

Best News

August 2001

Message from the Chief Executive



By now you will have all received a letter about fund-raising - no doubt I will soon be hearing all about your suggestions so that we will meet our target for BRMB's Cash for Kids by the time of our party next April.

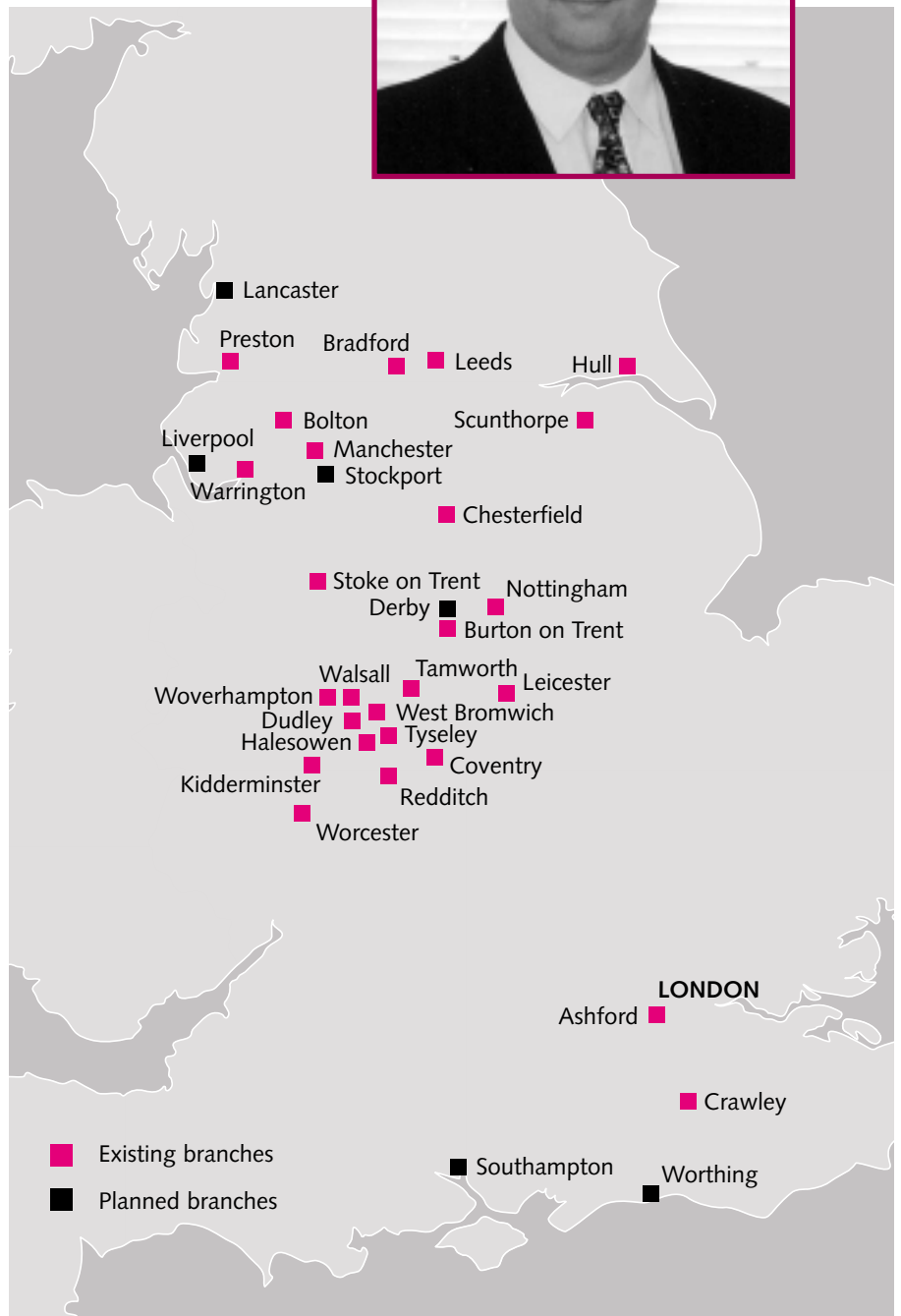
Since the last edition of Best News, the three new offices **Scunthorpe, Kidderminster and West Bromwich** have been busy establishing themselves.

In addition, this month we have opened a new office in the south east, at **Ashford Heathrow** and plans are already well advanced to open two further offices in this region at **Southampton** and **Worthing**.

Further north, other areas are being developed with a view to opening branches in **Lancaster, Liverpool, Stockport** and **Derby**. In the main, new branches are opened in areas which are developed from existing offices. This enables those new branches to get off to a flying start.

We wish all new branches and new members of the teams all the best success and I will keep you posted about their progress.

