

Marthall Tree Products

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Marthall Newsletter December 2015 Celebrating 25 years.

Marthall at 25

It seems quite remarkable to have celebrated our 25th Anniversary on the 1st October. I was asked by the team if I had thought back then if we would be where we are today. The honest answer to that is that my only thought at that time was if I had made the correct decision or not and how to establish our initial customer base. I was very fortunate to have support from our long standing main supplier A Diamond and Sons and they had taken a gamble by supplying us before we had actually started. For reasons that would take up a full A4 sheet I had to leave my previous employer at the end of August, or run the potential risk of not getting my final months' pay or P45. I already knew that our building here wouldn't be ready until the 1st of October, so a month was spent driving buses around the Ford and Woodchurch Estates for Toppings Coaches. As it happened when I did arrive the building was not quite finished and our early days were spent in an insect infested caravan with one brown very basic plastic phone. With the assistance of Diamonds our early customer list contained about 30 customers and one of my earliest memories was upon hitting 50 customers thinking that was the crust upon which the rest of the business would be formed. In those days no stocks were held and all business was conducted on a direct basis. I had decided to avoid two areas of business which I had had previous dealings with and that was supplying pallet wood and purchasing from the republic of Ireland. We did actually have two long standing pallet contracts and once those lapsed we didn't pursue further orders. With 1993 came the recession and still in our infancy it was very much a case of keeping our heads down. Every afternoon there would be a report of a large well established company going under and usually leaving a trail of creditors in their wake. At the same time our regular full load customers were starting to think twice and only order half loads and, quite often ending up a few posts short for a job as a result. It was then we started to stock just four items, still the most popular today, and this was the very small seed that has become the vast stocks and variety of items you have today.

It was time to get our first Leyland 7.5t truck and driver which, once again sowed the seeds for today's fleet. Our next move from a period of stability was to look at some diversification and in 1995 I studied for my CPC in road passenger transport and applied for an operator's licence for two buses. The following year a chance meeting with a former colleague created the idea of another sub division which would become Construction Material Specialists. With the success of winning our first bus contract in 1997 for a single journey on route 288 between Mobberley Primary school and Mobberley village, Marthall Motorbus was born. In 1998 we were offered the morning journey on the same route as Arriva drivers were getting lost (the route was only 1.1 miles long!), or not turning up and this was also taken on. At the same time our pm journey was extended commercially and ran from Ollerton to the school, then onto the village, Mobberley station, Knutsford and back to Ollerton in a circle, this increased revenue by 50p per day.

By the turn of the millennium our 3 year bus contract was coming to an end and despite an offer of a 1 year extension we decided to decline this as we were finding customers were surprised to find our gates closed, and some were actually trying to climb over to get in. At the same time the directors of CMS which was by now a separate limited company offered to purchase our controlling interest and during the year 2000 moved to premises in Warrington. Today this company is part of the SIG group and has been merged with one of their Scandinavian companies and I have to say I feel very proud when I see their stand at trade shows to think that we started this business off. So, effectively, we had come full circle, but from that moment our graph of growth zoomed up off the page and the next major development was the arrival of Cherry Peachey. Those of you with long memories will remember me launching her as 'no, not a new soft drink from MTP'. Cherry had come from Eynsham Park Sawmills and had moved to this area to be close to her grandchildren. One of the difficulties for a fencing supplier is to find experienced people, especially as the work is different to say timber merchants and is somewhat more specialised. Cherry's approach came at exactly the correct time although she faces a very difficult task. Firstly for over 10 years customers had only been used to dealing with me so to get them to speak to somebody else wasn't easy and, of course,

she had to work with me!! Her world and system collided with my world and system. Sadly her tenure with us was to be shorter than we would have liked as Cherry suffered a double blow of serious illness and ultimately worked part time before retiring. But Cherry had forced open the door for others to follow and, although I know she tries to play down her importance in the history of MTP, she was the forerunner of the team we have today.

MTP hasn't suffered a high turnover of staff with 'most' people enjoying lengthy spells of employment, from those very early days of Rob Barber and Simon Stone, through to today's team, some of whom have clocked up double figures and others who are not far off that number of years' service. Yes we have also had our misfortune with illness and people falling off ladders or injuring their backs, which in 1999 took out 3 of a 5 man team at the same time! When I reflect back upon the history, and I should really have kept more notes, I came up with people who stood out for one reason or other, Cherry was one of those, Martyn Potts was another, who as a driver was the first person I had enough confidence in to spend £60,000 on when I bought him our first 26t crane vehicle. Rick Smith was another very highly regarded driver and still to this day came up with one of the best ideas at a staff meeting, when he challenged as to why we offered cash on delivery. The argument he put forward led to its withdrawal and this has certainly saved a lot of headaches. On the customer side we had some great ambassadors of the business, very early on local seed merchant Tony Walley was as good as any rep., Richard Kennerley brought many new customers some of whom are, many years later, still buying fencing products from us whenever the need arises and so too Johnathon Wright who gave us many new introductions. We also had Tony Edwards on board for a time. Tony dragged me kicking and screaming away from double entry book keeping to the world of Sage, whilst at the same time introducing us to some of his former Manchester Chestnut customers. We also took over the business of Bob Merrill who many of you will know doubt recall with fond memories.

