

**SWP 1/87      STUDIES IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

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## STUDIES IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Stephen Stroyd, Self Employed Plumber

Peter Allen

Alex Low, Entrepreneur

Christopher R. Clarke

The Regent Belt Company

Quentin Brodie Cooper

"Where There's Muck - There's Brass

Amanda Chumas

Fairhaven Wholefoods Limited

Paul S. Harrison

JUNE 1986

## I N T R O D U C T I O N

"Business has the supreme merit of harnessing and helping to transform one of the world's deadly sins, "greed", into the noble activity of generating wealth for all. Entrepreneurship, it is now widely recognised, has a major role to play in this transformation process. Jean-Baptiste say the French Economist who coined the word, defined the "entrepreneur" as "somebody who puts existing resources to more productive use". Today, the Harvard Business School describes entrepreneurship "as the process of creating value by putting together a unique package of resources to exploit an opportunity". In Professor Malcolm Harper's and Professor Paul Burn's elective course, Entrepreneurship and Small Business, a feature of the Cranfield curriculum since 1975, members of the M.B.A. degree course are given the opportunity to study entrepreneurs as people, to ask of themselves if they possess the personal competences associated with entrepreneurial success, as well as to consider the situations that lead people to start businesses and to be successful when they do. Each class member is exposed to analytical methods to help diagnose entrepreneurial competences and characteristics, as well as given the opportunities to listen to and question a cross section of "role models" who have faced and surmounted Kipling's twin imposters, "triumph and disaster". In 1986 these ranged from Sir Philip Harris, "the Carpet King who wouldn't be floored" (Evening Standard) to Robert Payton the "My Kind Town Ltd." Pizza Pie kinda entrepreneur.

To complete this process and learning experience each student has to select and interview an entrepreneur of their acquaintance, focusing on personallity and the opportunity that led to a business being created. The five cases that follow tell us much about the wealth creating forces and Britain today! Is entrepreneurship opportunity driven (Regent Belt Company) and ("Where there's muck - there's brass"), personal life style orientated (Alex Law and Fairhaven Wholefoods) or just a question of survival (Stephen Stroyd, a plumber in Mrs. Thatcher's brave new world of Cleveland)?

A quarter of the M.B.A. class, following further small business management and problem cases, move on to actively investigate starting their own businesses. We hope the cases attached, reproduced with permission and with thanks to their authors and subjects, will similarly inspire readers to harness all their deadly sins (and competences) to the noble task of creating wealth for themselves and their colleagues.

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STEPHEN STROYD, SELF EMPLOYED PLUMBER

BY

PETER ALLEN

## SES : Entrepreneurship and Small Business

Peter Allen

### A Study of an Entrepreneur in the North of England

Stephen Stroyd : Self-Employed Plumber

The possible growth in small businesses is currently held up to be the future saviour of the UK economy. This report analyses the career of an entrepreneur in the Northern Region - an area much in need of the growth of an "Enterprise Culture".

I examine the context in which the entrepreneur works, first by examining the economy and culture of the community in which he lives. After detailing his personal history I examine his business and how he feels about his business. Finally I examine how closely this entrepreneur fits in with the accepted models of entrepreneurship. As a subsidiary issue, the role of government schemes, and in particular, the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, are examined.

#### 1: A Geographic Profile

When considering the subject of Entrepreneurship in the North of England, one is reminded of the answer given by an Irishman when asked for directions to Dublin:

"If I were you, I wouldn't start from here".

The surplus of business starts over stops, in the period 1980-83, was the lowest in the United Kingdom. At a net figure of round 4,000, it was the lower than Northern Ireland, and less than 1/10th the figure for the South-East. Why should this be so?

Educational levels throughout the North are low. The percentage of pupils aged 16 remaining at school beyond the statutory leaving age (24% in 1982) was the lowest of any region in the UK. Employees in the North are less likely to have a higher educational qualification than in most other regions.

Unemployment in the North has been the highest regional figure in Great Britain for a number of years. The county of Cleveland derived 30% of its employment from Heavy Manufacturing according to the 1981 Census of Employment. Steel and the chemical industry accounted for much of this emphasis. These sectors have seen massive cut-backs in labour since that time. As a result, unemployment in Cleveland has been above 20% since 1983.

The live-birth rate in Cleveland in 1982 was the highest in any county. Overall, the population is young, there are fewer people above retiring age in Cleveland, as a proportion of the population, than in nearly all other counties. GDP per head, throughout the North is below the national average. Total expenditure on welfare benefits, such as national insurance benefits, supplementary benefits, child benefits and war pensions per head, are the highest in the UK.

Overall, the North, and Cleveland in particular, has a high level of social deprivation, coupled with a dependence on large, heavy industrial manufacturers, most of whom have suffered during the recession. The population has little history of individual enterprise. This is the background surrounding the entrepreneur I have chosen to study.

## 2 : The History of an Entrepreneur

Stephen Stroyd is aged 22, married with a small child. He lives in the village of New Shelton in East Cleveland. The immediate area is formed of a number of small towns and villages on the edge of the North Yorkshire Moors. With a history of ironstone mining (now declined) the area is less populated than the rest of Cleveland. With a smaller population, the area receives less attention than the rest of the County in terms of local government spending and employment initiatives.

In many ways, Stephen's history is a microcosm of life in Cleveland. He left school at 16 with no formal educational qualifications. His first employment was with Howard Ward - a local employer, manufacturing tape measures. Stephen began work as a drilling machine operator. After 5 months, he was made redundant along with 2/3rds of the 1,000 strong workforce.

After a period of one week on unemployment benefit he won a YOP place with Neatheat Services - a firm specialising in plumbing and heating engineering. An extension of the YOP place for a further 3 months, after the initial 6 month placement, led to full-time employment for almost 3 years. During that time he began a City and Guilds course in plumbing and heating. However, when work dried up for the firm, he was laid off. Consequently, he failed to complete the City and Guilds course.

Following 6 months of unemployment, Stephen managed to get a job with DT Building Services. Here he worked as a plumber, mainly on council house-building contracts. After almost a year, he was again unemployed. This time the firm sold out to another company and everyone received notice of termination of employment.

However, there was no need to join the unemployment queue this time. Having received an offer of a job whilst still with his previous employer, he joined Cosy Engineering the following Monday after finishing at DT Building Services. Seven months later he was again unemployed. Again the contractor had run out of work.

## 3 : Self employment

A cycle of unemployment; work; laid-off, seemed about to start again. This time, Stephen decided to step sideways. He gave his reasons for starting his own plumbing business as being:

"Fed up of being laid off"

"Persuasion by his wife's uncle, himself a self-employed carpenter that self-employment was the right course - before he was too old

His initial decision was to "try it for a year".

This time around, he remained on the Unemployment Register for 13 weeks - the qualifying period for the Enterprise Allowance Scheme. This is a government scheme set up to encourage those who are unemployed to start off in business. Together with the qualifying 3 months of unemployment, each individual on the scheme must provide £1,000 capital of his own. The scheme then pays the individual £40 per week for the following year.

Stephen borrowed the £1,000 necessary from his mother. Unlike many who start the scheme, he had no work "lined up" when he became Stephen Stroyd, Plumbing and Heating Engineer. Consequently, around half the £1,000 was used to "pay the mortgage" during the first 4/5 weeks while he remained without work. The rest of the start up capital was spent on advertising. Insertions were placed in most of the local papers. He had introductory leaflets printed and delivered them by hand in both Shelton and the local town of Guisborough. Headed stationary, for invoices and estimates, and business cards completed the advertising spend.

The other necessary requirements were tools and a van. Stephen already had a large enough tool kit with which to start. His van was bought on hire purchase terms.

Stephen seemed to have a reasonable knowledge of his market. The old "bread and butter" market for a plumber had been contract work for the local council. A period of undercutting by all the firms in this market, leading to many of them "going bust", combined with a cut-back in council expenditure, meant that this potential market for Stephen had all but disappeared. The majority of his work came from repairing leaks, installing central heating systems and other domestic plumbing work. His major problem was the amount of competition. Shelton, a village of around 5,000 adults, supported 5 other self-employed plumbers besides Stephen. It became increasingly clear to Stephen that the key to new customers was the recommendation of past customers. As a result of doing the majority of his first few jobs in Guisborough, he now finds that the majority of his work is based in Guisborough. Recently, this has been reinforced by him acting as the recommended plumber for a local bathroom suite salesroom. Indeed, his connection with Rosedale Bathrooms began after a satisfied customer had recommended Stephen's work to the owner of the bathroom salesroom. This contract looks like providing Stephen with much needed stability for his business.

Stephen has now been working for 15 months. The £40 per week payment from the Enterprise Allowance Scheme came in extremely useful for the first year. The major problem he has faced is the uneven nature of the work load. He has lived from week to week, with rarely more than a fortnight of work booked in advance. In his first year, he did not make enough money to be liable for tax. Another problem has been the retrieval of cash in payment for work done. In common with many other small businesses, recovering money from his debtors has been difficult - and vital. It should be noted at this point that the most difficult payers have been his wealthier customers. In his own words :

"those without always seem more grateful - they usually pay straight away. The problem in getting money always comes from the posh houses."

Having said this, he has yet to suffer from a bad debt - his customers have always paid up in the end.

Overall, his business now seems to be settling down. Work now seems to flow in more consistently, and the work for Rosedale Bathrooms looks likely to provide at least one job per week. My latest conversation with Stephen revealed him to have around a fortnight's workload - although business had quietened slightly as the warmer weather of summer had approached.

#### 4 : Pros and Cons of Self-Employment - an Insider's View

At the end of his first year, Stephen Stroyd has not made a fortune. Cash flow is always a problem. He and his family live from week to week. He has not made enough to be able to repay the initial £1,000 to his mother.

So what has he got out of it? What have been the pluses and the minuses?

Aside from the worries associated with an uneven workload, Stephen highlighted the working alone as the main negative point. There were two aspects to this, the lack of company, and the lack of assistance for heavy jobs. As far as the former goes, "it's something you get used to". The latter is more of a practical problem. Lifting a radiator, for example, when it's still full of water, is not a job for one man, unless he is Charles Atlas. When faced with the possibility of heavy lifting, Stephen arranges his work so that his wife's uncle - the self-employed carpenter - can come along to help.

When it came to the pluses of self-employment, there was actually a positive side to the uneven workload. Lulls in work meant that Stephen often had time to sit at home during the day. With a small son, this was seen as a major plus. Unlike many men who worked "normal hours", he was getting a chance to see his son grow up. Lynn, his wife, also liked the fact that he was at home during the day. Even the possibility of 24 hour call-out was not seen as a major minus.



Above all, Stephen enjoyed the fact that there was no-one to tell him what to do. There was no need for him to return to the plumber's yard or do odd-jobs when the main work was done. The choice of when and how to pay bills was also seen in a positive light.

Stephen said when he started that he would "try it for a year". That year is now up. Soon after the first year was completed, work dried up to nothing for a period of three weeks he seriously considered giving up. However, work picked up again and Stephen continues in business. Whilst still at the margin, the pluses seem to outweigh the minuses - at least at present.

## 5 : Stephen Stroyd - A Typical Entrepreneur?

How closely does Stephen fit into the models we have of entrepreneurs, and what entrepreneurial characteristics does he possess? These are the questions I will attempt to answer in this section.

One strand of entrepreneurial theory has been the splitting up of entrepreneurs into various types:

Technology Entrepreneur - associated with the development and commercialisation of new products and processes.

Opportunistic Entrepreneur - focused on growth and the act of creating new economic activity. Has an eye for the "main chance". Will use resources at hand to respond to a perceived opportunity.

Lifestyle Entrepreneur - freedom, independence and other "lifestyle" benefits are the motivation.

Craftsman Entrepreneur - a technician, establishes independent business in order to practice trade.

Overall, Stephen Stroyd seems to fit best into the last of these categories for obvious reasons. There is however, an element of the lifestyle entrepreneur in his outlook. His listing of one of the major pluses as being the chance to be at home during the day, seems to be evidence of this entrepreneurial type. In conversation with Stephen, I came to the conclusion that objectives such as extra money or growth of the business, may well be traded for benefits such as additional freedom or time spent within his family.

In terms of entrepreneurial characteristics, Stephen scored fairly highly in certain aspects whilst being low on others. He had a strong belief in himself and his own ability in terms of the skills for the job. He prided himself that he often knew more about particular heating systems or boilers than fully apprenticed, time served plumbers.

He also asserted strongly that he had learnt more of the job whilst "grafting" than he ever did whilst doing a City and Guilds course. He also had a high concern for the standard of his work. Not only was it important to do "a good job" in order to get further work, but he also demonstrated strongly the attitude of a craftsman - doing a good job for its own sake.

The characteristics/competences where Stephen seemed weak were in the areas of initiative, information seeking and organisation. He did not show any great initiative in terms of developing new markets and opportunities. Evidence of this was seen in the first few weeks of him starting business. He did not have any work to start with, and apart from money spent on advertising, he basically sat by the telephone and waited for the work to come to him. In terms of information seeking, he demonstrated little in the way of asking advice on how to conduct business or reduce his costs. For example, he had little knowledge of the tax system and tax allowances, relying solely on a once yearly visit to the accountant. Planning ahead and the efficient use of resources were not demonstrated. He made an estimate of the materials needed for each job, normally a slight overestimate, but that was as far as it went. When it came to financing his business, he immediately opted for hire purchase as the method for paying for his van. Other options do not seem to have been investigated.

Overall, I believe Stephen represents a common type of "Entrepreneur" found in the North. He is a craftsman who knows well the manual and technical side of his trade - he is a very good plumber. However, due partly I believe to a lack of education, partly by the lack of role models, and partly the "nature" of the Northern man himself, he lacks "business sense" in either a formal or "street-wise" sense. I believe this to be the major problem facing any scheme to develop entrepreneurship within the North. People are not used to thinking in terms of a business and its requirements. The Enterprise Allowance Scheme has enabled Stephen, along with others, to start off in business. However, he, along with others, is unlikely to provide a model for new growth industries.

## 6 : The Future

The first year has been a tough one for Stephen. That he has survived is to his credit. The future seems to hold forward at least the prospect of a reasonable, but not spectacular, living for him and his family. I asked him how he saw his future.

Overall, he saw possibilities for modest growth. In fact he saw this as being fairly essential. In particular, he wanted to employ someone else. Plumbing was a hard game, he needed someone else to help with the physically heavy work. I also detected this as being an objective in terms of success in business - he would move from being the employee to being the employer.

Perhaps Stephen is not a success as an entrepreneur in the conventional sense of the word. However, working for himself has seemed to provide at least a prospect of a reasonable future for himself and his family.

I believe I can go no further than the answer he gave me when I asked him to sum up working for himself:

"It's a queer going on, but it's better than working for someone else!"

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ALEX LOW, ENTREPRENEUR

BY

CHRISTOPHER R. CLARKE

"The average English family fortune can be traced in cycles. The first generation makes it, the second generation holds it, the third generation loses it, and the fourth generation has to make it again. I'm the fourth generation."

Nestled in the shelter of a Cornish hillside, with views to the sea only two miles distant, is the guest house "Coombe Farm". It lies three miles from the popular village of Looe, and is well situated to serve as a centre for tourism within Cornwall and Devon. This paper examines the career and philosophy of the owner and manager of Coombe Farm, Alexander Low.

Alexander Low has owned Coombe farm since 1979, and has established it as one of the leading guesthouses of its type. He is an entrepreneur who, having recognised the potential within the British tourist industry, has clearly established the importance of the service role in the business. The paper will discuss the process by which he brought his business to its present state, but this most recent career path must be paced in context beside the first major areas of experience.

Alexander was born the second child (he has an elder sister) of a father who, at the age of 27, "retired" to live off the family fortune. At the age of 7, Alex was sent to boarding school, and spent his school vacations at organised camps. From that age, he had essentially no regular home life. After leaving school, he did his national service with the Air Force photographic unit. He subsequently attended technical college to continue his studies in photography. He considered the lectures to be redundant, and didn't attend. Despite this, his talent ensured that, at the annual exhibition, more of his photographs were hung than any of his classmates. An outraged

head of school informed his father that his son was "undisciplined", and requested his removal from the course. His father, who until this point had been supplying an (albeit meagre) allowance, promptly withdrew it, leaving Alex with no support. Alex freely admits that while worrying and at times uncomfortable, this was the most valuable experience of his life, as it taught him the value of self sufficiency. Professional photographic work was difficult to find, and Alex supported himself by selling cars.

A temporary freelance assignment with a small company provided the first opportunity within the photographic world, and this soon became a full time staff position. His career as a Fleet Street photographer progressed rapidly, and took him on assignment to over 75 countries. From photographer, Alex diversified to publishing and editing, while still maintaining a relatively high profile as a freelance photographer within Fleet St.. In 1979 Alex, as one subsequent media feature describes "turned his back on the bright lights....."

Herein lies one of the early questions regarding the career of this entrepreneur. Many entrepreneurs give the impression that part of their motivation lies in developing a career with an element of excitement. In Alex's case, entirely the opposite is true. Why, if we are to believe the model, would Alex leave a career which had taken him to over 70 countries and exposed him to more excitement than any man has the right to expect within a life quota, to pursue the undoubtedly more sedate life of a Cornish guesthouse owner? This question will be

addressed in the second part of the paper, after the description of his career is complete.

