

## **Marthall News December 2012**

### **Christmas closure**

We will be closing at 4pm on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> December and reopening on Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2013. We hope you all have a restful break and return fully refreshed for a very busy 2013!

### **General**

The end of September brought a close to our 22<sup>nd</sup> year. As with any business we could see the winning post by the end of August and had a very good idea of how our year had been, but nobody could have foretold the events of the month. Normally a successful year would have one shouting from the roof tops, but in many respects it was also a year of sad reflection.

In December we said goodbye to Mrs Martha Diamond and nearly 12 months later to Michael Charlton. They shared some similarities, both had been honoured by the country for services to the timber industry, both were inspirational figureheads in their respective businesses and both had not only lost a member of the team they had lost a member of family. I suppose that the only difference for us was that Michael Charlton was always Michael and Mrs Diamond was always Mrs Diamond and I think this shows the generation gap between them of 20 years. Despite this Mrs Diamond was a daily visitor to the mill and still involved in the running and decision making. Families, friends and the industry will miss both of them.

Another sad sign in 2012 was the need to close an average of 1 credit account per month, not through companies closing, but due to them taking over 60 days to pay. Happily the vast majority have remained as Pay As You Go customers. 2012 also saw the second time in our history where we had to take legal action all the way. That honour fell to a Middlewich based landscape contractor.

Following a series of false promises to ourselves and to the Enforcement Officer we did receive full payment eventually. Of course, having letters after his name, the Leading Light in this company is far more intelligent than me with my 2 O levels and, obviously that's why he Paid £3200 for a £2100 debt!

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As the year progressed we continued with our improvements, tarmacing our entrance way, Young Dave freshening up the shop, improving the range and grouping items together. So by August it was fairly clear that we would just fall short of £3.5M turnover but it would be a record year, eventually ending 6.9% up.

September arrived, the final month, and 'bang' .... Phones went off following an area incident... they would remain off for two and a half weeks ( But we didn't know that nor were we told that!), Young Dave would crash his car... car written off but Young Dave unhurt and then Diamonds would lose a long standing, key man in a tragic accident at the mill resulting in a temporary closure. Hence, our delayed, and, somewhat muted, celebration of an otherwise very successful year.

So to year 23! Triple dip or no triple dip our plans for year 23 were largely being drawn up in the summer. We have decided to replace our oldest 2004 truck and this left to a very good home at the end of November. Our replacement is due anytime and this represents a major investment for the future. Two new members of staff are joining us in January, one to bolster the yard so Harry from Sevenoaks does not have to search for staff anymore and the second, Emma Cutler to join us as an 'all-rounder' inside, working, firstly, alongside Alan in our, ever expanding aggregates side, supporting Colin on the counter and learning the timber side of the business as well. .... She has her work cut out.

It is difficult to predict what will happen in 2013. With the high street slowly disappearing I would have thought those who are remaining would do better, but it appears not. I believe that the problem for the High street is the physical fixed costs they face just to exist. Surely councils would be better off getting 50% rates than nothing for an empty building, reducing incomes even further. Like many of you I continue to be frustrated by the ludicrous stories of our nation giving money to others, who, apparently are in a far better position than we are. Will these countries have a Live Aid to help feed the people of South Shields, Cumbria and Sandbach I very much doubt it. No buses in Warrington after 7pm on a Sunday, forcing people to buy old polluting cars to get out. How many missiles not dropped somewhere in Afghanistan would pay for these services, 1 probably. Who will be the first big casualty of 2013 and which old editions of Top Of The Pops will BBC4 still be able to show next year?

## Prices

The mention of Alan in the above brings us nicely around to prices. Now just in case you are not aware of it January follows December. I say this because the Construction materials supplies industry has this giant alarm clock, which goes off once a year. The directors of all the major companies swing into action and

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send out numerous price increase letters(at what cost?) , without any consideration to the market or how their individual units are actually performing... And some are doing very little. Mergers are on the horizon with staff that were relocated just 2 or 3 years ago again facing a further relocation or the boot. So will it be a case of you telephone your favourite contact to find they have gone and be greeted with that reassuring question of 'it's Stan who?'. The solution is, of course, to Go Goodwin... we are not moving Alan to Skegness and as he is only 3 years into a 30 year contract he won't be going anywhere soon.

Of course, all of this is happening at a time when many of you are telling stories of falling prices with contracts being won at less than cost so moves such as this are not helpful. Yes I fully accept that costs have risen, ours have to, but you have to be leaner and meaner to get through you can't simply go on increasing prices, the market won't stand it. So our timber prices will, once again, remain largely unchanged. In fact over our whole price lists 1 & 2 we are going to try to hold the vast majority of prices and absorb any increases where possible. Early in the New Year you will receive our 2013 lists and we will detail any price changes at that time.

Once again we are hoping that by keeping high stocks and keeping prices unchanged we can support you to support us!

## Twitter and Facebook

Young Dave advises that we are now on Twitter and Facebook, whatever they are. He tells me that there will be exclusive offers available from time to time, so like our Facebook page and follow us on twitter to find out what these are.

## And Finally..

Rock salt £3.20 per bag or £2.95 pallet lots while stocks last. We will NOT be buying expensive rock salt when prices shoot up.