In recent years we have added a dedicated aggregates man in Alan Goodwin with his direct loads and bulk bag sales, whilst Emma has complimented this with mini bags and decorative bagged products. Postcrete has become another good item for us and having tried, virtually, all the manufacturers you all tell us that the Lafarge Blue circle, as was, is by the far the best product on the market. So despite being offered alternatives at £1 or more a bag cheaper we have stuck to this brand. Young Dave created the shop which has already been expanded once and is due to grow again in the near future. We have continued to improve the ground with concrete and tarmac replacing the dust and swamp that many of you will recall and with the current team in place I really do feel we have future proofed things for many years to come.

Of course, equally important are our many loyal and excellent suppliers but it would be wrong of me not to single out the team over in Coleraine at A Diamond and Sons without whom none of this would be possible. The two companies have grown in a similar way and have a very special bond which continues to deliver quality products on time. This happens because behind the team here who genuinely care about what they do, is a team of nearly fifty equally dedicated people who also care very much about the orders they are sent.

Another success over the 25 years has been the recommendation by us of certain customers. With a lot of contractors working from home potential customers become frustrated at ringing around and either getting answer machines or ringing out. They then try us but as we don't do installation it is always a pleasure to be able to put forward some contractors to do the work and from, feedback received, this leads to a high percentage success rate in winning the work.

Year 25

You will recall that 2014 was a completely crazy year with many shortages and exceptionally high demand. At the end of it we had, not unsurprisingly, had a record year, although we were a little disappointed to have just missed out on the £4M turnover. As the New Year started I sat the team down and told them that they must not be disappointed if we have a second best year due to not having the same madness as the year before. October, our first month, was a record so just maybe I would be wrong. We then had a string of second bests and had fallen behind the previous year. The election result, which even the polls got wrong, sent a surge of confidence throughout the market place and shortly after Easter we were seeing record numbers of visitors with a regular 100+ tally of customers per day. As we entered the period where the year before we had not only no stock, but the mill had gone on its annual holiday we were in a position whereby we had plenty of stock on the ground and as a result eased ahead of the previous year's sales and finished nearly 4% up. During this year we also extended our tarmacked area and, all things being well, this will be added to again next year.

During the year we said goodbye to two members of staff. Firstly young Niall who was very popular serving customers in the yard, decided that he would like a change of career and, secondly, not so young Tony who used to drive the Transit, was due an operation in the summer and departed in July. Due to some technical reasons he is still waiting and it will probably now be some time next year before he is finally operated upon. All at MTP wish them both our very best wishes.

So the opportunity rose to strengthen the yard especially with the increased volume of customers and we were joined by Lee, Dan & Paul during the summer. Tom who had been in the yard moved on to a new role driving the Transit.

Looking ahead

Once again I am going to be cautious about my expectations for the coming 12 months. Every time I switch on the radio there is some American talking about a global slowdown. The conclusion that I have come to is that this is designed to create the similar feeling in other parts of the world and by creating a decline in these markets, the US market, by default, will have seemed to have improved. I hope people will continue to realise that they do still indeed have money and here in the UK we have a good economy and they will continue to invest in new projects both in terms of infrastructure and around the home. This time next year we will know how we have all done.

We are currently reducing our display area, partly because space is needed for additional stock and a larger shop (yes the Aladdin's cave as it is often called, is being extended), but also because our supplier is discontinuing the large gazeebos which make up most of the feature. These are currently being sold off very cheaply and if interested please contact Emma for more information.

Our team continue to listen to customer requests for new items and 'due very soon' after much searching will be stainless steel nails. However we can reiterate we will never be extending our range of hardwoods nor getting involved in composite decking!

War in Europe

Writing this just after the terrible events in Paris, which took so many lives, that it was the worst loss of life, in France, since the Second World War, isn't the actual topic of concern here, although with the enemy within it quite naturally does have to be a concern. Now I have become increasingly concerned about the news that frontiers are being closed off throughout Europe with Razor wire. As countries accuse their neighbours and they then make counter claims tension seems to be running high. It only takes one cross border incident and the whole thing could blow up with the other countries around siding with one or the other. The end result a third major war in Europe? I can only hope that all the leaders who have attended many events to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the ending of World War Two can reflect upon this before something escalates. The scenes of people walking down motorways for hundreds of kilometres to get to a specific country of choice are just something none of us could have ever imagined seeing. There is also the question of how did we arrive in this situation in the first place? Was it the toppling of Saddam Hussain which allowed the creation of this monster called Isis, and if so, does that make the US and UK ultimately to blame, although he did invade Kuwait, which we must not forget.