Establishment of a guesthouse was definately not the first priority for the new business, although it was in a generally related field. When a guesthouse became a more likely possibility, the process of selection was carried out systematically. Cornwall had been decided on (Sally Low was originally from this area). It was not hard to realize that £60-£70,000 was a reasonably attainable level of finance, and the names of estate agents easily obtained. The selection process, to the stage of a short list of ten properties, was carried out in London.

Coombe Farm was selected for its potential and purchased in a delapidated condition. All renovations were carried out by the Lows. The farm has been landscaped and decorated to their personal taste and style, and there is no question that the "ambience" so generated is an essential ingredient in the overall success.

#### ALEXANDER LOW - THE MAN

Alex shares some of the characteristics of the "classical" entrepreneur model (if such a beast exists), and these are perhaps delineated by his attitudes to aspects of his business. For example:

On Business. Alex is ruthless. He would probably dispute that, but he is. And yet at no stage does his ruthlessness intrude onto his geniality. Indeed, like all

valuable weapons, his ruthlessness lies concealed until required. Woe betide the tradesman who performs a substandard piece of work on the farm, or who fails to meet a deadline. Alex has no time for the decline of the work ethic in British society. Clearly, his experience as a self starter has left its effect.

On Success. There is no doubt that Coombe farm is successful, no matter which parameters such success is gauged by. They were awarded "A.A Guesthouse of the Year, West England" in 1981, after having opened the business only 2 years previously. More importantly, the guesthouse is fully booked, in advance, for most of its 8 month season.

The AA award is arguably the most important single factor in Coombe Farm's development, not so much for what it represents in itself, but from what it led to. Following the award, the Daily Telegraph, ironically the media group for whom Alex worked as a freelance photographer, ran an article about the guesthouse nationally (see appendix 1 ). This publicity was instrumental in establishing a client base, which has provided the foundation of repeat business.

It should not be thought that external signs of success such as these are only viewed as a means to an end. Both Alex and Sally were delighted by the award, which was unexpected, if deserved. One gets the impression, particularly from Alex, that the award is a gratifying confirmation of the success which they have already judged by their own standards.

On money. "Money isn't important for its own sake."



(At this point Sally looked first shocked, then frankly disbelieving). Alex believes in the essential utility of money, but is not motivated by it per se. He looks upon it as the necessary fuel on which to run his projects. Certainly some of the capital projects on which considerable sums of money are currently being outlaid would be hard to justify on pure net present value terms. Storage sheds which could be constructed from concrete blocks are then faced with Cornish stone. A swimming pool is being built, when the most effective short term measure would be extension of the already overbooked accomodation. There are areas of potential which could be exploited for their profit making capabilities, but they are left for the future. They may well never be unfurllled. The reason lies in the next section.

On motivation. Alex is adamant that his motivation lies outside of the monetary sphere. He enjoys an expanding bank balance, partly because it provides ongoing capital (virtually all retained earnings are ploughed back into the business) and also because it provides tangible proof that his formula for success does in fact work. Neither is he necessarily motivated by contact with people. In fact he is somewhat selective in the contact that he enjoys with guests. Sally, in her role as hostess, is often the one who, for better or worse, socialises with the visitors. Alex is, for the most part, happier on his tractor, or planting trees, or planning a nature walk, or building the sheds, or planning and implementing the innumerable tasks which comprise his current list of "projects".

Alex has maintained his artist's talent. The talent which ensured his student photographs were hung in the school's exhibition, which took him to photographic assignments in over 75 countries, now guides him as he seeks to realize his concept of the perfect guesthouse. To this artistic entrepreneur, considerations of an economic nature must be weighed against the aesthetic.

On management style. Alex concedes that he could not work with a partner. Decision making must be vested in one person, and he sees that person as himself. Despite the obvious teamwork and usual harmony between he and Sally, there is no question in his mind as to who has the final say in decisions. He acknowledges the part which luck has played in the development of this enterprise. The most readily recognisable examples being the availability for sale of the farm at the time that he was in the market, and the AA award. He makes it clear, however, that he also believes that one makes one's own luck.

On Expansion. Alex believes that the most likely source of business expansion is in the accommodation sector. He is, however, not prepared to invest the time or the energy into expansion of this side of the business. He recognises, with some perception, that any expansion would change the nature of the establishment, and that he and Sally already have more than enough to occupy them. To employ more staff would be to relinquish a degree of control, a sacrifice which Alex is reluctant to make. An opportunity exists to expand the catering operations at a later date. Coombe farm currently offers a four

course evening meal as a service to guests, at an inclusive cost of £7.50. This is not a profit generator to a large extent in its own right, but definitely draws clientele who might otherwise be discouraged by the lack of local restaurants. Neither Alex nor Sally currently desire to implement a change which will fundamentally change the nature, price, and clientele of the business. Here, perhaps, Alex breaks from the classical mould. He has brought his business to a point approximating his target point. Many of his ilk would now set out to fight new windmills. Alex is happier to fine tune his project to attain a greater level of perfection. That this is a characteristic of the artist turned entrepreneur is a hypothesis which will be discussed in the concluding section.

On Pricing. The guesthouse market is price sensitive within that segment of the market who are first time potential users. This Coombe Farm "proved" to their own satisfaction when they used to display their prices on their roadside sign. A high displayed price would result in fewer potential patrons driving in to investigate. The prices are now not displayed. In general terms, Coombe farm charges prices slightly above those that might be expected at an average B&B Guesthouse in the area. Their average tariff is £10.00 per person per night for a double room, which rises slightly in the peak months of the season. The writer's opinion is that, given the facilities offered, the situation and the service, the price represents particularly good value. They are represented in the "BTA Recommended" guidebook and they are one of the least

expensive guesthouses published. Possible price increases are limited by i) the lack of en suite facilities, which could be remedied at a considerable cost; &

ii) the reluctance of Alex to change the nature of the clientele. Once again the impression is given of a man who has a particular vision, the pursuit of which overrides even material ones. Does this eliminate him from the ranks of entrepreneurs? Of course not, it merely marks him as one who is driven by a motive other than profit.

On The Future. Although it is very much his "baby", Alex recognises that there will come a time when he and Sally will be unable to continue the management of the farm. Every year, two thirds of the way through the season they swear that it will be the last. One day it really will be the last. In preparation for the event, Alex is slowly introducing his youngest son, Charlie, into aspects of the business. At present this is limited to responsibility for a particular area, and for chores around the house (after all, he is only 11!). If Charlie (or any of the other children, but this is most unlikely) shows a genuine interest in the business, then it will be transferred to him. If not, and Alex maintains that he would not force the issue, then it will be prepared for sale, and disposed of to the best offer. The artist will finally leave his canvas. And then? "No I could never actually retire, not completely. There will always be some project or another to keep one busy."

On Life. "It's a game"

## CONCLUSION:

This then, is Alexander Low: Guesthouse owner, photographer, and entrepreneur. And above all these, and influencing all of them, he is an artist. All entrepreneurs are driven by something. For many it is the quest for wealth. For a much smaller percentage it is fame. For some the thrill of the chase, to be handed over to lesser men to manage while the entrepreneur engages once again in a new chase. For Alex Low, and I suspect for many entrepreneurial artists, it is none of these. He would be amongst the first to admit that money, as a means to an end, is important. But the end, to which money is the means, is pre-eminent. He seeks to establish a business, refine it to a state closer to his idea of perfection, and then to re refine it.

Alex Low shares many of the characteristics of the "typical" entrepreneur. He is egocentric, and preoccupied with the business. He has a background conducive to the formation of entrepreneurial ambition. He is a risk "respector": prepared to take risks but always maintaining a healthy caution. Alex provides an interesting study because he adds the artist's temperament and creative ability. The business becomes the end, and the trappings of success the means to that end.

Alex is right, he will never retire. He may, as is the artist's right, bring this current work to completion, either by passing it on, or selling it. but another will replace it, because "there are always projects to keep one busy, always".

# COUNTRY LIFE IN THE 'BEST IN THE WEST'

By Marjorie  
Caton Jones

**T**O WIN the AA award for the "Best Guest House in the West" is a remarkable achievement for a couple in the business for less than two years—but Alex and Sally Low of Coombe Farm, Widegate, near Looe, Cornwall, are no ordinary couple and Coombe Farm no ordinary guest house.

As a leading photographer and former Fleet Street picture editor, Alex, 44, has worked in 75 countries. Sally, 42, once ran a very successful small restaurant in Cheshire.

Early in 1979 they decided to abandon Fleet Street to live in Cornwall with their two children. Alex set about looking for a suitable property in a highly-organised way.

"We wrote to about 40 estate agents in Cornwall and Plymouth as well as looking in the local papers," he said.

"We also bought Ordnance Survey maps so that when details started to roll in we were able to discover exactly where properties were, which way they faced, whether the surrounding area was swamp or marsh, and so on.

We knew exactly what we were looking for—a South facing property with a minimum of 10 acres, about eight bedrooms and within a certain price limit. We gave ourselves

three months to draw up a short list and, armed with this, we set off for Cornwall one filthy wet weekend in March, 1979.

On the evening of the first day, they found Coombe Farm, an existing guest house. It had eight bedrooms, 10½ acres and faced due south with an uninterrupted view down a beautiful wooded valley to the sea at Seaton, two miles away.

Alex said: "The yellow and blue paint was flaking off the outside. What is now a lawn was a field grazed by bullocks. It was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, which came almost up to the patio. The garden had hardly been touched for three years and the pond leaked."

Alex and Sally took possession of Coombe Farm on Oct. 1, 1979, and spent the first winter painting the inside white. They spent £1,500 on paint and the only painting jobs they did not tackle themselves were the window frames, doors and gutters outside.

Today Coombe Farm has two double bedrooms and six

spacious family rooms. The house is beautifully furnished with antiques and the extensive garden reclaimed.

Alex and Sally's success is not merely a reflection of the comfort and good food but of the atmosphere they and their attractive 21-year-old assistant, Lorraine Tamblyn, a farmer's daughter, take in making their guests feel at home.

Whatever the weather, guests at Coombe Farm are free to stay around and enjoy the house and garden and watch the bantams, ducks and two beautiful peacocks which roam freely around the grounds.

There are welcoming log fires in the lounge and dining room where the drinks (Coombe Farm has a residential and restaurant licence) are left out for the guests to help themselves, leaving a note of their room number.

As a result the visitors' book at Coombe Farm is full of ecstatic comments from satisfied guests from all over the world.

Coombe Farm reopens on March 1, when bed-and-breakfast will cost from £6 for adults (reductions for children) and the evening meal £5.50.

"The highlight of our trip to England was discovering the friendliness of Coombe Farm, just southwest of the village of Widegates off the south side of the B3253 to Looe (tel. Widegates 223). The house is English country style overlooking ten acres of beautiful, unspoiled meadows and wooded land. The dining room, lounge, and all eight guest rooms have a spectacular view of the garden, rolling hills, and the sea sculpted in the distance. The charge is £7 (\$16.10) per person, plus VAT, and all rooms are beautifully color coordinated, sparkling clean, and furnished with antiques and paintings belonging to the family of Alexander and Sally Low, the gracious hosts, who retired from London to open this guest house. Alex is a world-renowned freelance photographer as well as an author and producer who travelled around the world on assignments in more than 75 countries. Sally is also an artist is preparing the best breakfast and home-cooked meals we had in England. The dinner menu is excellent, priced at around £4 (\$9.20). A whole plaice fried in butter with peas and creamed potatoes was sensational. Our dinners were served in front of a cheery fire. After dinner, we retired for coffee to another crackling fire in the lounge. There is a fine selection of liquors and wines to complement dinner. On a scale of 1 to 10, the Lows' Coombe Farm rates a 10" (Ray L. Benedicktus, Los Angeles, Calif.).

ALEXANDER LOW

17th April 1983

Curriculum Vitae

Born in London, 1937. Educated at Seaford College, Petworth, Sussex. Did National Service in RAF Photographic Unit stationed in Germany. From 1958 to 1964 worked as freelance photo-journalist for Sunday Times newspaper and colour magazine, Sunday Telegraph, Queen, Go, Newsweek etc, and as a 'special' on feature films through Pictorial Press Agency.

In 1964 joined BBC2 television to work with Chris Brasher on weekly 1½ hour programme about leisure called 'Time Out'.

In July 1964 appointed first Picture Editor of proposed Daily Telegraph colour magazine, 'Weekend Telegraph'. Planned and set up picture department, then for the next four years assigned and edited the major picture stories and spent nine months each year travelling the world on photographic assignments for the magazine.

In 1968 left the Telegraph Magazine to freelance for the world's leading illustrated magazines and to work as a 'special' on various major American produced films. Spent 1969 and 1970 based in New York and Los Angeles with additional photographic assignments in Mexico and Argentina.

In 1971 decided to go into book publishing after working on assignments in over 75 countries around the world including the following major photographic essays:

The Battle Against Drugs - Opium and Heroin addicts  
in Hong Kong.

Ruins of Empire - British India from the Khyber Pass  
to Ooty.

Haile Selassie - the Emperor of Ethiopia.

Mae West in Myra Breckenridge, Hollywood, USA.

Coronation of the King of Toro, Mountians of the Moon, Uganda.

A World in a Country, Argentina from Iguacu to Tierra  
del Fuego.

Island Paradise, Seychelles, Indian Ocean.

Sensations of taking part in the Winter Olympics -  
Switzerland, France and Austria

Famine in Bihar, India.

El Mahdis Family Reigns Again, Khartoum, Sudan.

Fortress Waiting for War, Taiwan and Quemoy.

Harrah's Magnificent Car Collection, Reno, Nevada, USA.

First Trans-Sahara Sand Yacht Race, Algeria, Morocco,  
Mauritania

Inured by Sunken Treasure, the Wreck of the Association,

Greig's Country, Norway, for American International Pictures  
Film Song of Norway.

The Real Australia - behind the glossy image.

The Bikaner Wedding, last Royal Wedding in India.

Conquering the Blue Nile - first navigation of the river  
from Lake Tana to the Tississat  
Falls, Ethiopia.

The Fight Against Leprosy, Ethiopia.

Vivian Leigh in her last film, The Roman Spring of Mrs Stone  
Big Game Fishing - in search of a world record marlin, Kenya.  
Doomed to Extinction, the Serri Indians, Mexico.

The Life of the Marquis de Sade, with John Houston, Film,  
Berlin.

The Last of the Maharajas, six of the most famous with their  
palaces and treasures, India.

The Beauty of Ireland - for British Overseas Airways Corp.

Spain and Portugal - for British Overseas Airways Corp.

Harold Robbins, Author, Hollywood, USA.

The Alternative Society - free-land communes, California, USA:  
Madagascar, land of the lemur.

East Africa, Safari - Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania.

Poona - the Sandhurst of India.

Desert Island Survival, Virgin Islands, Caribbean.

Twice the speed of sound - a proving flight in Concorde 001.

The Erotic Temples of Khatmandu, Nepal.

Mid-summer in the Stockholm Archipelago - 12,000 islands  
off the coast of  
Sweden.

Steinbeck's Cannery Row, Monterey, California, USA.

In July 1971 joined the main Board of Tom Stacey Holdings Ltd,  
book publishers, as pictorial director to control visual concept,  
the research and to edit all of the company's illustrated book  
projects. These included the highly successful 20-volume colour  
anthropological work of 144 pages per volume, entitled Peoples  
of the Earth which has been published in every major language  
throughout the world, often in a number of different editions.  
Other projects included The History of the Olympics in Pictures,  
A History of Yachting in Pictures, The Last of the Nuba etc.

In June 1973 left Tom Stacey Ltd to work independently as a  
picture consultant and author/producer of own book projects.  
These included The Amazing World of Animals with foreword by  
Sir Peter Scott, The World of the Horse and Wonders of the World  
for Trewin Copplestone Publishing. At the same time completely  
edited and referenced the vast collection of colour transparencies  
of the Daily Telegraph Colour Library.



In February 1977 rejoined staff of Telegraph Colour Magazine, as Picture Editor, to reorganise and revitalise the Picture Department and photographers. Task completed autumn 1978. Decided time had come to leave the troubled world of Fleet Street and publishing and seek a fresh life style in the country less dependent upon uncontrollable factors and away from the increasing frustrations of city life.

In October 1979 left the Telegraph and bought Coombe Farm, a dilapidated property in Cornwall, to run as a guesthouse. Two years later, in December 1981, with Sally Wickes, won the Automobile Association's award for the best guesthouse in the West of England.

THE REGENT BELT COMPANY

BY

QUENTIN BRODIE COOPER

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on a two hour recorded interview carried out with Mr Bill Swaney on 13th May 1986 at the premises of The Regent Belt Company in Walgrave. It is also supported by some press information and two questionnaires.

The paper is presented in four parts; a history describing the story of Mr Swaney's life, an analysis of the elements that go to create a successful entrepreneur, a review of the test results and a brief conclusion.

The cassette recording is still available and might be used for an "on-line" analysis of entrepreneurial competences, but due to the lack of time this has not been carried out.

## HISTORY

Bill Swaney was born and brought up in Australia. He is the eldest in a family of four boys and one girl. Both his parents were doctors and lived in a relatively affluent suburb of Melbourne.