Andrew C Sweeney
Chief Executive Officer



Focus On . . . Darren Pollard

It was way back in 1992 when Darren Pollard joined The Best Connection as industrial consultant based at Tyseley. Today, Darren is still based at Tyseley and is senior branch manager of Birmingham 1 Industrial Division. As well as being responsible for this operation, which generates an annual margin of £1.6 million, Darren has also recently been given responsibility for the Worcester branch.

The Worcester branch was initially launched from serviced premises on 3rd April 2000, with staff chosen by Darren. In January this year, however, the team moved to their new premises in Queen Street, Worcester.

Darren's Worcester team currently stands at six. Dave Bates, who is a senior consultant, has known Darren for over 10 years having previously worked together for another agency.

Other members of the Worcester team include senior consultant, Clare Dudley, who was recommended to The Best Connection whilst employed by a 'rival' (but not as good as!) Worcester employment agency, and senior consultant, Ian Halfpenny, who previously worked for a competitor for three years but approached The Best Connection once the Worcester branch was up and running.

Hannah McManus is an administrator who was introduced to us through the local Chamber of Commerce, whilst Redditch branch manager, Matt Slater recommended administrator, Polly Rendall, after working with her in previous employment. On Monday 30th July, Gareth Lewis, trainee consultant, joined the team, enabling the Worcester operation to extend to two plans. The Worcester branch currently makes a margin in excess of £9,000 per week.

Darren's combined team of 18 across Worcester and Tyseley are jointly responsible for the employment of around 800 staff each day within the Warehouse and Industrial marketplace. They manage this by ensuring that all clients receive the best possible service from the outset and always strive to make the most of any potential new business opportunity.

Darren's Tyseley team includes divisional managers, Matthew Leech (Industrial 1 & 2) and Mark Asson (Industrial 3 & 4), who are jointly responsible for a margin in excess of £40,000 per week.



Matthew is assisted on Industrial 1 by Peter Johnston, senior consultant and Neil Rowbotham, consultant, while Andy Edwards, senior consultant and Ben Taylor, consultant, work on Industrial 2 along with trainee consultant, Paul Short, who assists on both plans.

Lee Hall and Paul Corcock are both consultants working on Industrial 3 and Malcolm Barker and Sharon Phillips are senior consultants on Industrial 4.

"Birmingham is a challenging area to work in since, if you do not perform well first time, then there are 100 or so other agencies out there who will," said Darren.

Darren's role provides him with the opportunity to interview a large number of people from other employment agencies. "From my experience it is evident that our ongoing training programme and company structure which allows progression through the ranks, together with the company's systems and procedures that have been developed over the past 10 years, are undoubtedly the best in the marketplace.

"Although sales plays a major part in any branch becoming successful, it is certainly not the only factor and I personally believe that

"Birmingham is a challenging area to work in since, if you do not perform well first time, then there are 100 or so other agencies out there who will,"

key to our success lies in our ability to service the client well and to demonstrate that we are working hard on their behalf and that we genuinely appreciate their business.

"In addition, the reason that we can service the client so well is that we look after our temps and make sure that they find the type of work they want, when and where they want it," he continued.

While socialising used to be high on Darren's list of favourite pastimes, since his marriage to Karen last April, they both now enjoy more of a family life at their home in Oldbury which they share with their beautiful 12 month old daughter, Molly. Darren and Karen are looking forward to the arrival of Molly's brother or sister towards the end of November.

Personality Profile: Sean Seabourne

Sean Seabourne joined The Best Connection as consultant in 1995. Today, he is a senior branch manager based at Tyseley.

Sean has the day to day responsibility for overseeing Birmingham 2 Industrial. In addition, he is also responsible for the Redditch branch which includes Industrial and Driving disciplines. His team comprises 16 members of staff with Redditch branch manager, Matt Slater, acting divisional managers (B2), Simon Thompson and Ian Hancox, as well as three senior consultants, nine consultants and one branch administrator, along with various support staff in Birmingham.

According to Sean, enthusiasm is vital since "With enthusiasm anything is possible." He recalls how one of the first lessons he was taught in recruitment was to be enthusiastic.

"People buy from people and for a consultant to be eager and bright sends out a good positive image of themselves and the company.

Personality Profile: Lisa Oerton

Lisa Oerton joined us as credit controller in June 1998 and was promoted to her current position as credit control manager in March 1999.

Lisa's day-to-day responsibilities are many and varied and include supervising staff, reconciling daily banking and month end, and credit checking new companies. This includes deciding whether or not to supply to a business based on its credit-worthiness and also involves Lisa using a certain amount of intuition about the company in question based on a 'gut feeling'!

In addition, Lisa's tasks include completing paperwork regarding any bad debts, ensuring that all queries are resolved and motivating the team to collect the monthly cash target which is set by Andrew Sweeney. If, in the event that The Best Connection decides to pursue a company for non-payment then Lisa is responsible



"The role of consultant has changed dramatically over the years and with new legislation constantly being introduced, the task of fulfilling a client's requirements is becoming ever more challenging."

