



# BLACK SWAN

## NEWS—COMMENT—EVENTS—INFORMATION

www.thehireman.co.uk

Spring Edition / 2011

**W**ELCOME to the spring edition of our newsletter, the 'Black Swan'. Named after the location of our first depot in Black Swan Yard on Bermondsey Street, it was also a common expression in 16th century London as a statement of impossibility based on the presumption that the black swan did not exist. It is now used to describe an event that is a surprise, has a major impact and tends to be rationalised by hindsight. All of which we will strive to achieve in the next newsletter!

Having recently celebrated our 25th anniversary we thought we'd take the opportunity in this newsletter to introduce you to our management team. Bruce, Dave and Neil have contributed articles covering a wide range of topics from the economy to our social calendar for the rest of 2011 and not forgetting Europe's soon-to-be tallest building, the Shard, which is taking shape just moments from our head office. And don't forget to have your say on the location of our third depot.

Joe Clarke, Editor

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### ● LOOKING TO THE FUTURE WITH AN EYE ON THE PAST

I have recently had two interesting conversations, one with an accountant and the other with a bank manager, both younger men than me and both with no real recollection of the severity of the recession in the early nineties. That recession lasted for at least four years, during which time our turnover halved and we lost a lot of good customers with well run companies who were forced into receivership. I vividly remember regularly reading stories of wrecked lives and shattered families within the construction industry.

During this latest recession, caused by a totally different set of circumstances, our turnover was reduced but I'm pleased to see that the majority of our customers are emerging with a healthy workload, which is not an accident. I'm fairly sure that like us there has been a lot of operational reviewing, rationalisation and a renewed focus on sales and marketing and customer retention.

Interestingly, even though the economic growth figures last year have been encouraging across many industries, it is construction that is leading the recovery outperforming all other sectors by a ratio of 5:1. What remains to be seen is the effect on the recovery, and our industry, of the government's proposed cuts in public spending and the fact that mortgage lending is currently half the long run average.



*“ the key factors to our survival have been a customer base of strong well founded companies and our own team of dedicated people ”*

Coming out of a recession is always a good time to plan for expansion, taking advantage of natural economic growth and new business opportunities. With this in mind we have decided to improve our coverage of London and the immediate Home Counties

by opening the first of possibly four new depots. The areas we have identified are shown on the map on page 4. We are anticipating that, as well as improving the service to our customer's construction sites across Greater London, we can also offer them a viable alternative hire supplier for their sites in Kent, Surrey, Essex and Hertfordshire.

In the near future we will be contacting our customers, as well as our own staff, to ask for feedback on these plans and the areas mentioned for new depots and any other ways that we can improve our service. In the meantime, please vote for your favoured location in our online poll, I would also be very pleased to hear directly any thoughts or advice on our plans.

The Hireman has now experienced two major recessions in its 25 year history and I'm sure that among the key factors to our survival has been a customer base of strong well founded companies and our own team of dedicated people who work tirelessly day in and day out to get the job done.

Recessions are a part of the economic cycle and hopefully with the worst of this one behind us we can now modestly look forward again to growth and stability in the future - we have after all, seen it all before ■

*Bruce Graham*  
Founder & Managing Director  
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# Meet The Team...

## ● LET'S PUT SOME FACES TO THE NAMES AND INTRODUCE YOU TO OUR MANAGEMENT TEAM.

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### **Susan Stowers - Accounts Manager**

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Sue joined our accounts department in early 2009 and quickly made her mark with her no nonsense approach to business coupled with a positive and outgoing personality. Her extensive experience in accounts and office management, partly gained over the previous eleven years working for an international publisher, quickly led to her promotion to the role of Accounts Manager. She has also shown her value supporting the directors in a variety of projects. Sue is married and enjoys spending time with her two grown up daughters.

### **Alex Hadley BSc(Hons), MA, Grad Dip - IT Manager**

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Alex joined us in 2006 while studying for his Master's Degree at London University. He has been instrumental in creating our new web site and has developed all aspects of our IT and communications. In 2007 he played a vital role in the launch of our current hire system software. He is currently working towards a second Master's Degree, in Economics, and has plans to continue his studies to obtain a Doctorate. In what little free time he has, he enjoys listening to music, playing squash and watching cricket.