Until the age of three Bill grew up without his father who was away fighting the war. Consequently he was the only male in a household of three women; his mother, her sister and their mother, and as a result described himself as having been a spoilt brat. Despite this he demonstrated his mechanical aptitude at this early age by dismantling the doohandle and locking the ladies in the livingroom. He experienced a comfortable upbringing that included attendance of a large private school. At this time he described himself as being fairly lazy but this was a situation with which he was not entirely happy. A release for his energies, practical nature and engineering interests was provided when his parents, who by now were quite well off, bought a farm outside Melbourne.

He enjoyed the Australian outdoor life, the riding, hunting and snooting. He was also a good sport and though he demonstrated no particular leadership qualities he was a competent team player. He was academically capable but not very strongly motivated and therefore had mediocre results in his exams. His uninspired academic career in engineering led him to join the Australian branch of the the American Caterpillar Tractor Corporation in Melbourne as a Sales Engineer. This involved him in being flown all over Australia on a generous expense account whilst helping with technical sales problems. "It was a fantastic job although not brilliantly paid" and it took him wherever there were diesel engines. The job provided the challenge for which he had been searching and, as well as being fascinating, gave him the chance to travel in four years he saw most of Australia, New Zealand and New Guinea.

As with most young Australians, he then wanted to see the rest of the world. He thought he could come to England and, with his qualifications and experience, find a similar job. It was however a rude shock to discover what it was that the English were accustomed to paying their engineers. He had arrived in the UK with about £1000 pounds and therefore decided to spend three or four months travelling in Western Europe. Finally he ended up in London where he met another Caterpillar engineer, Christopher Futter, and between them they decided to make sheepskin boots. These were boots of a simple design that had been quite popular with young people in Australia and were usually "knock-a-ug" by hippies. They had sold well in Australia and so they thought that they should do twice as well in "cold old England". However, they knew nothing about sheepskin or how to stitch it together; they did not even know what a sewing machine was. They just thought that it couldn't be that difficult compared with a diesel engine. They therefore went out and found a special over-locking sewing machine that was known to few firms in the leather trade and only made by one small English machinery company. Neither did they know anything about microcellular soles and the adhesives that would stick them to leather, but that was no deterrent. Within no time they were living in a flat in Hampstead, that was meant to be let only to Australian nurses, and had trucks drawing up to deliver the leather. Bill's girlfriend, who is now wife, joined them and whilst she sewed up the boots they did their corporate planning in the front room. They started selling the boots in Petticoat Lane. The routine of getting up at 5 o'clock on a Sunday morning to fight with the Pakistanis for a pitch at the market and then spending the other six days of the week making up the product for the next day's trading was to continue for a over a year. Their first order

source, they were soon selling to craft shops and exporting.

At this time Bill and Chris attempted to develop another idea that had come from Australia, that of wine boxes. This was handled by Chris but supported by Bill and although it has not until very recently proved successful, Chris must take much of the credit for sewing the seeds of change in the large brewers and vintners.

Having decided to broaden the product range by producing leather jackets Bill went looking for someone to cut some leather thonging. In doing so he came across a factory in Shepherds Bush that had been weaving leather for producing hand plaited uppers for the english shoe industry. At that time the company, called Pitaso, was bankrupt; the overdraft was fully extended, all the suppliers were owed money and there were no orders in the book. The owner's house had been pledged as security for overdraft. As he was in such trouble and had not been able to get any English people to help he turned to these friendly foreigners for help. A deal was struck which gave Bill and Chris 51% of the company in return for working in that company without any pay until the house was removed as security.

Bill worked there for 18 months whilst living on the Petticoat Lane takings and with the help of extended supplier credit turned the company round. The company started selling once more to the English shoe manufacturers, the workforce was built up from three to forty women and eventually moved to a new factory. Once there was money in the bank and he could draw a salary Bill dropped the boot business. As the retailers held large quantities of stock the level of outstanding debt was very high and consequently the closure of the business released a large amount of cash.

Bill's next idea was of producing hand plaited leather belts. In Australia these were made out of kangaroo skin which seemed very similar to the buffalo calf leather they were using for shoes. They started to "do" them and as a new item in England and the belts sold well. A firm called Dawson Accessories (part of Dawson cashmere group in Scotland) was a customer, but as it was not making any profit the parent company was going to close it down. Consequently, Linn Adam, the Sales Manager, was going to be out of a job and so he went to Bill, the innocent Australian, to persuade him to buy the company. The first step was buying some leather-goods making machinery that had been subcontracted to Dawsons. Bill did not know what any of it did and had never seen such equipment before. However it was in good condition and going cheap and so, as an engineer, the offer was irresistible. It was then, in 1975, three years after arriving in England, with Pitaso making 40-50k pa and on the proceeds of the boot making business, that the shell of the present company was bought. The name chosen for it was the last of thirty submitted to Companies House - The Regent Belt Company.

The deal was a good one; Dawsons had run up a 170k tax loss and agreed to sell very cheaply. For this Bill got stock, a customer list and distribution arrangements, the last two of which, despite Linn's assurances were very poor. Although the decision was not a conscious one, the integration of a component supplying company (Pitaso) with the belt business did create a direct chain through to the retailer. Despite knowing nothing about making belts Bill felt that if he could learn to weave leather could also learn to make belts.

by the family company in Australia. He also decided on a change in emphasis, he would work part time with Pitaso and take over as MD of Regent with Linn stepping into a selling role. That is how it has remained ever since and has proved to be a good arrangement given the skills of of each man; with Linn as the salesman and Bill as the administrator.

The company now has a turnover £3m, with exports being 60% of sales. 70% of the work is done contract for retailers in England and overseas and the remaining 30% is sold under their own brand name through network of agents. A wide and expanding range of goods is produced although the single largest item is still belts.

## ANALYSIS

### Background and circumstances leading to entrepreneurship

Although Bill did come from a secure and stable family background, there are other features of his upbringing that are characteristic of the emergent entrepreneur. He was the eldest son and was without his father for much of the time. Furthermore he exhibited a degree of individualism and obstinacy that led to a conflict with his parent's expectations. His parents wanted him to go into medicine but, because they wanted him to do so, he did not. He wished to remain independent and do things his own way.

The strategic event leading to dislocation was his decision to look for a job in the UK. As a consequence of this move he became a foreigner in England, exhibiting some of the traits of the ethnic minorities.

Had he stayed in Australia it is probable that through the connections of his family he would have been "squeezed into a job where he would have felt committed and not able to get out". Additionally, there was the element of fear of failure, in a relatively small community, which might well have inhibited any entrepreneurial instincts. There was very little room in which to "manoeuvre unseen and do deals". Thus the great advantage of coming to England was that it released him from these strictures.

### Need for achievement and motivation

Bill's high need for achievement was reflected in some of his early activities, but not in his sporting or academic life. This is perhaps because there was not enough motivation for him in these environments. His desire to get ahead was however the reason for his leaving Caterpillar; he was "not seeing enough movement fast enough".

When trying to identify how it is that Bill drives himself it is clear that he does not set targets for growth. The reason for this is the unpredictable nature of the fashion industry and though the company does have detailed budgets and monthly reporting systems much of the influence over sales is not in his hands. The weather alone can have a considerable effect.

It is rather that he sees himself as having taken on business commitments, whether or not they made commercial sense, and having had to work at them. His view is that "if I don't give myself these challenges I will probably go off down the pub and never return". By loading responsibility on himself he has been able to get more out of life than his own drive would normally push him to.

His concern is definitely with creating something for himself and this is reflected in his comment regarding acting as an import agent; "you have never got anything that you can really call your own".

He regards himself as successful in that he has created a solid small business with reasonable profits and good opportunities for further growth. However he recognises that this is all relative and that many others have done far more in a shorter space of time. When asked what sort of criteria he used





youth. On the other hand, there are numerous instances in which it was only his inexperience that permitted him to get involved; "our commercial innocence led us to doing a whole lot of things with which we would now be appaled".

On the personal side, and in contrast to most entrepreneurs, he does not consider himself to be a good salesman. He has some ability, but is not a "great on-the-spot chatter-upper of people". He does however have a good understanding of negotiating and rarely has arguments with

people that cannot be resolved. He considers his capacity for vision to be his greatest strength and he is constantly looking a long way ahead which frequently annoys his colleagues. Although he sees his desire to look forward as natural and intuitive he considers that the ability to make the right decision can only be gained by experience.

He describes himself as not a particularly quick learner. In stead his view is that has been consistent, pragmatic, with an idea of what he wanted to achieve whilst not rushing to try and do it too quickly.

#### Interpersonal relations

Bill has a very high level of concern for the welfare of his staff. He sees them as the key to the business and as such is concerned that the business should be an integral part of the community, thus ensuring that there are excellent amenities. His attitude towards them is pragmatic and he is always prepared to hear them out on their problems and then negotiate.

He has experienced some difficulty in getting new people to stay with the business. He is not sure whether the failure lies in his selection process, his emotional approach to it or whether it is the people and the "English situation". In any case he does not feel that he is too demanding and realises that his business may not be attractive to the calibre of person he is trying to attract.

His marriage has been a successful one. Although he had known his wife previously in Australia they got married only about four years after having been in the UK. As such, she knew what she was in for and had had, as she continues to have, a high level of involvement in the business. She has been very understanding of the dedication required in the business and although they have had discussions and arguments there have been no serious disputes.

#### Luck

There do seem to have been some elements of luck in Bill's story. In particular, the ease with which most of his ideas transplanted to the UK seems to have been fortuitous. Furthermore, as he says, "we couldn't believe our luck - we were astounded to find this factory stuck out here, it had been empty for two years and no one else wanted to buy it"

He would generally deny that luck had played an important role saying

"If you run around and look for things often enough they will turn up" and "keep looking enough and you will find luck". Furthermore he maintained that "once a decision had been made you had to follow it through and concentrate totally on

### Finance

This never seems to have been a problem for Bill. His entry level to business, through the sheepskin boots, was very low. Furthermore, when he decided to go into manufacturing it was again at a level that could be financed internally. The only external assistance received was from his family company in Australia who now hold 10% of the equity.

## TEST RESULTS

### Founding your own business

Bill scored 23 on this test placing him in the "entrepreneurial, independant manager category". This is perhaps not surprising given his emphasis on the administrative role in the businesses whith which he has been involved. It is also true that in most cases he worked with a partner and one might therefore be surprised to find him in the "compulsive entrepreneur" category.

Two of the questions that scored negatively reinforce his view of himself as a non-political person. He does not take the trouble to cultivate people who might be of use to him in his career and would consider it silly for a man to marry a girl because he thought she was going to be an asset to him in his career.

### Self rating questionnaire

The low scores on self-confidence and assertiveness seem to reflect the lack of the salesman-type qualities in Bill. Again the low score on use of influence strategies emphasises his non-political stance. The low score on initiative seems a little unusual and that on commitment to work contract exceptional. One would have thought that placing a high priority on getting the job completed would be of considerable importance in supplying to the fashion industry.

## CONCLUSION

Bill Swaney would appear to typify the opportunistic entrepreneur. Many of the ingredients characteristic of entrepreneurs are present although none in a particularly extreme form.

The test results appear to confirm the findings derrived from interview.

It may be that, in view of his growing and increasingly successful activities, Bill may wish to take stock of his personal skills and abilities and identify where and how they might be developed to cater for the changing nature of his organisation.

APPENDIX 1 - TESTS

## FOUNDING YOUR OWN BUSINESS

NAME:

INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer "yes" or "no" to each of the following questions by circling Y or N respectively. Answer in accord with your first response to the question, then proceed immediately to the next question. There are no right or wrong answers.

- 1) Is being comfortable more important than getting ahead? Y ☒ N (1) ✓
- 2) Would you like very much to have a job where you are your own boss? ☒ Y N (2) ✓
- 3) Are you an irritable person? Y ☒ N (3) ✗
- 4) Do you treat people in authority with caution and reserve? Y ☒ N (4) ✓
- 5) When you talk to people in authority, are you completely at ease and relaxed? ☒ Y N (5) ✗
- 6) Do you ever feel just miserable for no good reason? Y ☒ N (6) ✗
- 7) Would you prefer to work with a congenial, incompetent partner rather than a difficult, highly competent one? Y ☒ N (7) ✓
- 8) Do you tend to be pessimistic and unconfident in difficult situations? Y ☒ N (8) -
- 9) Do you hate being in a crowd who play jokes on one another? Y ☒ N (9) -
- 10) Would you mind moving to a less attractive part of the country in order to get promotion? Y ☒ N (10) ✓
- 11) Can you do routine and repetitive jobs without getting bored? Y ☒ N (11) ✓
- 12) Do you feel you could have achieved more if you had shown better judgement? ☒ Y N (12) ✓
- 13) Do you dislike seeing things wasted (food, electricity, etc)? ☒ Y N (13) ✓
- 14) Do you find it easy to relax completely when on holiday? Y ☒ N (14) ✓
- 15) Do you feel there are too many rules and regulations in the world today? ☒ Y N (15) ✓
- 16) Have you always worked hard in order to be among the best in your own line? ☒ Y N (16) ✓

/continued . . . . .

- |     |   |     |     |      |   |
|-----|---|-----|-----|------|---|
| 17) | Do you feel irritated when your watch does not keep time properly?  | (Y) | N   | (17) | ✓ |
| 18) | Do you attach a lot of importance to the toleration of opinions different from your own?                      | Y   | (N) | (18) | - |
| 19) | Do you limit your recreational and social activities in order to work more effectively?                       | (Y) | N   | (19) | ✓ |
| 20) | Do you take trouble to cultivate people who may be of use to you in your career?                              | Y   | (N) | (20) | x |
| 21) | Is it very important for you to be a success with people of the opposite sex?                                 | (Y) | N   | (21) | ✓ |
| 22) | Do you feel annoyed when people are not punctual?   | (Y) | N   | (22) | ✓ |
| 23) | Is it more important for you to be yourself than to improve yourself?   | (Y) | N   | (23) | x |
| 24) | Do you like getting drunk?  | Y   | (N) | (24) | - |
| 25) | Do you get restless and annoyed when you feel you are wasting time?   | (Y) | N   | (25) | ✓ |
| 26) | Do you like gambling (football pools, raffles, etc)?  | Y   | (N) | (26) | ✓ |
| 27) | Do you like to make improvements to the way in which your organisation functions?                             | (Y) | N   | (27) | ✓ |
| 28) | Do you find it easy to forget about your work outside normal working hours?                                   | Y   | (N) | (28) | ✓ |
| 29) | Does inefficiency make you angry?   | (Y) | N   | (29) | ✓ |
| 30) | Are you annoyed when a person in authority tells you to do something?   | (Y) | N   | (30) | ✓ |
| 31) | Do you like playing pranks on others?   | (Y) | N   | (31) | ✓ |
| 32) | Do you suffer from sleeplessness?   | Y   | (N) | (32) | x |
| 33) | Would you feel annoyed if a person in a superior position told you how to do your job better?                 | Y   | (N) | (33) | - |
| 34) | Can you forgive a colleague being incompetent so long as he is a nice fellow?                                 | Y   | (N) | (34) | ✓ |
| 35) | Would you think it silly for a man to marry a girl because she was going to be an asset to him in his career? | (Y) | N   | (35) | x |
| 36) | After you have done something important, do you often come away feeling that you could have done better?      | -Y  | (N) | (36) | - |

FOUNDING YOUR OWN BUSINESS

- |         |         |
|---------|---------|
| 1) No   | 17) Yes |
| 2) Yes  | 18) n/a |
| 3) Yes  | 19) Yes |
| 4) No   | 20) Yes |
| 5) No   | 21) Yes |
| 6) Yes  | 22) Yes |
| 7) No   | 23) No  |
| 8) n/a  | 24) n/a |
| 9) n/a  | 25) Yes |
| 10) No  | 26) No  |
| 11) No  | 27) Yes |
| 12) Yes | 28) No  |
| 13) Yes | 29) Yes |
| 14) No  | 30) Yes |
| 15) Yes | 31) Yes |
| 16) Yes | 32) Yes |
|         | 33) n/a |
|         | 34) No  |
|         | 35) No  |
|         | 36) n/a |

Diagnosis:

- 30 Neurotic, Crazy  
25 - 29 Very Entrepreneurial  
20 - 24 Entrepreneurial, Independent Manager  
15 - 19 Organisation Person  
0 - 14 Civil Servant, Banker, Bureaucrat



### Instructions

1. This questionnaire consists of 70 brief statements. Read each statement and decide how well it describes you. Be honest about yourself. Remember, no one does everything very well, nor is it even good to do everything very well.
2. Select one of the numbers below to indicate how well the statement describes you:  
  
5 = Very Well  
4 = Well  
3 = Somewhat  
2 = Very little  
1 = Not at all
3. Write the number you select on the line to the right of each statement. Here is an example:

I remain calm in stressful situations.

2

The person who responded to the item above wrote a "2" indicating that the statement described him very little.

4. Some statements may be similar but no two are exactly alike.
5. Please answer all questions.

Instructions: Select one of the numbers below to indicate how well each statement describes you:

- 5 = Very well
- 4 = Well
- 3 = Somewhat
- 2 = Very little
- 1 = Not at all

Write the number on the line to the right of each statement.