Politically neutral

My son Tom who is now 15 has a friend who has just started college this year and, as such, has become interested in more adult topics. He recently showed me a website showing the position of all the current political parties. The graph was Left and Right which is fairly obvious and Authoritarian at the top and Liberalist at the bottom. He was surprised because nearly all the parties, including the minor ones were grouped in the top right quarter i.e. leaning to the Right and authoritarian. On the same web page there was an opportunity to answer six pages worth of questions on varying questions/scenarios with an answer of agree or disagree, strongly or otherwise. This may come as a shock to you all but having taken this test and genuinely answered the questions as per my views my 'dot' was placed exactly centrally on the two lines forming a centre cross! Matthew was also shocked by this result. It could well mean that an extreme view in one subject is offset by an opposite extreme view in something else, but those of you who may have thought I had lost the plot in recent years may have to think again. Officially therefore, I am politically neutral, apparently. Give it a try yourself atwww.politicalcompass.org/test

New Pricelists

Your new price list is enclosed with this mailing and I am pleased to advise that for the New Year your prices are very largely unchanged. Yes, we have had the usual 'alarm clock goes off so we have to put our prices up' landscape and construction material price increase letters, and, indeed, some of those materials do have a knock on to some products but we are doing our very best to stand firm where these affect stock prices such as postcrete which is unchanged despite a price rise to us. We really wanted to hold prices to send a message to all of our customers that we will try to help you to keep the momentum going, so you in turn can continue to do the same level of business with us or more, if possible.

Once again we have reduced the range of Chain Link stocked as this continues to reduce in popularity but one item coming to the fore is our Europlast netting which makes for a very affordable dog fence.

From Emma

Emma wanted to share a few funny moments with you, but before that, the best one about her was that having received a call from a supplier she told Colin it was 'Angry Birds Strauss' on the phone when it was actually Englebert Strauss!

In the course of any business there are times when things don't quite go according to plan. It's not really any ones fault just human error or a misheard word. We do however like to reflect on our 'little stories' over a cup of tea and a biscuit. I thought you might enjoy being regaled with a few.

The first story involves Dave and a simple telephone call. A gentleman called up to ask if we had a particular item in stock. he said that we did. The customer was pleased and said he would "call over in the afternoon to pick them up". Dave happened to be at the counter when the gentleman arrived and gave him his ticket and out to the yard he went. Just a minute later he popped back into the shop with his ticket and asked "what are these?" Dave said "balustrades". The Customer laughed and said "no I wanted barrel strainers!"

The next story involves Colin and more misheard words. A gentleman comes into the shop and requests a particular item. Colin puts his order through the till and asks him for payment, the amount being approx. £300. Tom was driving the stacker truck that morning and he disappears to get the customer's order. He returns to the car park area and asked the customer "Where's your van mate". The customer looks at Tom and says "I'm leaning on it" 'It' being a ford fiesta. Tom looking rather confused says "Are you cutting them up or something?" The customer replies "They're not for me". Tom climbs off the stacker truck and shows the customer his picking ticket. 25no. 15ft 5 x 3 purlins. Both Tom and the customer return to the shop. "I think there has been a mistake" states Tom. The gentleman then tries to explain to Colin what he actually wanted. It was during this conversation that Colin realised he wanted palings not purlins! So when he had mentioned they were 5 x 3 earlier the customer thought he meant 5ft tall x 3 inches wide. Colin gladly refunded the difference of about £280 and the customer was sent happily on his way.

The final story I will share with you, there are so many, is one involving Emma. She took a phone call and was asked for 6 bags of screened soil along with some other aggregates and timber. She said "not a problem we have that in stock and we can deliver on Monday". It will come on our crane vehicle. The customer paid by card over the telephone.

As Monday lunch time approached we received a telephone call. "Hello" said the customer. "I have your driver with me but I think there has been a mistake?" Emma Takes the customer's name and brings up the order. "This is the order with soil on" She says. "Yes but I wanted little 25kg bags not bulk bags". Both the customer and Emma had a good giggle about it especially as he happily paid the extra cost for bulk bags. We sorted that mistake out that afternoon.

I hope you have enjoyed a few of our antidotes there are many more. I bet there are many people out there who would say they could write a book about their working life, but on the whole we all must try to find the funny moments in what can sometimes seem a slightly arduous day.