### **Ian Leppard - Depot General Manager, London Central**

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Ian joined us as a driver in 2006 and has since worked his way up to Depot General Manager. Although he had no previous experience in the hire industry he had worked in construction and engineering and quickly displayed a natural ability for our business, combining this with sound commercial acumen. Under his management our central London depot has gone from strength to strength. Ian supports Chelsea and enjoys socialising with friends and family. His youngest son is currently studying Politics at De Montfort University.

### **Tim Barker - Service Manager**

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Tim joined us in 2007 from Andrew Sykes, having previously held the position of Service Manager with Hewden Hire and Sidecup Plant. Tim has a wealth of knowledge and experience in our industry going back to the early eighties when he completed his electrical apprenticeship at Agent Plant, achieving the accolade of Best Student in his final year. Tim is married with two sons and a daughter and enjoys DIY and keeping fit. He takes part annually in the London to Brighton Bike Ride for the British Heart Foundation.

### **Phil Wright BA(Hons) - Depot General Manager, London West**

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Phil graduated from Exeter University with a degree in modern languages and joined us temporarily as a driver; that was six years ago. In the meantime he has displayed the commitment, skill and business awareness which has enabled him to work his way up and become our Depot General Manager in west London, where he has successfully built a business that continues to exceed our expectations. Phil enjoys most sports and is a particularly keen golfer and snowboarder. He is also a Chelsea supporter.

### **David Porter BA(Hons) - Quality Manager**

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After graduating from University in 1998 with a degree in Economics, David's first position combined the roles of Office, Accounts and Quality Manager for a precision engineering company. David joined us in 2006 as our Accounts Manager and during 2007 was instrumental in launching our current hire system software. Ready for another challenge he has now become our Quality Manager with the brief to obtain ISO 9001, OHSAS 18001 and ISO 14001. David supports Charlton and enjoys spending time with his partner and young son, and socialising with friends.

## Neil Graham BA(Hons) - Operations Director

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Neil joined us full time after completing a degree in Business Management at Nottingham University. He has successfully introduced supply chain management and developed our human resources and health and safety procedures. He is also responsible for guiding the development of our IT, communications and marketing strategies. In 2006 Neil joined our board of directors and is motivated by the challenge of creating a national network of depots. When he's not working he enjoys playing football and squash, and watching motorsports. He is also a keen Arsenal fan.

**“The challenge ahead for British business will be to foster a conspicuous lack of negativity and cynicism, and deliver truly remarkable customer service.”**



Artists impression, The Shard - London Bridge

## ● A FAMILY AFFAIR



Family businesses, large and small, are the backbone of the economy. Two thirds of all companies describe themselves as family-owned. However, I can think of one or two families – the Murdoch's and Hilton's spring to mind – as well known for their family feuds as they are for their companies.

There's no getting away from the fact that family businesses are emotional but they also have great stamina, just look at the Japanese construction company, Kongo Gumi, the world's oldest business founded in 578 AD.

And so I look back at the last twenty five years and recall some of my own emotions growing up in a family where the business and our staff have always been an integral part of our family life. I'm sure there have been feuds along the way but I only recollect fond memories of Saturday mornings and school holidays spent 'working' at Black Swan Yard; entertained and humoured in equal measure, I'm sure, by patient staff run off their feet with the day-to-day demands of a busy tool hire depot.

Then the recession of the early 1990s took hold and decimated our customer base. To save the business my parents swapped our leafy suburban home for less salubrious surroundings which strangely enough marked the beginning of my passion for the family business.

The Hireman is now emerging from its second major recession, one of the deepest global recessions in modern history, and we are reminded on an almost daily basis that the UK now faces severe austerity measures to tackle our biggest deficit since the Second World War. In spite of this I believe the challenge ahead for British business will be to foster a conspicuous lack of negativity and cynicism, and deliver truly remarkable customer service.

Being in London, however is a big advantage. The scarcity of houses and apartments on the market in the most expensive areas has prevented many from trading up to larger properties. Instead, home owners are opting to improve and extend their existing properties. And so despite the malaise in the housing market elsewhere in the country, prime property in London is in high demand. Certainly the overwhelming majority of our customers are positive about their order books for 2011. However, it is clear that margins are being squeezed, as the cost of raw materials continue to increase, and our customers price jobs more competitively to retain turnover and valuable staff.