- |  |          |
|--|----------|
| 1. I look for things that need to be done.   | <u>4</u> |
| 2. I like challenges and new opportunities.  | <u>5</u> |
| 3. When faced with a difficult problem, I spend a lot of time trying to find a solution. | <u>4</u> |
| 4. When starting a new task or project, I gather a great deal of information.            | <u>4</u> |
| 5. It bothers me when things are not done very well.                                     | <u>4</u> |
| 6. I give much effort to my work.  | <u>4</u> |
| 7. I find ways to do things faster.  | <u>5</u> |
| 8. I plan a large project by breaking it down into smaller tasks.                        | <u>4</u> |
| 9. I think of unusual solutions to problems.   | <u>4</u> |
| 10. I feel confident that I will succeed at whatever I try to do.                        | <u>3</u> |
| 11. I tell others when they have not performed as expected.                              | <u>3</u> |
| 12. I get others to support my recommendations.  | <u>4</u> |
| 13. I develop strategies to influence others.  | <u>4</u> |
| 14. No matter who I'm talking to, I'm a good listener.                                   | <u>4</u> |
| 15. I do things that need to be done before being asked to by others.                    | <u>3</u> |
| 16. I prefer activities that I know well and with which I am comfortable.                | <u>2</u> |
| 17. I try several times to get people to do what I would like them to do.                | <u>4</u> |

Instructions: Select one of the numbers below to indicate how well each statement describes you:

- 5 = Very well
- 4 = Well
- 3 = Somewhat
- 2 = Very little
- 1 = Not at all

Write the number on the line to the right of each statement.

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| 18. I seek the advice of people who know a lot about the problems or tasks I am working on.               | <u>4</u> |
| 19. It is important to me to do a high quality job.   | <u>4</u> |
| 20. I work long hours and make personal sacrifices to complete jobs on time.                              | <u>3</u> |
| 21. I am not good at using my time well.  | <u>3</u> |
| 22. I think about the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of accomplishing things.             | <u>4</u> |
| 23. I think of many new ideas.  | <u>4</u> |
| 24. I change my mind if others disagree strongly with me.   | <u>3</u> |
| 25. If I am angry or upset with someone, I tell that person.  | <u>3</u> |
| 26. I convince others of my ideas.  | <u>5</u> |
| 27. I do not spend much time thinking about how to influence others.                                      | <u>2</u> |
| 28. I feel resentful when I don't get my way.   | <u>3</u> |
| 29. I do things before it is clear that they must be done.  | <u>3</u> |
| 30. I notice opportunities to do new things.  | <u>4</u> |
| 31. When something gets in the way of what I am trying to do, I keep on trying to accomplish what I want. | <u>4</u> |
| 32. I take action without seeking information.  | <u>2</u> |
| 33. My own work is better than that of other people I work with.  | <u>3</u> |
| 34. I do whatever it takes to complete a job.   | <u>3</u> |
| 35. It bothers me when my time is wasted.   | <u>5</u> |

Instructions: Select one of the numbers below to indicate how well each statement describes you:

- 5 = Very well
- 4 = Well
- 3 = Somewhat
- 2 = Very little
- 1 = Not at all

Write the number on the line to the right of each statement.

- |     |  |          |
|-----|--|----------|
| 36. | I try to think of all the problems I may encounter and plan what to do if each problem occurs.                 | <u>4</u> |
| 37. | Once I have selected an approach to solving a problem, I do not change that approach.                          | <u>3</u> |
| 38. | When trying something difficult or challenging, I feel confident that I will succeed.                          | <u>3</u> |
| 39. | It is difficult for me to order people to do things.   | <u>2</u> |
| 40. | I get others to see how I will be able to accomplish what I set out to do.                                     | <u>4</u> |
| 41. | I get important people to help me accomplish my goals.   | <u>2</u> |
| 42. | In the past, I have had failures.  | <u>5</u> |
| 43. | I take action before it is clear that I must.  | <u>3</u> |
| 44. | I try things that are very new and different from what I have done before.                                     | <u>4</u> |
| 45. | When faced with a major difficulty, I quickly go on to other things.   | <u>1</u> |
| 46. | When working on a project for someone, I ask many questions to be sure I understand what that person wants.    | <u>5</u> |
| 47. | When something I have been working on is satisfactory, I do not spend extra time trying to make it better.     | <u>3</u> |
| 48. | When I am doing a job for someone, I make a special effort to make sure that person is satisfied with my work. | <u>4</u> |
| 49. | I find ways to do things for less cost.  | <u>5</u> |
| 50. | I deal with problems as they arise, rather than spend time trying to anticipate them.                          | <u>2</u> |
| 51. | I think of many ways to solve problems.  | <u>4</u> |

Instructions: Select one of the numbers below to indicate how well each statement describes you:

- 5 = Very well
- 4 = Well
- 3 = Somewhat
- 2 = Very little
- 1 = Not at all

Write the number on the line to the right of each statement.

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| 52. I do things that are risky.   | <u>4</u> |
| 53. When I disagree with others, I let them know.   | <u>3</u> |
| 54. I am very persuasive with others.   | <u>4</u> |
| 55. In order to reach my goals, I think of solutions that benefit everyone involved in a problem. | <u>3</u> |
| 56. There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.                                   | <u>4</u> |
| 57. I wait for direction from others before taking action.  | <u>2</u> |
| 58. I take advantage of opportunities that arise.   | <u>5</u> |
| 59. I try several ways to overcome things that get in the way of reaching my goals.               | <u>5</u> |
| 60. I go to several different sources to get information to help with tasks or projects.          | <u>4</u> |
| 61. I want the company I own to be the best of its type.  | <u>5</u> |
| 62. I do not let my work interfere with my family or personal life.                               | <u>2</u> |
| 63. I get the most I can out of the money I have to accomplish a project or task.                 | <u>4</u> |
| 64. I take a logical and systematic approach to activities.                                       | <u>4</u> |
| 65. If one approach to a problem does not work, I think of another approach.                      | <u>4</u> |
| 66. I stick with my decisions even if others disagree strongly with me.                           | <u>3</u> |
| 67. I tell people what they have to do, even if they do not want to do it.                        | <u>4</u> |
| 68. I cannot get people who have strong opinions or ideas to change their minds                   | <u>2</u> |

Instructions: Select one of the numbers below to indicate how well each statement describes you:

- 5 = Very well
- 4 = Well
- 3 = Somewhat
- 2 = Very little
- 1 = Not at all

Write the number on the line to the right of each statement.

69. I get to know people who may be able to help me reach my goals.

3

70. When I don't know something, I don't mind admitting it.

3

# CORRECTED SCORE SHEET

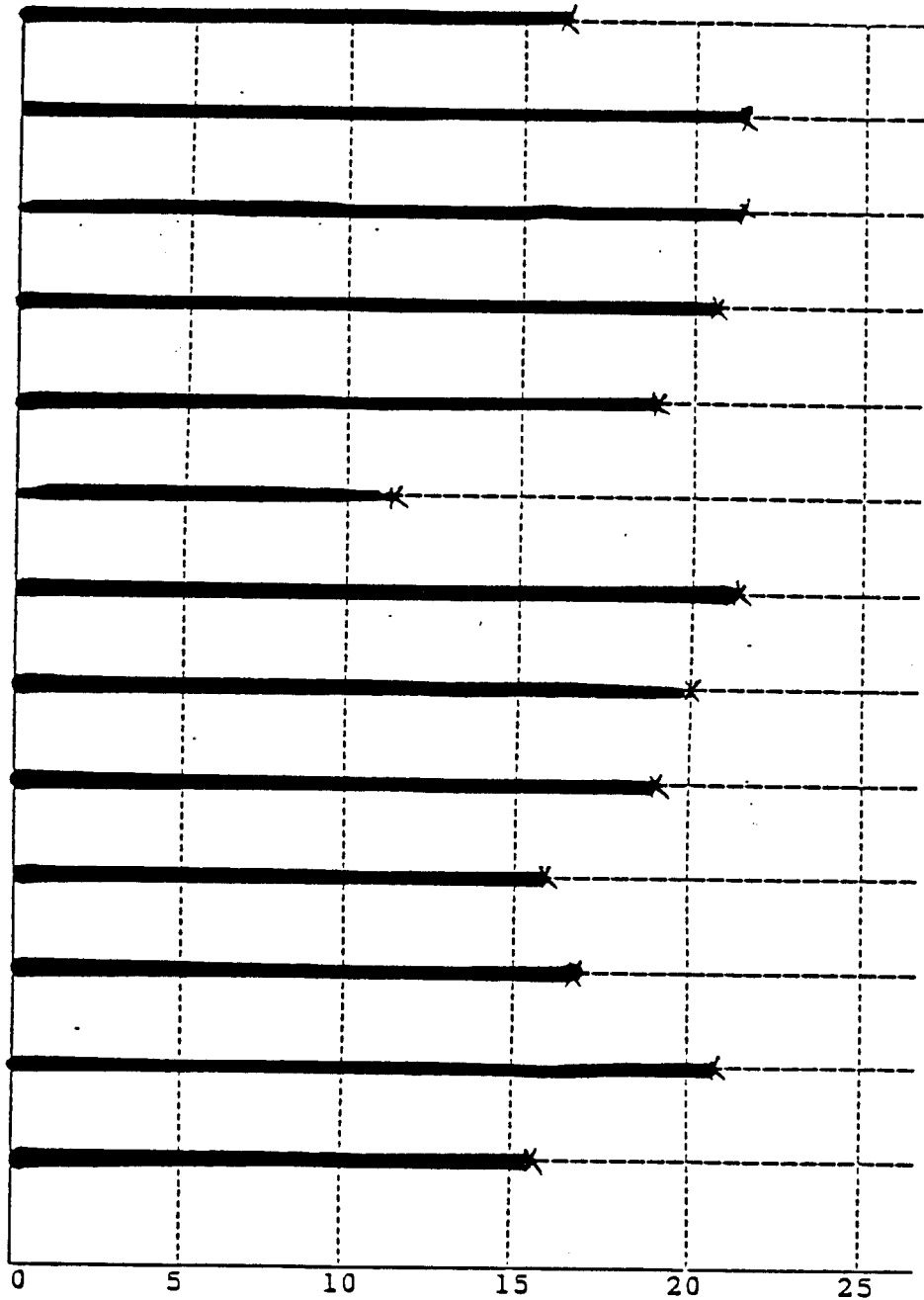
<u>Competency</u>	<u>Original Score</u>	-	<u>Correction Number</u>	=	<u>Corrected Total</u>
Initiative	<u>17</u>	-	<u>0</u>	=	<u>17</u>
Sees and Acts on Opportunities	<u>22</u>	-	<u>0</u>	=	<u>22</u>
Persistence	<u>22</u>	-	<u>0</u>	=	<u>22</u>
Information Seeking	<u>21</u>	-	<u>0</u>	=	<u>21</u>
Concern for High Quality of Work	<u>19</u>	-	<u>0</u>	=	<u>19</u>
Commitment to Work Contract	<u>12</u>	-	<u>0</u>	=	<u>12</u>
Efficiency Orientation	<u>22</u>	-	<u>0</u>	=	<u>22</u>
Systematic Planning	<u>20</u>	-	<u>0</u>	=	<u>20</u>
Problem Solving	<u>19</u>	-	<u>0</u>	=	<u>19</u>
Self-Confidence	<u>16</u>	-	<u>0</u>	=	<u>16</u>
Assertiveness	<u>17</u>	-	<u>0</u>	=	<u>17</u>
Persuasion	<u>21</u>	-	<u>0</u>	=	<u>21</u>
Use of Influence Strategies	<u>16</u>	-	<u>0</u>	=	<u>16</u>

CORRECTED TOTAL SCORE \_\_\_\_\_

## PROFILE SHEET

### Competency

Initiative  
Sees and Acts on  
Opportunities  
  
Persistence  
  
Information  
Seeking  
  
Concern for High  
Quality of Work  
  
Commitment to  
Work Contract  
  
Efficiency  
Orientation  
  
Systematic  
Planning  
  
Problem Solving  
  
Self-Confidence  
  
Assertiveness  
  
Persuasion  
  
Use of Influence  
Strategies



Competency Scores



APPENDIX 2 - PRESS INFORMATION



Old Road, Walgrave, Northamptonshire NN6 9QW, England  
Tel: Northampton (0604) 781731 Telex 311233 REBECO  
Telegrams: Regent, Northampton

In 1975, Linn Adam and Bill Swaney bought a small Company with three employees which distributed imported belts. The Partners made two important decisions about their new company, which they named, REGENT BELT COMPANY.

Firstly, they felt that if the Company was to have a sound business base it must manufacture the belts it offered to the marketplace. Consequently they bought machinery, although they knew little about the actual manufacturing processes of the goods they wished to sell. Secondly, they decided that it would be wiser to try to develop an "English" style than to copy the French or Italian manufacturers who were the major influence on the market at that time. As a result, local suppliers were resourced and their traditional products were gradually developed for the REGENT range.

Several difficult years passed while the small workforce learned the necessary manufacturing skills, but when English retailers began complimenting REGENT on its quality and style the partners felt they should try to develop export sales. This effort was commenced by joining the Clothing Export Council and attending the menswear fair in Paris in the Spring of 1979. The results were encouraging and in the following years with the C.E.C. the company participated in Trade Exhibitions in France, Japan, U.S.A. and West Germany. Sales agents were appointed in France, Italy, West Germany, Scandinavia, Japan and the Middle East and a showroom was opened in London with a Sales Manager who spoke four languages. Members of the Company's management have always travelled widely and frequently, visiting customers and observing fashion developing in the various overseas markets.

The Company now exports to more than 20 Countries and export sales comprise more than half of the Company's sales. The product range has been expanded to include leathersgoods, braces, bags and brief cases. Since starting to export, the Company has averaged a better than 50% growth rate per annum, and with a continually expanding product range the Company believes that this growth rate can be maintained in the foreseeable future.

# Humble start of award company

PRINCESS Anne's visit to Walgrave today proved to be the crowning glory for two self-made businessmen.

Bill Swaney and Linn Adam gambled their life-savings when, in 1975, they bought a small building, employed three people and started producing belts.

Now, after years of hard work, they have two factories, a London showroom, a 130-strong workforce, export sales of almost £1.8m and products which are renowned throughout the world for their quality.

And the Princess's visit to Regent Belt Company is the firm's second royal honour — in August it won the Queen's Award for Exports.

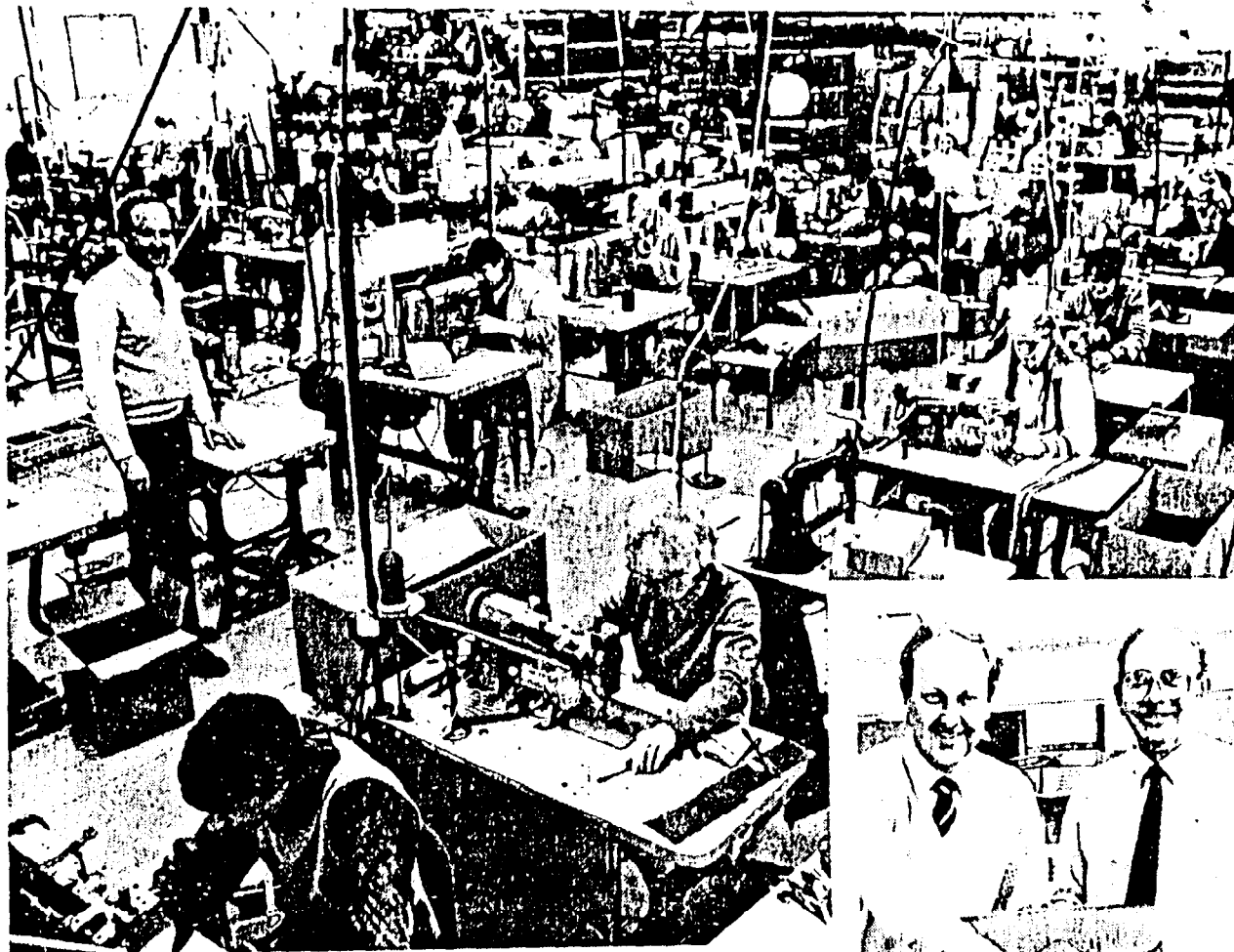
The company produces a variety of leather goods and accessories, including belts, women's bags, whisky flasks, wallets, medical cases, leather shoe kits and leather-bound books.

