and just told me to start serving.

At the start it was quite nerve racking. People were asking for prices that I didn't know and I'd be checking the invoices every day. You need to know everything or you can't really do it.

What's made you stick it out all these years?

Just enjoying the job. I don't think you'd work these hours if you didn't enjoy it. I don't think you'd put up with it! So obviously enjoying the job is a big part of it. I don't mind getting up early, I'm used to it and it's not a problem anymore. That was the one thing questioning whether I wanted to do it - losing Friday nights out was a big thing that gutted me. I don't think about Friday night anymore. Plus, we have a good team here. There's no friction between anyone and we all get along.

What's the most stressful part of the job?

A big thing is taking orders for people's contracts and shops, rather than just selling what's on the stand. That's where we make a lot of our money so there's the pressure of getting that right. Obviously you do get problems with some flowers not coming in or not being up to the best standard so you have to try to sort that out. That's probably the biggest pressure, trying to keep your customers happy. You start to build up a customer base and you want to pick up as many orders as you can to make money. Also I have control over the buying so if we folded one day that would be my fault.

How has the market changed over the years?

I think this market is better than the old market. The old one was grotty! There are so many people that have been here for so many years but I was only (at the old market) for two years before we moved so I was less worried about it. This one's brighter and fresher, and it attracts the customers because it looks nice. We've got new branding too which smartens us up. No-one can miss us here!

If you could be any flower what would you be and why?

A butterfly ranunculus. That's my favourite one. The pink ones!

We'd love to hear from you

What did you think of Issue 04?
It would be great to get your feedback.

And if there's something you'd like to
share or see featured in our next quarterly
newsletter, just let us know.
Your news, your stories.

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Above: Buyers' Walk