According to the FT Weekend, the developers of the Shard in London Bridge expect the highest residential property in London, at 186 to 224m (floors 53 to 65), to breach the £6,000 per sq ft achieved at the Candy brothers' One Hyde Park development in Knightsbridge. So don't worry if you're in the market for a £6.5 million one bedroom apartment in London, there'll be plenty on offer!

In a recent interview for Building magazine Nick and Christian Candy lambast the British attitude towards success, saying that "In this country we might as well put a sign up at Heathrow that reads 'we don't want people to be successful. We don't back entrepreneurs and we don't want people to make money.'" And they've got a point; banks are still holding back funding, particularly for SMEs, despite the scale of their national bail-out, and our new coalition government seem more concerned about their recent defeat over bankers' bonuses than the retention of good banking talent mixed with effective regulation.

Twenty five years ago my parents started a business based on the promise that the customer would always come first, and to this day our people and suppliers are excited and motivated by this challenge. The tricky part is retaining, motivating and monitoring talented people so that standards remain high and customers therefore keep coming back ■

## ● IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT WORK



As a life-long Hammers fan I've always enjoyed spending Saturday afternoons watching the game and catching up with friends and colleagues. To be fair, in recent years I've got rather good at the latter, but then needs must! I've also spent a lot of time socialising with our customers and getting

to know them better, many of whom have become good friends.

I believe that this is a great way to build better and more productive partnerships, and a crucial opportunity for The Hireman to say thank you for choosing to support us.

Many of you will have enjoyed a day out at Craven Cottage watching Fulham FC, and I'm pleased to say that for the fourth season running we will be renewing our season tickets later this year. If, on the other hand, you haven't been and want to go, then please get in touch with me. Days usually begin and end with a few drinks in a local pub overlooking the river and a bite to eat in one of Putney's many good restaurants.

We're always looking to expand our events calendar, so please contact me if you have any specific requests or ideas. To give you an idea, we recently enjoyed the panoramic views of Newbury Racecourse from their fine dining restaurant, but we're equally at home scoffing a burger outside Wembley Arena waiting for Ricky Gervais or Michael McIntyre to take the stage!

Some suggestions we've received already are: Cricket at Lord's and The Oval, Heineken Cup rugby, England Euro qualifiers, the Goodwood Festival of Speed and the British Touring Cars Championship.

So all you have to do is let me know what you're interested in and I'll take care of everything else ■



Craven Cottage - Fulham FC vs. Man Utd

## David Golledge - Sales Director

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Dave joined us in 2003 after a successful career in the industry, starting with Kendrick Tool Hire which was eventually bought out by Speedy Hire. He has a wealth of industry knowledge and enjoys developing and fostering relationships with our customers. In 2006 Dave was invited to join our board of directors and is positive about retaining our personal service as we expand. Dave plays football and squash, supports West Ham and enjoys spending time with his two young children.

**“I believe that this is a great way to build better and more productive partnerships, and a crucial opportunity for The Hireman to say thank you for choosing to support us.”**

# Closing Thoughts.

I hope you have enjoyed reading our first newsletter of 2011, it's been a busy start to the year for us and things are only set to get busier with the opening of a new depot. As Founder & MD Bruce Graham explains below we have decided to put the depot's location to you, our customers. For years, companies have focused on trying to "exceed customers' expectations" without ever asking them what those expectations are. Here at The Hireman we believe in greater interaction between customers, suppliers and staff with this aim in mind. Our goal is to provide a quick and effective solution for our customer's hire demands.

After all, our number one priority is that you are happy with the service you receive. So please let us know how we're doing, whether you like the changes we're implementing and what we could do to make things even better for you!

As always, if you would like to have your say please drop me a line...

● **email:** [joe.clarke@thehireman.co.uk](mailto:joe.clarke@thehireman.co.uk)



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## WHERE DO YOU WANT US?

We've decided to ask you, our customers & our own people where we should open our next depot...