It exports them to 27 countries — in Europe, the Middle East, along with Japan, Australia and America.

But the award-winning firm had more humble beginnings ...

Mr Swaney, now co-owner and managing director, worked for Caterpillar Tractors in Australia and then moved to London. He eventually met Mr Adam, who had worked in the Scottish knitwear industry but at the time was general manager of a distribution firm in Northampton.

The Northampton business was about to close so the men decided to go it alone and set up their own company. They installed equipment and started producing belts from the building in Regent Street — hence the firm's name.



● A hive of industry ... the Walgrave factory.

by Rob Gibbard

English retailers started complimenting Regent for its quality and style so the partners decided to develop exports. They joined the Clothing Export Council and in 1979 attended the menswear fair in Paris. Soon exports started to grow.

In 1982 they moved to their present Walgrave factory and last October also bought premises in Station Road, Irchester. Their London showcase is in Clifford Street, between Savile Row and Bond Street.

In 1981 export sales were £282,000; by 1984 they had shot up to £976,000 and last year they were £1,769,000 (about 60 per cent of total 1985 sales).

Mr Swaney said he believed the key to their success was the ability to develop original English styles.

He said they were planning to broaden their range of bags and briefcases. "We see a continual strong growth in the type of products we are making."

The partners pride themselves on a happy workforce and good co-operation with the communities at Walgrave and Irchester.

Mr Adam said: "Residents seem happy to have this chance of employment — we are happy to have the chance to employ them."

They said Princess Anne's visit was a proud moment in the history of the company. Mr Swaney said: "It is an honour, especially for the workforce."



● Partners in success, Bill Swaney (left) and Linn Adam.

Tue 11 and Monday branch of the British Diabetic Association will take equal share of the proceeds from the event on Tuesday May 13, starting at 7.15.

A competition for a cable television will be and there will be a cake tombola and other competitions.

The diabetic association share of the proceeds towards research and the H cash will go to its bursary fund.

## HOPE FOR FAIR DAY

A DEMONSTRATION model boats will be an attraction at the May Fair Sharnbrook.

The event, organised by Sharnbrook Amateur Theatre Trust at the home of the organisation, is one of the major fundraisers, expected over the two Sunday, May 4 and May 5.

Craftsmen and women demonstrate their skill there will also be a variety of stalls and competitions. Children will be entertained by Punch and Judy and shows.

The fair will run from 10.30 to five on both days and refreshments will be available.

## House call

THIRTY people boosted Caldecott Villa funds by £35.45 at a fundraising evening.

Prizewinners were Jones, Doris McPherson, Betty Smith, Ruby Brown, June Sharman, Jill Brown, Lilian Stokes, Edith Marilyn Branagh and Sharman.

## Silver day

A SILVER tray was presented by guide leader Mrs Liz Adcock on her retirement after eight years as district commissioner for Desborough and R.

"WHERE THERE'S MUCK - THERE'S BRASS!"

BY

AMANDA CHUMAS

I first met Tony and Rose in January 1985 when I acted for them on the sale of their industrial cleaning group, Sibleykleen to Blue Arrow plc.

Why did I choose the Sibley's as a subject for this report ?

As a solicitor, I had certainly come across many successful and not so successful businessmen and women, but Tony and Rose stuck out in my mind as archetypal entrepreneurs.

They are very much down to earth people, who as a husband and wife team, took the simple concept of cleaning and set out with the firm objective of building up a multi-million turnover company within five years. In fact it took them seven years. When they started, neither apparently had the benefit of any special training in finance or corporate management nor any capital resources to speak of, just a belief in themselves and a belief that their objective could be achieved.

How was that belief transformed into reality ...

Note: A copy of the five year accounts of Sibleykleen Group Limited from 1980-85, illustrating the rapid growth of the group are set out in the appendix to this report together with sample brochures explaining the Group's activities.

## BACKGROUND

### Tony Sibley

Tony was born in 1937 into a working class family in Harefield Middlesex. He was one of two children. By the time he left school, aged 16, Tony admits that he "had never passed an exam in his life." He wanted to go into signwriting but could not persuade anyone to take him on, so ended up in a die punching factory as boy friday until he reached 18 when he was enrolled into the Army for two years national service.

Stationed at Bicester, Tony found time to get up to all sorts of high jinks and continually tried to buck the Army's rules. Indeed, it was not until one of his antics attracted the attention of the law that Tony "saw the light." This experience did not entirely change his non-conformist attitudes, but it made him set his mind to improving his image with the Army. To do this he decided to throw himself into sport and gymnastics. He took up every conceivable activity, acquiring medals and brownie points by representing his battalion at football and the long jump. Such was Tony's commitment that, despite his unpromising start with the Army, he made it to corporal before leaving in 1958. However, it was whilst he was in the Army that Tony's entrepreneurial flair first came to the fore. He supplemented his wage, by buying NAAFI stores and selling them to his colleagues for profit.

In the next two years after leaving the Army, Tony did a variety of jobs; signwriting, boat-painting and working in an engineering and asbestos factory.

By 1963 Tony had married his first wife. It was his brother-in-law who suggested to him that they should start up in partnership, window cleaning. Their assets totalled a ladder, buckets, a motor bike and side car. Nevertheless they were able to make a reasonable living for nine months, until it started snowing on Boxing Day 1963 and kept snowing ... This put them out of business!

Tony's next stop was at a porcelain factory making heating filaments. He hated the job but stuck it out for six months until he saw that a company, Cleanwell Limited of Watford, was advertising for window cleaners.

Tony got taken on, he was desperate to make his way, he knew that what he really wanted was his own business but he lacked capital and a particular expertise. Therefore he realised that he would have to serve his apprenticeship, even if that meant knuckling under someone else's rules. Within three months Tony was made

foreman of an eight man team. But Tony was not content with window cleaning, he wanted to get as much experience as he could of the cleaning industry as a whole. He therefore volunteered for other jobs every evening, to extend his skills.

His enthusiasm brought a quick promotion to sales representative. Tony mastered this the hard way, cold calling on prospective punters with his company's brochure and his "gift of the gab." Tony recalls that he quickly realised that he was deficient in general knowledge and the niceties of social etiquette. These deficiencies were mastered in the same methodical way, he became an avid reader of newspapers, books on etiquette and french menus. Within no time he was "polished".

The next skill to get under his belt was management. To do this he moved to the Daily Office Cleaning Company of Staines. He was put in charge of the company's contract with Vauxhall Motors at Luton. It was through this connection that he met Dan Duffy an established businessman and entrepreneur some years older than Tony. Duffy proposed that he, Tony and another, Kelly, should set up their own cleaning company, "South Midlands Maintenance and Cleaning Contractors Limited". Tony and Kelly were asked to put up £100 equity each, although in fact Duffy lent Tony his £100. They kept the company's overheads down by using the office belonging to one of Duffy's sons and by keeping directors drawings down to the minimum, Tony thus found himself with a dual job, working for Daily Office Cleaners and his own enterprise.

South Midland's first big breakthrough came, when they landed the Britannia Airways contract at Luton Airport. Tony stresses that it was tough going getting the company off the ground. For the first six months or so he was getting up at 5 o'clock each morning to go down to Luton Airport to clean for Britannia, changing back into a suit at 9 a.m. for his ordinary duties with Daily Office and then returning to Britannia after work to clean until 9 p.m. Meanwhile Kelly, who turned out to be a dead loss, left South Midlands leaving Tony and Duffy in control as equal partners.

South Midlands went from strength to strength for the next two years until Duffy's sudden death aged 57. His two sons and a daughter inherited his interest and entered the business but this was the death knell to Tony's involvement with South Midlands. There was a division of opinion; Duffy's widow and children could not see any further than a profitable but small family company, whereas Tony, as Managing Director, wanted to expand the Company.

#### Rose Sibley

Rose trained as a dress designer after leaving school but had to give up when her family moved from Ealing to Luton. It was there

that she met and married her first husband aged 17. Despite the birth of her son, Darren, Rose felt she needed something to occupy her time. Although she explained that she did not need to work, her husband providing enough for her and her child, she decided to take a job locally in a water meter factory for the pin money and company, in the safe knowledge that her mother was happy to look after Darren. On reflection, she says that she could have got a better job but was "lazy and unambitious".

It was whilst Tony was working on a South Midlands contract in Luton that he and Rose met. Both were already married and it was sometime before they were in a position to re-marry each other.

#### THE FORMATION OF SIBLEYKLEEN

The events at South Midlands following the death of Dan Duffy and his meeting Rose made Tony decide to make a fresh start in 1977. He agreed with Duffy's successors to split the business and announced to Rose, (which was received as a complete surprise), that they were going into the cleaning business together as equal partners. Tony says that having spotted Rose's capacity for attention to fine detail and an appreciation of the value of money, he perceived her ability as a financial controller and administrator but Rose was not so convinced, in fact she was exceedingly diffident at the prospect of controlling Tony's £250,000 share of the turnover of South Midlands. She confesses frankly that she was forced into it.

To start they acquired premises in Luton and set up Sibleykleen Limited. They had two office girls handling switchboard and wages/invoicing. The books were maintained by outside help. Half of South Midland's cleaning commitments were transferred to Sibleykleen together with the services of 200 out cleaners.

Rose made it her business to master each role within the office. She started on the switchboard, which she confessed was a disaster the first day. It took her two weeks to learn. Next she moved to wages and so on until she was satisfied that she could do anyone's job in the office and was therefore competent to supervise the overall administration.

Meanwhile Tony was busy drumming up new business; his methods included cold calling and telephone sales.

The future of Sibleykleen was consolidated when they got the Smith Kline & French contract (generating £1,400 per week) followed two months later by British Aerospace (cash flow £2,000 per week).



Tony believes that to be successful, you must set yourself firm objectives when you start up and hold to them. His target was to make himself and Rose millionaires within five years. It took seven years but they did it! He says you have to "see yourself in the business and go for the fruits of success upon which you have set your sights"; in Tony's case this was a white Rolls Royce. "Don't look back. Once you have made your commitment and left the security of your employment your back is against the wall. You have to deal with each new situation despite inexperience in the best way you can. Certainly there will always be set backs but these must be kept in proportion as part of the learning curve, and not seen as signs of failure".

Both Tony and Rose worked very hard for the first four years of Sibleykleen's life; they had no holidays or free time. Tony's children lived with their mother and Rose's son was brought up by his grandmother.

Tony focused his efforts on sales and Rose concentrated on the supervision of administration and financial control. When necessary both would pitch in with cleaning.

PR was a joint activity, it consisted of entertaining business contacts most evenings after work. Tony says, "they would think we were relations by the time we had finished; nothing was too much trouble".

He is a great believer in the dictum that the customer is king. He would go out and promise almost anything to customers. He did not worry about the volume of the new business that he was taking on but emphasises that you must watch your margins. He knew well how to price contracts; of total costs 70% was labour, 5% materials, 25% overheads with a mark up of 33% profit at the bottom line.

For her part Rose kept an eagle eye on cashflow. She made it her "number one priority". She admits that she was scrupulous to the point of nit picking. If a petty cash slip did not have a receipt she would not refund. Her recipe for success was to watch the debtors, chase up invoices with all the tactics in the book and to watch cash outflow meticulously.

Tony says "it was all very simple really". The reason for their success was a constant drive to increase sales and manage cashflow. Although he does admit that they had one setback, they made a loss in the second half of the first year. This was because they had an inadequate accounting system. After a stiff reprimand from their longstanding friend and the company's accountant, Bob Morton, they realised the error of their ways and instituted the production of monthly management accounts. Rose recommends that "they are well worth the extra time and money spent in their preparation".

To turn around this loss they cut costs. Office staff were cut down. The girls said that they preferred to go out cleaning until things looked up rather than to leave the company. This says much for the loyalty which the Sibley's managed to inspire in their staff. Rose is a firm believer that you should never work over your staff but work with them.

As already mentioned Tony and Rose value the assistance and advice given by Bob Morton over the years. In addition, Tony cited the support given by their bank manager. Sibleykleen was founded on the back of £150,000 loan from Barclays. As the Group's expansion quickened, the demands for cash became more pressing, but Barclays had confidence in Tony and Rose and were ever ready to lend. Tony concedes that things might have been different had Sibleykleen not been so successful, but his tips are "get yourself a good accountant and bank manager".

Tony then went on to explain his rationale for building up the Group structure. At the time of the sale the Group consisted of - Sibleykleen Group Limited, the holding company, which supplied financial and management services to its trading subsidiaries, Midlandkleen Limited, Londonkleen Limited, Southernkleen Limited, Northernkleen Limited, Northwestkleen Limited, Hospicare Limited and Sibleyguard Limited. Obviously, one of the reasons was to limit the Group's exposure to ordinary creditors everytime it expanded into a new area, but Tony explained that the primary reason was to overcome the difficulty of reconciling desired expansion with the need for control. His solution was to harness the enthusiasm of local management by management participation in their local subsidiary.

Firstly, Londonkleen was formed in 1981 with the new manager David Beaumont taking 40% of the equity. Then came Northwestkleen in which local manager, Paul McNeill received 25% equity for his efforts. Just prior to the sale, these minority interests were "rolled up" into holdings in Sibleykleen Group Limited. The subsidiaries thereby becoming wholly owned and the management being able to participate in the sale proceeds. The location of each new subsidiary was chosen on the basis of Tony's knowledge of local demand. He kept his ear to the ground, and invariably spotted potential through the existing firms in the area having forgotten about their customers.

In 1985, Tony and Rose decided to sell the Group to Blue Arrow plc for a share equivalent consideration of £1.45m.

Naturally, my next question was why? In answer they explained that:-

1. They had achieved what they had set out to do;

created a substantial enterprise. The offer from Blue Arrow resulted in the capitalisation of their efforts. There was security in cashing in their gains.

2. Both Tony and Rose appreciated the problems of span of control. They were uncertain whether the rapid growth of turnover could be sustained even with management participation, unless the Group evolved into a very different kind of animal. Tony found more and more that he was becoming removed from selling which he enjoyed. Growth had meant that he had had to assume a clear leadership role as chief executive. Increasingly he had become "desk bound by paper". Tony also went on to explain a residual dissatisfaction with the business that he and Rose had built up, he said that unfortunately good executive management "don't just fall into place". He added that, prior to receiving Blue Arrow's offer, he and Rose had been planning to appoint David Beaumont, of Londonkleen, as group managing director. But this plan was scotched by David's sudden heart attack.

Accordingly they accepted Blue Arrow's offer.

It is interesting to note that, Tony's hunch about growth in the value of Blue Arrow's shares was correct. When he and Rose cashed in their consideration recently, they got back considerably more than Sibleykleen price of £1.45m !

#### WHERE DO THEY GO FROM HERE ?

Since the sale Tony and Rose have used some of their proceeds enjoying their freedom, but they are now looking to build up another business when Tony's restrictive covenant lapses at the end of the year. "The money won't last for ever". Tony insists that this time they will do things differently; "getting the right corporate culture from the start is essential, we want to put together a proper management team". He explains "I want properly qualified people; a good accountant and a good PR manager are worth their weight in gold. I also need a franchising expert." Nevertheless qualifications are not everything, "commonsense is the most important asset anyone can have".

Some five weeks prior to my interview with Tony and Rose, they had just set up their latest enterprise Maidkleen (there had been a specific exemption from the restrictive covenant to allow this). The business is based on an idea which they had in 1980, that of superior residential cleaning. The service is provided by a team of three girls with a company van, uniforms, equipment

and materials all bearing the company's logo and is run from premises in Mill Hill under the control of Brian Stepney, Tony's latest recruit.

I gathered that demand is catching on fast, surprisingly, mostly from households in which the wife does not work. Perhaps there is a substantial demand for "one upmanship" to be cashed in on! In the five weeks since Maidkleen was established turnover has grown to £500 per week, on the basis of one team of three cleaners. Tony and Rose hope to see the business in profit by the end of the year, by which time they should have six teams of girls.

Tony points out that in order to accomplish this personal service, it is crucial that all the employees are properly motivated. In order to achieve this he intends to let the cleaners themselves have the final say over who joins their team. He hopes to sustain motivation by recognising effort and initiative in the form of gratuities over and above the girls' wages and by giving back to them control over and responsibility for their own work. Such an approach is unusual in the cleaning industry.

Tony and Rose are already bubbling over with new ideas to extend this business; housesitting, residential security services, garden care, a post-party clean up service .... The list goes on. In addition they would also like to get back into industrial cleaning. They would not aim to compete with the big boys of the industry on price, service is their platform. Having been relatively "big" before, they want to now move up market and be the best. Tony perceives a niche for top quality cleaning for banks, hotels and luxury commercial buildings "marketed under the name Excellence".

### SO WHY WERE THE SIBLEY'S SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS ?

Rose and Tony modestly describe the success of Sibleykleen as a "simple story" but why were they so successful when 80% or so of all new businesses fail or never really get off the ground ?