Founder & Managing Director, Bruce Graham says:

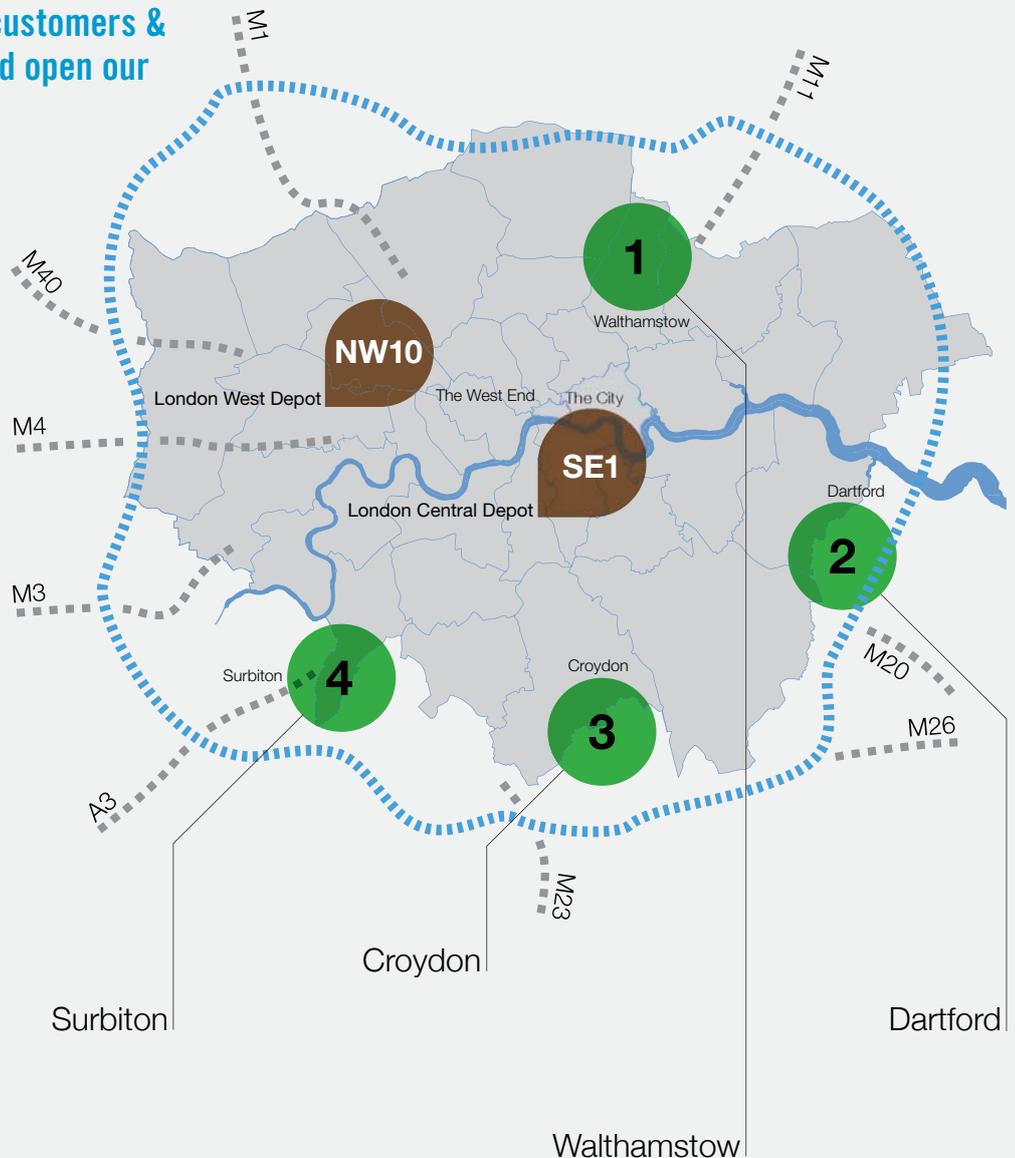
"We have such a great relationship with our customers and our own staff that it's natural to consult them about our expansion plans. Demand is such that we need to open a new depot, and no-one knows better than our customers where it should be."

We have compiled a shortlist of four locations we believe are the most suitable. The areas we have identified as possible locations are:

- 1 - Walthamstow:** near the M11, M25 and North Circular, in north east London.
- 2 - Dartford:** near the A2, M20 and M25, south east of London.
- 3 - Croydon:** near the M23 and M25, in south London.
- 4 - Surbiton:** near the A3, M3 and M25, in south west London.

There will be a poll on the home page of our website: [www.thehireman.co.uk](http://www.thehireman.co.uk) which will allow current and prospective customers to vote on their favoured location. We are also contacting our customers and talking to our staff directly to gain feedback on depot location and any other ways we can improve our service.

We believe that by working closely and more efficiently with our customers we can deliver a constantly improving service of the highest quality and value, so please vote now.



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