In my view, the primary reason was that Rose and Tony made a good team. Tony on sales and Rose on cashflow. I doubt if either would have been as successful on their own. Indeed, in Rose's case, she may well never have contemplated starting up her own business. She described herself as 'lazy', but when I put it to her that her initial hesitance might well have been due to lack of confidence she agreed. It is very much to her credit that she managed to keep a steady hand on the business to underpin Tony's ambitious expansion plans. Without Rose the business may have collapsed through over-trading. Tony had learnt the tools of his trade before starting up on his own; for Rose it was a different matter, having no prior knowledge of the cleaning industry herself she had to learn through the development of the business.

Rose and Tony also abided by the rules of good business management:-

- They made it their business to know their customer and to keep the customer satisfied. By this means they were quick to spot expansion opportunities; the development of new services to existing customers and the provision of existing services to new markets.
- They chose to 'stick to the knitting' - i.e. cleaning.
- They kept their operating gearing low; premises were on short leases.
- They had a flat and flexible organisation structure. They were prepared to "muck in" at all levels, including actual cleaning when necessary.
- They encouraged experimentation in new areas through management participation.
- They motivated their staff and gained their loyalty by working with them not over them. I asked how Tony and Rose had accommodated this principle when they began to acquire the trappings of success, Tony's Rolls Royce and Rose's Mercedes. Tony replied that it was simple, "everyone wants to be associated with success - staff and customers, but you must not go over the top". Rose added, "you must not divorce

yourself from people as a result of success; you must stay at their level.... People need feedback, you have to make them believe in themselves". Tony stresses that good teamwork is especially important in a labour intensive business like cleaning.

Of course they were lucky, they recognise that they hit the industry in a major growth phase, but luck alone would not have been sufficient, it was "their dedication to making it " which was crucial. I gather that they never contemplated failure.

Rose and Tony reflect on how useful it was to be able to "bounce ideas off" one another, both having the same commitment to the business. Frequently major decisions were "made over the kitchen table". They both claim a strong intuitive sense which they exploited to the full in decision making. As Tony says "you can rarely be sure that you are 100% right in what you decide. In the final analysis you have to follow your instincts. If logic suggests something is right but it does not feel right - don't do it!" I gather that with hindsight, this rule has paid dividends time and again. Tony claims that it is his intuition and perception which has given him his ability to spot niches in service markets. As Rose endorses, "frequently he sees a need for something (not just in cleaning) and then a year or so later someone is providing that service." With a gift like this I look forward to seeing where they will be in a couple of years time, given that they now have the finance and the time to follow through on Tony's ideas.

On a final note both said that building up the business was fun. Neither of them regret the personal sacrifices they made for the cause of success. As Rose said "we enjoyed it, ALL OF IT!"

#### PERSONAL PHILOSOPHIES

I asked each of them about their own personal values and beliefs:-

Both confessed that they were not regular church-goers; however I was surprised to hear Tony say that he prays daily, thanking God for their good fortune. Rose too believes in an almighty power. She was a Catholic by upbringing but technically is now excommunicated because of her divorce. She says that occasionally, when she wants to, she still goes to Mass. It struck me that there was a slight sadness when she said "I know I have no right to be there but sometimes I just feel I want to go".

Both are philanthropic, they entertain at home and undertake other fund raising activities to maintain their local Church and for the benefit of the Spastics Society. Rose commented that

they donated to charity even when money was tight in the early days of the business. She had observed at that time, that, in the same week as they had gave, money would come in from another, completely unconnected source to cover the donation. Consequently she believes that if you give out to others your kindness is repaid.

Similarly, they have not overlooked sharing their good fortune with their family and other relatives.

In response to my question about values and beliefs, both replied that they believed in each other and honesty. They like honest dealings with people.

Their three children (from their former marriages) are obviously important to them. They are all treated equally.

As far as their social life is concerned, they enjoy the company of others but despite offers of hospitality they do not want to get sucked into the local social circuit. Instead they prefer to enjoy their beautiful home, which they have built on the proceeds of the business.

#### OBSERVATIONS

How do Tony and Rose measure up as entrepreneurs ?

- They both have a wealth of intuition which, coupled with Tony's gifts of spotting market opportunities, has served them well.
- They are dedicated and singleminded in their pursuit of success. To them work is all consuming.
- Both believe in exploiting net works and opportunities. For example Tony made it his business to get involved with the British Institute of Cleaning Services and became Chairman of the Contract Cleaning and Maintenance Association. It was a good platform from which to keep an eye on competitors and changes in the industry.
- Both derive job satisfaction from the cleaning business. They needed to know that their customers were satisfied. As Rose said "in comparison to praise from clients, payment itself almost became incidental".
- Neither shy away from difficult problems. Rose

recalls the particular occasion when they decided that, in the interests of the business, Rose's brother-in-law, who had been made a director of Midlandkleen had to go, because he was not up to scratch. Although her brother-in-law was paid a golden handshake, the decision cost Rose a lot, since there is now a permanent rift between her and her sister. But Rose does not regret the decision, it was "necessary for the business".

- As far as self-confidence and assertiveness is concerned both claim to be somewhat shy. In Tony's case, frankly, I find this surprising. Rose too does not seem to be unduly shy or lacking in self-confidence but from what she had told me earlier in the interview perhaps this was not always the case.
- As regards systematic planning, it is difficult to say. My impression is that Tony is very much the ideas man but that Rose provides systematic checks and balances.
- It is overwhelmingly evident that both have initiative and a strong need for achievement.

Individually perhaps, neither possesses the complete range of the 13 entrepreneurial competences but put them together ...



## THE LESSON

What did I extract from my interview with the Sibleys:-

Tony's enthusiasm, to believe in oneself, to believe that it can be done and to get out and do it, is highly infectious.

As far as the service sector is concerned he says that there has never been a better time to start up in business. In the UK, unlike the USA, the level of service in so many sectors is still very poor and yet in today's consumer society we are more and more willing to pay for good service "if you are sensible in your marketing appraisal and determined, you really should not fail."

Tony remarked that he would like to draw on his experience to encourage others on to the entrepreneurial trail but they must be self-motivated. He has little sympathy for those who remain unemployed and blame society for their predicament, instead of trying to go it alone, in however modest way.

I was also interested to note Tony's caution about not pulling out too early. "OK if, after twelve months your business shows not even a faint sign of ultimate profit then perhaps you should cut your losses, but be prepared to ride it out and do not allow every set back to become a disaster."

The final point which really struck home was Tony's caution to continually be aware that human nature is not always nice, keep your guard up to spot the tricksters and the pitfalls but do not be surprised when you get caught out, it is sure to happen sooner or later and it is not the end of the world. "Balance dedication and resilience, and follow your instinct".

# APPENDIX 2

## Accountants' Report on Sibleykleen

The following is a copy of a report to the Directors of Blue Arrow and Lloyds Bank International Limited received from Longcrofts, Reporting Accountants.

The Directors,  
Blue Arrow PLC

The Directors,  
Lloyds Bank International Limited

31st January, 1985

Gentlemen,

Sibleykleen Group Limited ("the Company") was incorporated on the 11th August, 1976 under the name Ubigroup (Sibley) Limited. The Company's name was changed on 12th April, 1977 to Sibleykleen Limited and on 17th August, 1982 the current name was adopted. The Company commenced business on 1st April, 1977 and has subsequently acquired certain subsidiaries, details of which are given in the schedule to this report.

We have examined the audited accounts of the Company and its subsidiaries ("the Group") for the five years ended 31st March, 1984, and the six months ended 30th September, 1984. Messrs. Morton Thornton, Chartered Accountants, were auditors of all Group companies throughout the period. No audited accounts have been prepared for any company in the Group subsequent to 30th September, 1984.

The auditors' reports for the Group in each of the four years ended 31st March, 1984 were given subject to a qualification in respect of the dependence on the close involvement of the Directors, who are also the major shareholders, in the system of internal control of the Group.

The summarised financial information presented below is based on the audited accounts of the Group, after such adjustment as we consider appropriate.

In our opinion, the financial information set out below gives, under the historical cost convention, a true and fair view of the results and source and application of funds of the Group for the stated periods ended 30th September, 1984 and a true and fair view of the state of the affairs of the Company and the Group on that date.

Consolidated  
Profit and Loss  
Accounts

		Year ended 31st March.				Six months to 30th Sept.
	Notes	1980 £000	1981 £000	1982 £000	1983 £000	1984 £000
Turnover	2	591	752	1,257	2,099	1,550
Cost of sales		441	551	940	1,611	1,178
Gross profit		150	201	317	488	372
Administration expenses		131	178	258	389	310
Operating profit	3	19	23	59	99	62
Interest payable	4	7	9	12	21	14
Profit on ordinary activities before taxation		12	14	47	78	48
Taxation	5	6	6	20	33	20
Profit on ordinary activities after taxation		6	8	27	45	28
Minority interests		—	1	7	16	8
Retained profits		6	7	20	29	20

# Accountants' Report on Sibleykleen continued

## Balance Sheets

As at 30th September 1971				
		The Group		The Company
	Notes	£000	£000	£000
Fixed Assets				
Tangible	6		256	
Investments	7		—	
			<u>256</u>	
Current Assets				
Stock	8	8		
Debtors	9	588		
Cash at bank and in hand		4		
		<u>600</u>		
Current Liabilities - Creditors falling due within one year	10	617		
Net Current Liabilities			(17)	
Total Assets less Current Liabilities			239	
Creditors falling due after more than one year	10		35	
			<u>204</u>	
Provisions for Liabilities and Charges	11		47	
			<u>157</u>	
Capital and Reserves				
Called up share capital	12		1	
Reserves	13		109	
Shareholders funds			110	
Minority interests			47	
			<u>157</u>	

# Accountants' Report on Sibleykleen continued

	Six months ended 30th Sept. 1984					
	1980 £000	1981 £000	1982 £000	1983 £000	1984 £000	1984 £000
<b>SOURCE OF FUNDS</b>						
Profit before taxation less minority interest	12	13	40	62	19	40
Adjustments for items not involving the movement of funds: —						
Minority interest in retained profit for the period	—	1	7	16	13	8
Depreciation	12	15	35	65	79	44
Adjustment on disposal of tangible fixed assets	—	1	1	—	—	5
Total generated from operations	24	30	83	143	111	97
Funds from other sources						
Proceeds from disposal of tangible fixed assets	1	14	2	16	69	13
Issue of shares	—	1	—	—	—	—
	25	45	85	159	180	110
<b>APPLICATION OF FUNDS</b>						
Purchase of tangible fixed assets	23	41	130	192	182	33
Taxation paid	—	—	2	2	7	—
	23	41	132	194	189	33
	2	4	(47)	(35)	(9)	77
<b>INCREASE/(DECREASE) IN WORKING CAPITAL</b>						
Stock	—	3	1	3	1	(1)
Debtors	31	13	175	(18)	144	165
Creditors	(23)	(41)	(129)	(133)	(78)	10
Movement in net liquid funds	8	(25)	47	(148)	67	174
Cash and bank balances	13	4	(9)	64	2	(56)
Bank overdraft and loans	(19)	25	(85)	49	(78)	(39)
	2	4	(47)	(35)	(9)	77

Consolidated  
Source and  
Application of  
Funds

## Accountants' Report on Sibleykleen continued

### Notes to the Accounts

#### 1. Basis of Presentation

The consolidated accounts, which have been prepared under the historical cost convention, comprise the accounts of the Company and its subsidiaries after eliminating all intercompany transactions. The accounting periods of the Group companies are co-terminous.

#### 2. Accounting Policies

##### (a) Turnover

Turnover represents the invoiced amount of services supplied by the Group, excluding value added tax.

##### (b) Depreciation

All tangible fixed assets are depreciated over their anticipated useful lives, in straight line instalments, as follows: —

Machinery and equipment	- 25%	straight line basis
Office equipment	- 15%	
Motor vehicles	- 25%	reducing balance basis
Fixture and fittings	- 15%	

##### (c) Investments

Investments in subsidiaries are stated at cost.

##### (c) Stock

Stock is valued at the lower of cost and net realisable value.

##### (e) Doubtful Debts

Specific provision is made against debts which, in the opinion of the Directors, may be irrecoverable.

##### (f) Hire Purchase

Tangible fixed assets acquired under hire purchase agreements are capitalised and depreciated. Hire purchase instalments outstanding represent future liabilities to finance companies, exclusive of future interest. All amounts due within twelve months of the balance sheet date have been included in current liabilities.

##### (g) Deferred taxation

Provision is made for corporation tax deferred because of differences between depreciation and other charges provided for in the accounts and the corresponding allowances for taxation purposes, except to the extent that, in the opinion of the Directors, such taxation will not be payable in the foreseeable future.

##### (h) Leasing

Lease rentals made in respect of operating leases are written off over the term of the leases. Assets obtained under finance leases are capitalised and depreciated, the interest element of the rental obligations is charged to the profit and loss account over the period of the lease and represents a constant proportion of the balance of capital repayments outstanding.

#### 3. Operating Profit

Operating profit is stated after charging the following items: —

	Year ended 31st March,				
	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Depreciation	12	15	35	65	79
Leasing and hire charges	4	18	19	14	44
Directors' emoluments, including pension contributions	34	34	35	62	68
Auditors' remuneration	2	4	4	5	5

Six months ended 30th Sept 1984

£000
14
20
25
10

## Accountants' Report on Sibleykleen continued

### 4. Interest Payable

	Year ended 31st March.					Six months ended 30th Sept. 1984
	1980 \$000	1981 \$000	1982 \$000	1983 \$000	1984 \$000	1984 \$000
On bank loans and overdrafts	5	5	4	4	4	5
On other loans wholly repayable within five years	2	4	8	17	21	9
	<u>7</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>14</u>

### 5. Taxation

	Year ended 31st March.					Six months ended 30th Sept. 1984
	1980 \$000	1981 \$000	1982 \$000	1983 \$000	1984 \$000	1984 \$000
UK corporation tax						
Current	4	2	(3)	20	6	24
Deferred	2	4	23	13	—	(4)
	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>20</u>

### 6. Tangible Fixed Assets

Tangible fixed assets at 30th September, 1984 comprise: —

	Group			Company		
	Cost \$000	Depreciation \$000	Book Value \$000	Cost \$000	Depreciation \$000	Book Value \$000
Machinery and equipment	271	145	126	—	—	—
Office equipment	39	9	30	29	7	22
Motor vehicles	148	53	95	74	28	46
Fixtures and fittings	7	2	5	3	1	2
	<u>465</u>	<u>209</u>	<u>256</u>	<u>106</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>70</u>

### 7. Investments

Fixed asset investments of the Company comprise investments in subsidiaries.

### 8. Stock

Stock comprises consumable materials.

### 9. Debtors

Debtors at 30th September, 1984 included \$3,169 relating to Mr. A. W. Sibley's overdrawn account. This overdrawn account was not subject to any repayment terms or interest charges and subsequent to the balance sheet date has been repaid.

# Accountants' Report on Sibleykleen continued

## 10. Creditors

	At 30th September 1984	At 30th September 1983
	Group	Company
	£000	£000
Amounts falling due within one year: —		
Bank overdraft	145	—
Trade creditors	83	—
Corporation tax	42	—
Other taxation and social security	164	—
Hire purchase liabilities	81	—
Other creditors	11	—
Accruals	91	—
	<u>617</u>	<u>—</u>

Bank overdrafts amounting to \$145,000, are secured by way of a debenture, dated June, 1977, and by a fixed and floating charge over the assets of the Group.

Amounts falling due after more than one year: —  
Hire purchase liabilities

35	15
<u>35</u>	<u>15</u>

## 11. Provisions for liabilities and charges

Deferred taxation provided in the accounts, and including all potential liabilities, is as follows: —

	At 30th September 1984	At 30th September 1983
	Group	Company
	£000	£000
Tax effect of timing differences due to: —		
Excess of tax allowances over depreciation	52	—
Less: tax losses available for carry forward against future taxable profits	5	—
	<u>47</u>	<u>—</u>

## 12. Called-up Share Capital

Authorised:  
1,000 ordinary shares of \$1 each

Allotted, called-up and fully paid:  
1,000 ordinary shares of \$1 each

At 30th September 1984

\$1,000

\$1,000

## 13. Group Reserves

Movements of Group reserves during the period were: —

	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984
	£000	£000	£000	£000	£000
Balance at beginning of year	14	20	27	47	76
Retained profit for the year	6	7	20	29	13

Six months ended

30th Sept.

1984

£000

189

20

109

## Accountants' Report on Sibleykleen continued

### 14. Contingent Liabilities

- (a) the Company has given a guarantee to its bankers, secured by way of a fixed and floating charge over its assets in respect of the loan and overdraft facilities of its subsidiaries. At 30th September, 1984 the extent of the contingent liability amounted to \$98,682.
- (b) the Company has given a guarantee and an indemnity to a finance company in respect of hire purchase facilities extended to its subsidiaries. At 30th September, 1984 the extent of this contingent liability amounted to \$82,393.

### 15. Leasing Commitments

The future minimum lease payments to which the Group is committed at 30th September, 1984 under leases and contract hire agreements are as follows:—

	<u>Group</u>	<u>Company</u>
	<u>\$000</u>	<u>\$000</u>
Within five years:—		
Year ending 30th September, 1985	36	3
30th September, 1986	5	2
	<u>41</u>	<u>5</u>

### 16. Capital Expenditure

Capital expenditure authorised by the Directors but not provided in the accounts amounts to \$5,100.

### 17. Post Balance Sheet Events

On 8th November, 1984 Sibleykleen acquired 100 per cent. of Sicleyguard Limited for \$1,000. The Company has not commenced to trade.

On 2nd January, 1985 Sibleykleen acquired 100 per cent. of Hospicare Limited for \$1,000, and acquired the remaining minority interest of 40 per cent. in Southernkleen Limited for \$400.

On 30th January, 1985, following a reconstruction of the shareholdings in the Group, Sibleykleen acquired at no cost all the remaining minority interests in its subsidiary companies shown in the Schedule to this Report.

Yours faithfully

LONGCROFTS  
Chartered Accountants



# WAKE UP!

Male and Female Executives

## EXPAND YOUR OWN BUSINESS

in Partnership with the

## Sibleykleen Group



David Beaumont  
Londonkleen

Ask David Beaumont (ex Exlusive) or Paul McNeill (ex ISC) if they made the right decision. David formed LONDONKLEEN just two years ago, and Paul NORTHWESTKLEEN in October 1982. This year David's annual sales will exceed one million pounds and Paul's £250,000. They are no longer working to expand someone else's business, now they have a substantial share in their own efforts, which, as you can see, is well on the way to a secure future for them both.



Paul McNeill  
Northwestkleen

I am sure that there are many contract cleaning executives with good track records, who can be just as successful as David and Paul. So telephone us and let us meet you; if you are acceptable we will provide the full backing of an established group, but be prepared to take your coat off and start from scratch.

## IT'S UP TO YOU!

Contact TONY (0532) 454040 or DAVID 01-349 4821 and secure YOUR future with the SIBLEYKLEEN GROUP.

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NORTHWESTKLEEN • MAIDKLEEN INTERNATIONAL

Contractors to: M.O.D., D.H.S.S., Inland Revenue, Home Office, M.A.F.F., B.B.C., British Aerospace, G.E.C., Boroughs of Enfield, Hillingdon, Luton, British Rail, U.S.A.F., B.O.C., Cadbury-Schweppes, Honeywell.

## Sibleykleen Group

1 Kenilworth Road, Luton, Beds LU1 1DQ

For a better cleaning service.....

Settle on Midlandkleen!



**Midlandkleen**

# Midlandkleen Industrial Services

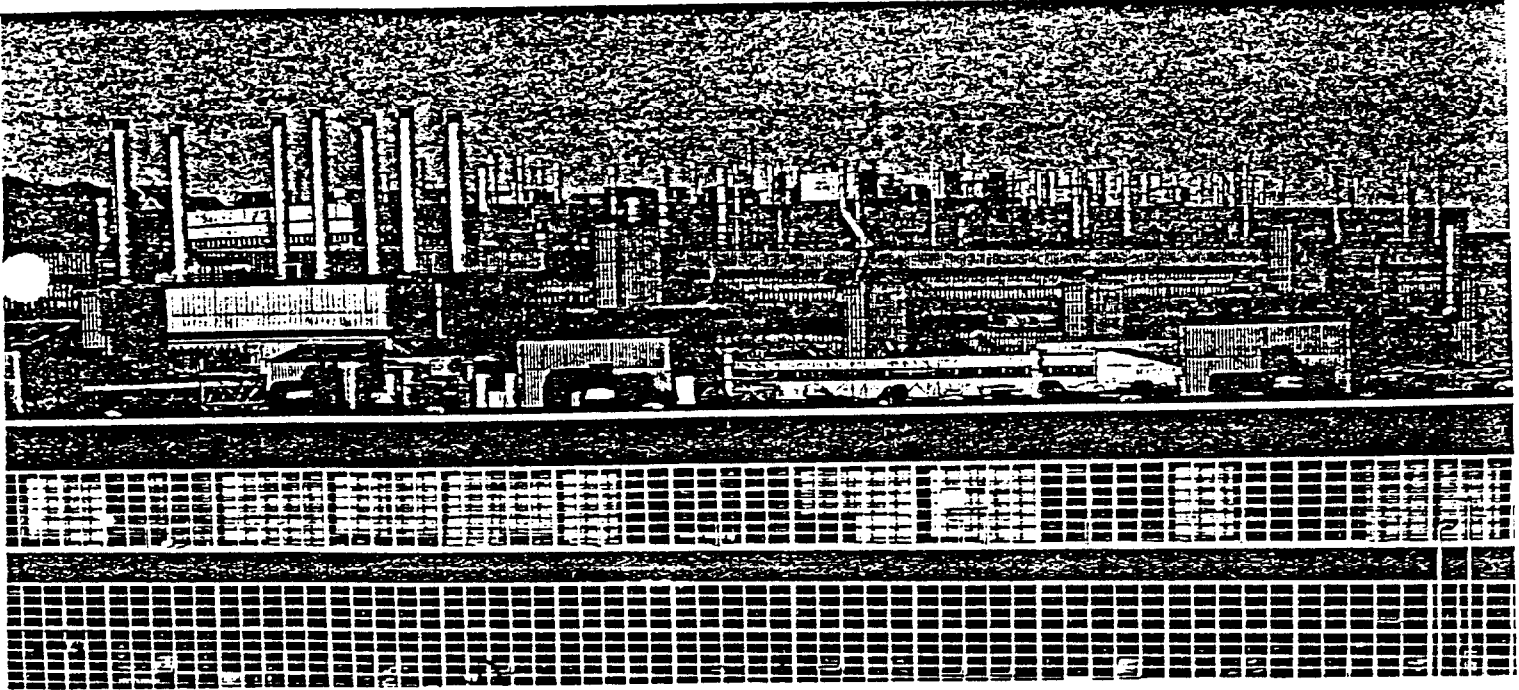
Choose our Industrial Cleaning Division before the Inspector arrives—not after!

Midlandkleen have over 20 years experience of industrial cleaning. We have cleaned spray booths, cyanide plants, oil and septic tanks & water towers. We carry out builder's cleans, complete factory dust downs, painting and decorating, floor de-greasing, stone renovation, metal cleaning and even the internal structure of a 12th century church. We also service Micro-

clean rooms for the aero-space industry. Among our prestige clients we are proud to serve: Vauxhall Motors, Volkswagen-Audi, British Steel, British Aero-space Dynamics, British Rail and International Harvesters.

Use our ancillary services to support your office cleaning programme.

We clean carpets and upholstery, curtains and fabrics in-situ. Blinds, windows, paintwork, bronze, stainless steel, marble and terazzo... in fact you name it—we clean it!



Ring us now.....



We're at your service!

(0582) 29172  
**Midlandkleen**

95 Maple Road  
Luton  
Bedfordshire LU4 8BQ



Member of the BSCA

Member of the CCMA



Member of the Sibleykleen Group

FAIRHAVEN WHOLEFOODS LIMITED

BY

PAUL S. HARRISON

## INTRODUCTION

Robin Sternberg possesses most of the factors identified by McClelland and others as indicating a strong tendency towards entrepreneurship. However it was not until Robin reached the age of 45 that his "determining event" took place in the all too common form of redundancy. Not untypically Robin then tried a number of ideas before commercialising his philosophy on food and combining a calling with conventional management skills to form Fairhaven Wholefoods Limited, now heading for a 1986 turnover of £½m.

## FAMILY AND EDUCATION

Robin was brought up in the immigrant community in and around London. His mother immigrated here from Germany with her family after the first World War and his father's parents had settled here having left eastern Europe in the 1890's.

Typically making his own way, Robin's father ran a reasonably successful paper business, "he would not work for others". However Robin did not imagine during his early life that he would run his own business and felt no inclination to do so.

Even though Robin is an only child his parents did not put pressure on him to join the business and he was very much allowed to go his own way from an early age.

For his primary and secondary education Robin attended a school where teaching centred around the "anthroposophical" theories of Rudolph Steiner. These attempted to explain the world, events and processes via the nature of man. It is hard to assess how this teaching slant may have affected Robin but at the very least I feel that it possibly fostered an ability to stand back and take a broader view of life and human behaviour than many people do.

Robin enjoyed study and following a short period of additional tuition went up to Oxford to read Classics.

University life seems to have been fairly unremarkable but in his final year Robin's mother was killed and his father injured in an accident and Robin returned to London to run the business while his father recovered. There was still no desire to make a career in his father's footsteps and as soon as Mr Sternberg had sufficiently recovered Robin returned to Oxford to avail himself of the placements service.

Robin's feeling that he "always had it in him" to run his own business seems to stem from confidence gained during this period. Robin also saw room for improvement in the family business which led to some disagreements with his father.

## INITIAL CAREER

At the beginning of the "never had it so good" sixties Robin had little difficulty in finding a job in industry, where he had always seen his future. He spent five years with Potterton (the boiler people) in marketing and market research before moving to the Gas Council.

Having progressed a little way up the management ladder Robin increasingly came into contact with the internal politics and conflicts which were prevalent in this rather bureaucratic organisation and disliked the way that these considerations interfered with business decisions.

Robin moved on to a part of one of the "securities" companies but as was the fashion at the time he was floated off as the result of a take-over and eventually made redundant.

Possibly seeking a less complicated life, Robin became MD of a small office furniture company; public but still family controlled. Experience with his father's business should perhaps have sounded alarm bells here and following attempts to introduce new systems to run things more efficiently the "autocratic" chairman made Robin redundant.

Twice redundant in three years and now with a wife and young family Robin fortunately found another job quite quickly and entered a period of relative stability as GM of a company making electrical control equipment for heating boilers. Again he found the hierarchical management system unpleasant but stayed for six years until, following multiple take-overs and wranglings between the large groups of which Robin's company was a part, redundancy once again came his way as the company was closed.

#### NOW WHAT?

Even at the depth of the recession in 1980 Robin, as an experienced manager, could have found another "proper job". However this would almost certainly have entailed moving out of Letchworth where the family had become well established. Therefore, as a result of an attachment to Letchworth, a somewhat jaded view of industry and bolstered with Robin's confidence and his wife, Wendy's nursing salary, a joint decision was made to stay put and for Robin to attempt to go it alone.

#### THE BIRTH OF FAIRHAVEN

Robin had been winding up his old company on a part time basis and his first inclination was to try to start something with the stock and some patents which he had bought. However, he failed to arouse much interest with that and tried selling central heating systems for a while under a franchise arrangement. Unfortunately there were, once again, few buyers.

For some time Robin and Wendy had been helping the local Vegetarian Society by organising groups for bulk buying wholefood. The arrangement was to gather a group of members together, pool requirements, ensuring that individual amounts were adjusted to give totals equal to the bulk quantity, make the bulk purchase and share it out.

Just at the time that people weren't buying Robin's heating systems the wholefood buying was getting out of hand with four groups running separate buying cycles and a large amount of members time being spent administering the system. The opportunity was spotted and Robin offered to take on the buying and run it as a business. The society were quite happy for him to do this as for a small profit margin members could obtain regular supplies of food at what was still a very good price and Robin even offered door-to-door delivery.

Therefore, rather boldly, Fairhaven Wholefoods Limited was set up in May 1981 with a customer base of 24.

## PROGRESS TO DATE

Robin stuck to the same system used by the voluntary scheme and instituted a monthly ordering cycle. Customers order their goods, the vast majority paying with the order, and at the order cut-off date the quantities are aggregated and bulk food bought in the minimum amount to cover orders placed. The bulk quantities are then broken down to meet the orders and delivered.

In terms of a business to start and grow the Fairhaven formula has key advantages;

Very little capital outlay -weighing and bagging equipment

Virtually no working capital requirements -customers pay with order before stock is bought and almost no stock is left at the end of the cycle.

Additionally, no premises or vehicles were required as Robin did the bulk breaking at home and used his existing estate car for transport.

Customers were pleased with the quality and price of the goods and, of course, the delivery service and word spread quickly. In his fourth month customers had climbed to above the 100 mark.

A general increase in awareness of health and the content of food products obviously helped, with the major stores rather slow to react and then expensive and the smaller, specialist shops even more costly.

Robin found that he didn't need to advertise, placing great emphasis on meeting people when delivering to discover their needs and views on new products.

The monthly order form mailed to each customer (in duplicate - one for a friend) also serves as a newsletter (see appendix I) and distributing these with the local newspaper brought in some extra custom as did stalls at fetes etc. Robin also encourages food sharing via the form and chooses sale lot sizes to lend themselves to this activity.

After a year Robin took over a small lock-up shop unit in Letchworth market and began selling smaller packs of food (bulk breaking excess at first). Again value and friendly service proved successful.

The base business continued to grow and in the second year Wendy gave up work to help and a part time assistant was engaged for the monthly weighing period.

Last year the volume of business grew too great to handle, both personally (despite regular 100hr working weeks) and from the point of view of available space in Robin's house. Following a careful courtship period Paul and Gill Pritchard joined the business as equal partners and both houses were mortgaged to buy a warehouse.

This is where the business is now, with monthly customers rapidly approaching 1000, spread throughout Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, and the small market shop being restocked from the warehouse two or three times daily.



## THE FUTURE

Robin is now looking to make full use of the warehouse by buying in larger bulk quantities and possibly importing direct, but is well aware of working capital implications. He wants the business to grow without increasing overheads or inefficiencies but is more concerned to retain personal contact with customers through deliveries made by himself or Paul.

## PERSONAL ANALYSIS

Robin's early career, his relations with his father and difficulties in fitting in with the system in really any of his jobs, may suggest a general problem in getting on with people or, like his father, a basic inability to work for anyone else. However, this is certainly not so and I feel that Robin's problem with organisations was essentially a moral one. Robin scored highly on all of the 13 competencies associated with entrepreneurial success except for assertiveness and possibly self-confidence (see appendix II). These two lower scores may link with the moral issue in explaining his difficulties with company politics in that they tend to mitigate against performing well in that type of situation.

References to his dislike of company politics are noted above and he talks of the dichotomy of home (life?) and work which exists for most people.

Fairhaven fits Robin's personal views so removing this dichotomy. He also sees himself as something of a parish priest or possibly missionary gently spreading his vegetarian ideas, not by direct pressure or exhortation but via good value wholefood which can be appreciated by anyone.

It seems unlikely that Robin would have had the necessary dedication and commitment to make a success of a venture which did not tie-in closely with his personal views, and his efforts immediately prior to Fairhaven bear this out.

Robin places great emphasis on people and is continually looking for ways to improve his service to customers who he sees as the main asset of the business.

In terms of motivation Robin has achieved great satisfaction from growing the business and this seems to be his main driving force. One of his criticisms regarding his father is that he wouldn't grow his business. While satisfying a second motivator in achieving a measure of financial security for the two families now dependent on Fairhaven, continued growth may begin to compromise Robin's desire for customer contact and may also introduce some unwelcome conflict as more staff are needed.

It would be wrong, I feel, to point to Robin's immigrant background and family entrepreneurship as reasons for his entering business, particularly as he was 45 when he did so having spent over 20 years in industry. It is probably equally wrong to emphasise the moral issues, as I have, maybe focussed by his schooling, and one could well argue that anyone made redundant for the third time is likely to try something different. However, it seems to me that moral issues have played a part in Robin's experiences with industry and that his family background provided some of the confidence and determination needed when starting up.

With regard to success, again I think that the moral aspects have contributed together with undoubted management expertise and, of course, an exceptionally good scheme.

APPENDIX I

8th May 1986

Dear Friends and Customers, again including dozens who are new to us this month,

First may we share with you our biggest (and littlest) family news - born to Gill & Paul on 22nd April, Thomas, brother to Eleanor, Melissa, Felicity & Alexandra, Godson-to-be to Wendy & Robin.

Thomas, whose ETA was actually 1st May, is we hope a good reason for being just a day or two late with the last few of your April deliveries. We're working hard to try and complete them all on time this month - we'll do our very best. Thank you, incidentally, all of you who responded to our appeal to get orders in on time (28th May, remember, for this form) - if you are on time with orders then we have a much better chance of being on time with all the deliveries. Perhaps too we should repeat our advance notice that, due to exceptional staff shortages in July, we shall have just for that month to work to rule by saying no late orders, no additions, and no samples; delivery may have to stretch right through the month; and in fact, whilst the basic delivery service will be maintained in July, those of you who don't normally order every month may find you can help by switching to a June or August delivery when we shall be at full strength.

The main price news for June is mixed, as usual, but more down than up: flour is up, beans generally down, cashews and hazels down, most fruit down, but the Brita filters and refills up about 15% due to currency swings. We haven't altered the listed items very much this time - there have been a lot of new things in the last two or three months for you to catch up with - but we have changed two of the flavours in the Granose (formerly known as Nutridelite) fruit bars - lines 439-40 - to Orange and Strawberry; they're not the cheapest, but are very good quality, quite substantial at 50 grams each, and, sandwiched in rice paper, they are made to split neatly into five sections. As we get nearer to holiday time, some of you may like to know more about the 6-gallon Containers (line 445). They are about 10x12x18" high, stackable, very strong, with a handle and two bungs in the top (1" & 2.5" diameter), and we supply a tap, itself worth about a pound, to fit in place of the smallest bung. We are supplying them at a mere £1 complete simply because we obtain our apple concentrate in them, but they would probably cost about £10 in a camping shop. Customers have used them for all kinds of things such as photographic chemicals and diesel tanks, and one has developed an automatic watering system for his greenhouse with them, but most find them very good for wine making, and for water on camping holidays (they can be laid flat with the tap projecting downwards); one family regularly pays for a weekend's camping by taking a dozen and selling them on the site to fellow campers!

This is the 61st regular monthly list we have produced, since we started independent life, arising from within the local Vegetarian Society, just five years ago in May 1981. In that time our list has grown from 24 foods to over 400, our workspace from 100 to 5000 square feet, and our workers from one part-timer to a team of eight very full-timers; but best of all we have changed to a two-family business committed to our ideas of service

We are happy to include here without charge any items which seem relevant to us, subject to space and to receipt of written details by the 28th of the prior month.

Letch Library 80th Anniversary Celebration include Cooks & Books event with Dams Meera Taneja (Indian Cookery), Eth Pearce (West Indian), Jennifer Gitti (Vegetarian) and Fairhaven (all your favourites) 25/5/86 8pm - tickets from Library

Herts Holistic Health Centre, Bridget W 524631 (Touch for Health Course using acupressure & massage to relieve stress 14-15/6/86 - details from Maria, St Albans 53359)

Letch Allergy Support Gp. Pat Letch 4859 (Dr Jean Monro on Chemical Allergies, Letch Library, 19/6/86 7.30)

Letch Holistic Health Gp. Joe Letch 6850 (buffet with shared contributions discussion led by Gill & Chris Langley approaches to Veganism. 20/6/86 - ring for details)

Letch & Dis Vegetarian Soc. Rene Letch 683694, Peter Letch 671579 - new members' guests always welcome to varied program of activities

Ex-Letchworth vegetarians Gordon Margaret Watson run highly recommended smallscale b & b service + meals arrangement in Charmouth, Dorset - ri 0297 60751

Customer Beachie who is training Alexander Technique offers furniture beds, mattresses, futons, all handmade - order - Hertford 53933

Customer Denise has massage table for sale - Whitwell 255

## Notes

- For each item you want please enter both the 'No. of Packs' and the 'Total Cost' columns.
- For a sample of any unfamiliar item write 'SAM' in 'No. of Packs' column. Samples are generally free when we weigh them out ourselves but jars, bars etc are charged pro rata to the pack price.
- To help you calculate 2%: Allow 2p for each full pound PLUS 2p for an odd penny. The discount only applies to cash or cheques received before banking by the due date (not post-dated), on orders delivered as normal.
- We regret that our warehouse is not set up for retail, cash & carry sale. Please see details of our shop on the front page.
- We are sorry to impose a Minimum Order Value of £12 but this is necessary to keep down our overall costs and prices.
- We cannot split packs but we will try to find you a 'Foodmate' with whom you could share.
- We are happy to quote for supplying foods in the original bulk packs.
- We try hard to avoid mistakes. Please tell us if anything is wrong so that we can put it right as soon as possible. We always buy the best quality foods but if anything proves unsatisfactory, tell us straight away and we will offer an exchange or refund.
- Foods are normally delivered by the date shown but sometimes can

	Pack Size	Pack Cost	No. of Packs	Total Cost
<b>SUBTOTAL (Brought forward)</b>				
<b>301 SPREADS—Sweet</b>				
302 Honey - Australian Clear	1x7lb	5.75	1	5.75
303 Honey - Australian Set	1x7lb	5.75	1	5.75
304 Honey - Mexican Clear	1x7lb	4.75	1	4.75
305 Honey - Mexican Set	1x7lb	4.75	1	4.75
306 Honey - Acacia Clear	2x1lb	2.00	1	2.00
307 Honey - Clover Clear	2x1lb	1.65	1	1.65
308 Honey - Clover Set	2x1lb	1.65	1	1.65
309 Honey - Wildflower Clear	2x1lb	1.65	1	1.65
310 Honey - Wildflower Set	2x1lb	1.65	1	1.65
311 Chunk Honey - (Cut Comb in Acacia)	2x12oz	2.50	1	2.50
312 Honeycomb	1x12oz	1.70	1	1.70
313 Apricot Jam NAS, Whole Earth	2x10oz	1.45	1	1.45
314 Blackcurrant Jam NAS, Whole Earth	2x10oz	1.55	1	1.55
315 Blueberry Jam NAS, Whole Earth	2x10oz	1.65	1	1.65
316 Orange Marmalade NAS, Whole Earth	2x10oz	1.45	1	1.45
317 Raspberry Jam NAS, Whole Earth	2x10oz	1.55	1	1.55
318 Pear/Apple Spread NAS, Whole Earth	2x1lb	1.75	1	1.75
319 Pear/Apple Spread + Citrus NAS	2x12oz	1.55	1	1.55
320 Date Syrup - Pure NAS	2x12oz	1.75	1	1.75
321 Maple Syrup	2x12oz	4.15	1	4.15
322 Malt Extract	2x1lb	1.10	1	1.10
323 Molasses	2x1lb	0.80	1	0.80
<b>324 DRINKS</b>				
325 Liquid Soya Milk, Granose	12x1L	7.10	1	7.10
326 Liquid Soya Milk, Granose NAS	12x1L	7.10	1	7.10
327 Skimmed Milk Powder	2.5K	4.10	1	4.10
328 Barley Cup CF	2x250g	1.90	1	1.90
329 Dandelion Coffee Grains CF	250g	2.50	1	2.50
330 Chamomile Tea Bags CF	2x25	1.60	1	1.60
331 Mixed Fruit Tea Bags CF	2x25	1.60	1	1.60
332 Peppermint Tea Bags CF	2x25	1.60	1	1.60
333 Rose Hip Tea Bags CF	2x25	1.60	1	1.60
334 Red Bush Tea Bags CF	2x40	1.40	1	1.40
335 Luaka Tea Bags - Decaffeinated	2x24	1.90	1	1.90
336				
<b>337 JUICES—Sugar-free</b>				
338 Apple Concentrate (dil 1:8)	2.5L	6.55	1	6.55
339 Apple & Blackcurrant Conc. (dil 1:8)	2x.5L	4.65	1	4.65
340 Apple & Cherry Conc. (dil 1:8)	2x.5L	4.65	1	4.65
341 Apple & Orange Conc. (dil 1:8)	2x.5L	4.65	1	4.65
342 Apple & Raspberry Conc. (dil 1:8)	2x.5L	4.65	1	4.65
343 Aspal Apple ORG	2x1L	2.25	1	2.25
344 Grape - Red	2x1L	1.15	1	1.15
345 Grape - White	2x1L	1.15	1	1.15
346 Grapefruit	2x1L	1.20	1	1.20
347 Orange	2x1L	1.20	1	1.20
348 Pineapple	2x1L	1.20	1	1.20
349 Tomato	2x1L	1.00	1	1.00
350 Norfolk Punch (apple) - Bottles	2x70cl	4.50	1	4.50
351 Norfolk Punch (apple) - Pitcher	1x2L	6.00	1	6.00
352				
353				
<b>354 FLAVOURS etc</b>				
355 Carob Powder	1K	0.95	1	0.95
356 Dried Yeast	500g	1.35	1	1.35
357 Miso - Soya Paste, Genmai	2x400g	5.00	1	5.00
358 Soya Sauce - Shoyu - Japanese	1L	2.45	1	2.45
359 Tamari Sauce	1L	3.40	1	3.40
360 Cyder Vinegar ORG	2.5L	2.25	1	2.25
361 Tomato Ketchup NAS, Whole Earth	2x328g	1.60	1	1.60
362 Brown Sauce NAS, Whole Earth	2x328g	1.65	1	1.65
363 Baked Beans NAS, Whole Earth	6x440g	2.90	1	2.90
364 Rock Salt - Fine	2.5K	0.60	1	0.60
365 Sea Salt - Large Crystals	2.5K	0.90	1	0.90
366 Sea Salt - Fine	2.5K	0.90	1	0.90
367 Herb Salt	250g	0.85	1	0.85
368 Peppercorns - Black	250g	2.00	1	2.00
369 Sugar - Muscovado	2.5K	2.45	1	2.45
370				
<b>371 OILS:</b>				
372 Olive Oil - Virgin	2x1L	5.10	1	5.10
373 Soya Oil	2x1L	1.35	1	1.35
374 Sunflower Oil	2x1L	1.50	1	1.50
375 Sunflower Oil - Virgin	1x5L	4.00	1	4.00
376				

	Pack Size	Pack Cost	No. of Packs	Total Cost
<b>SUBTOTAL (Brought forward)</b>				
<b>401 SNACKS &amp; TREATS—Savoury</b>				
402 Pumpernickel Rye Bread	4x250g	1.40	1	1.40
403 Rice Cakes - No Salt ORG 112x110g	11.32K	6.60	1	6.60
404 Rice Cakes - With Salt ORG 112x110g	11.32K	6.60	1	6.60
405 Wholewheat Crisps - Salted	50x10g	1.75	1	1.75
406 WW Crisps - Cheese/Onion Salted	50x10g	3.75	1	3.75
407 WW Crisps - Smokey Bacon, Salted	50x10g	3.75	1	3.75
408 Bombay Mix GF	1K	2.20	1	2.20
409 Chin-Chin GF	1K	2.20	1	2.20
410 Black Olives in Brine (Vacuum Pack)	12x454g	1.50	1	1.50
411 Green Olives in Brine (Vacuum Pack)	12x454g	1.40	1	1.40
412				
<b>413 SNACKS &amp; TREATS—Sweet</b>				
414 Banana Chips - sweetened with Sugar	500g	0.80	1	0.80
415 Crystallised Ginger in Raw Sugar	500g	2.40	1	2.40
416 Sesame Halva NAS	500g	1.65	1	1.65
417 Mango Pieces NAS (50% treated)	500g	2.75	1	2.75
418 Papaya - Diced	500g	1.50	1	1.50
419 Pineapple - Diced	500g	1.70	1	1.70
420 Pineapple Pieces NAS (50% treated)	500g	2.75	1	2.75
421 Trail Mix NAS	1K	2.45	1	2.45
422 Yoghurt Coated Peanuts NAS	250g	1.40	1	1.40
423 Yoghurt Coated Raisins NAS	250g	1.40	1	1.40
424 Fig & Almond 'Cake'	500g	1.85	1	1.85
425 Carob Fancy Selection	1.75g	2.00	1	2.00
426				
427				
<b>428 BARS</b>				
429 Apple NAS, Shepherdboy	10x40g	1.60	1	1.60
430 Banana NAS, Shepherdboy	10x40g	1.60	1	1.60
431 Ginger & Nut NAS, Shepherdboy	10x38g	1.60	1	1.60
432 Multifruit NAS, Shepherdboy	10x38g	1.60	1	1.60
433 Sunflower NAS, Shepherdboy	10x50g	1.80	1	1.80
434 Apricot NAS, Grizzly	10x25g	1.30	1	1.30
435 Muesli NAS, Grizzly	10x25g	1.30	1	1.30
436 7-Fruit NAS, Grizzly	10x25g	1.30	1	1.30
437 Apricot & Date NAS, Granose Castus	10x25g	1.10	1	1.10
438 Fig & Prune NAS, Granose Castus	10x25g	1.10	1	1.10
439 Orange NAS, Granose Nutridelite	5x50g	1.75	1	1.75
440 Strawberry NAS, Granose Nutridelite	5x50g	1.75	1	1.75
441 Carunt, NAS	10x45g	2.45	1	2.45
442 Take-Off NAS, Hellas	10x35g	2.25	1	2.25
443 Carob, Fruit & Nut NAS, Kalibu	5x60g	2.15	1	2.15
444 Carob, Plain NAS, Kalibu	5x60g	2.15	1	2.15
445				
<b>446 NON-FOOD</b>				
446 Mountain Meadow Shampoo V	1x2L	4.30	1	4.30
447 Scarborough Fayre Shampoo V	1x2L	4.30	1	4.30
448 Scarborough Fayre Conditioner V	1x2L	5.60	1	5.60
449 Lavender Soap - Faith V	2x87g	1.55	1	1.55
450 Orange Soap - Faith V	2x87g	1.55	1	1.55
451 Rosemary Soap - Faith V	2x87g	1.55	1	1.55
452 Ecover Laundry Powder V	1x3K	4.50	1	4.50
453 Ecover Cream Cleaner V	2x1L	2.75	1	2.75
454 Ecover Fabric Conditioner V	2x1L	2.75	1	2.75
455 Ecover Floor Soap V	2x1L	2.75	1	2.75
456 Ecover Toilet Cleaner V	2x1L	3.00	1	3.00
457 Ecover Washing-Up Liquid	2x1L	2.75	1	2.75
458 Ecover Wool Wash V	2x1L	3.30	1	3.30
459 Seed Sprouter, Ambiq	one	4.10	1	4.10
460 Vegetable Steamer, stainless steel	one	2.00	1	2.00
461 Brita Water Filter	one	11.20	1	11.20
462 Brita Refills	two	4.30	1	4.30
463 2.5K Storage Caddy	one	0.95	1	0.95
464 Set of 10 Cook Booklets	set	2.70	1	2.70
465 6-Gallon Container with Tap	two	2.00	1	2.00
466				
<b>467 FRESH ORGANIC VEGETABLES</b>				
468				
469 Not available this month				
470				
471				
472				
473				
474				
475				
476				
477				

## PROFILE SHEET

### Competency

Initiative

Sees and Acts on  
Opportunities

Persistence

Information  
Seeking

Concern for High  
Quality of Work

Commitment to  
Work Contract

Efficiency  
Orientation

Systematic  
Planning

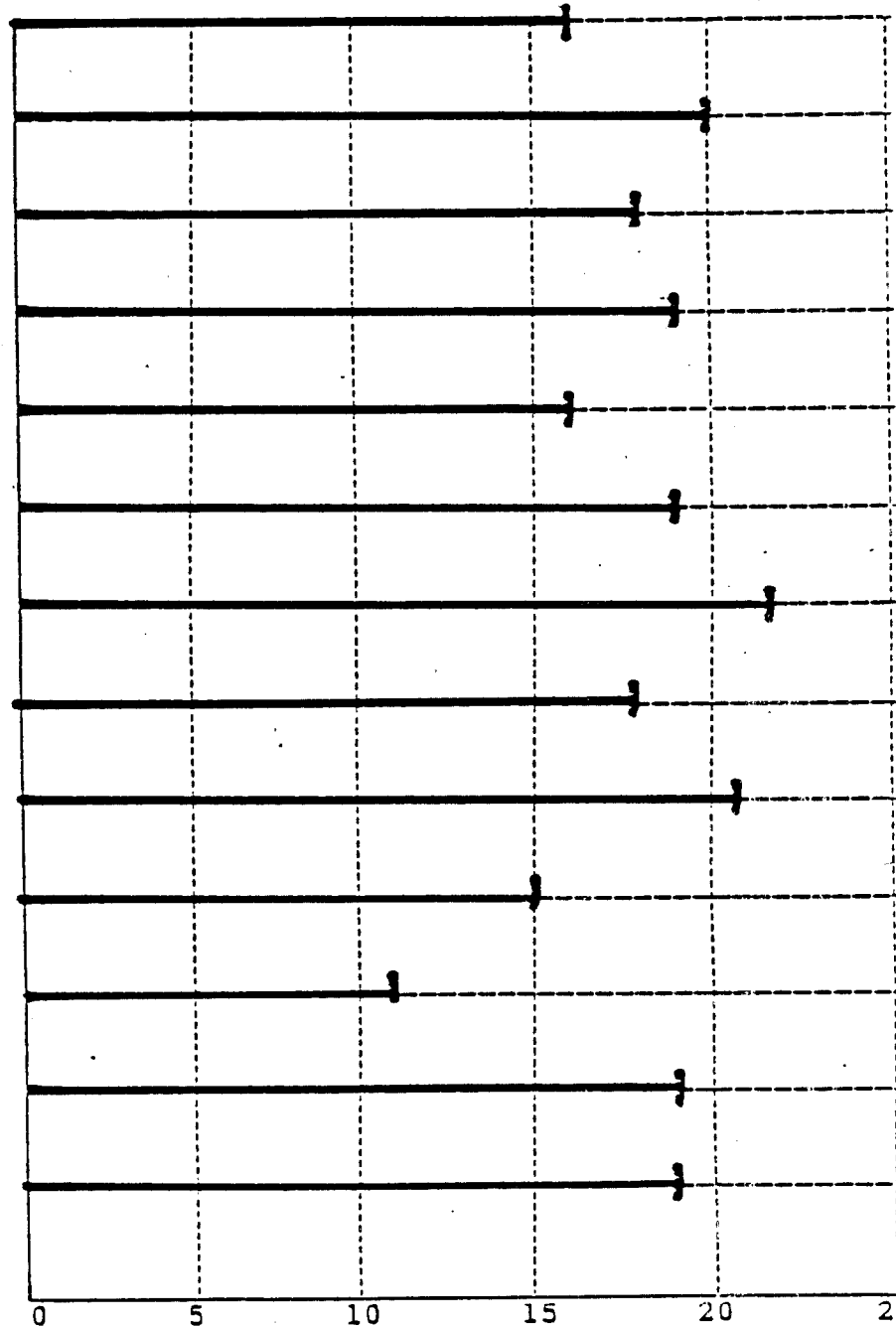
Problem Solving

Self-Confidence

Assertiveness

Persuasion

Use of Influence  
Strategies



Competency Scores