Even so, Sean feels that this is a step in the right direction since it forces employment agencies to act in a more professional manner which will hopefully, in time, extinguish the 'cowboys' from the industry.

Sean, who lives on the outskirts of Redditch, Worcestershire and is the proud father of an 11 month old 'angel' called Lydia, continued: "The Best Connection provides fantastic tools for all members of staff and excellent opportunities to learn, develop and become successful. Couple this with tenacity and dedication and it's no wonder that we are **The Best!**"



for dealing with all of the legal aspects – from sending an initial threatening letter – to preparing all necessary paperwork for a court case.

Five members of staff make up the Credit Control team. These are: credit control junior, Sarah Griffiths, who is responsible for chasing all outstanding credit and order numbers with the branches, and four credit controllers: Carole Harrison, Clare Hayes, Sarah Ponsonby and Natalie Poole. The sales ledger is split alphabetically and each credit controller is responsible for a section of the ledger. This involves telephoning companies to chase payment, ensuring that companies remain within their credit limit, banking and reconciling payments and dealing with all queries through the appropriate branch. Since each team member deals with the same companies each month it enables them to build a rapport with their contacts and they also become familiar with those companies that usually pay on time and those that need chasing.

Lisa, who lives in Amblecote, Stourbridge, commented: "I have worked in credit control for many years and really enjoy my job. There's nothing more rewarding than when a nice fat cheque arrives after months of chasing it!"

In her spare time Lisa is a keyboard player in a band and her other hobbies include reading and keeping fit at the gym, playing badminton and aerobics. These energetic pastimes will have to be put on hold for a little while, however, since Lisa is expecting her first baby at the beginning of December.

10th Anniversary Gifts

You may remember that at our 10th anniversary party in March we presented £1,000 gift certificates to each of the three members of staff who have been with us since day one. We caught up with them recently to find out how they'd used their gifts and thought you might like to know.

Matthew Burford

For some time Matthew had been considering buying a computer and with Oliver, Matthew's four-year-old starting school in September, Matthew felt a computer would be essential both for Oliver to learn on and for Matthew to be able to keep up with Oliver!

"I was completely shocked and wasn't expecting anything!" said Matthew who initially received a clandestine phone call from Mike Cooper sounding Matthew out as to whether he would prefer a set of golf clubs or something more practical for the whole family!

Matthew had never previously used a computer so he discussed the pros and cons of various systems with our resident specialist, Dave Moreton, and bought himself a computer with suitable software from his local supplier.

After enrolling on a Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) course at Redditch College, which Matthew has been attending for one evening per week, Matthew is about to complete the first course module and can use the word processing package with great proficiency!

He has two more modules on the 60-hour course to complete and these will enable him to produce spreadsheets and databases. Maybe soon, Dave Moreton will be calling Matthew for advice!

Matthew is thrilled with his new purchase "I am really grateful. It was a great gesture which also demonstrates to others how The Best Connection looks after its staff", said Matthew.

To say that he's taken to using the computer like the proverbial duck to water is an understatement. In the short time that he's been learning, he's already online and even does his banking over the Internet.

Matthew and Oliver may both soon have competition in the household though, because 14-month-old daughter Ellie is showing interest and is already playing computer games. Let's hope dad can manage to keep up with them!

Sam Truman

Sam's gift certificate was timely as she had just started taking driving lessons. The gift has enabled Sam to reach the point of test level. "Because there were no financial burdens, I could have lessons as often as possible," said Sam who passed her theory test with flying colours back in May.

Sam is confident that she is ready to take the practical test and is keeping the date a closely guarded secret.

Sam also made another purchase with the money left over from lessons – a nice new fridge-freezer, "not very glam but very practical!" said Sam.

We think Sam must be a real natural to have progressed to test level so quickly and wish her the best of luck with her test.

Andy Redfern

Andy Redfern was also taken completely by surprise at the presentation and said his gift was greatly appreciated.

Andy has recently moved to a house in Sheldon and has used his certificate to furnish his new home with a new carpet and settee. We hope he's settling in well and enjoying the new purchases.

Refurbishment transforms Tyseley

As we continue to celebrate this, our tenth year, it is only right and fitting that we take a look back at the branch from where The Best Connection was launched.

The Tyseley branch, under the guidance of Martin Recci and coupled with the hard work and dedication of the whole Tyseley team, has enjoyed outstanding success over the past ten years. While the branch remains in its original location, it has recently, (and, as many felt, not before time!) undergone a complete refurbishment.

The refurbishment has transformed the branch, providing light and airy, well laid out offices. Changes have included additional training/canvassing areas together with a new meeting room. This also doubles as an eating area providing a separate environment in which staff can take their lunch breaks. The branch now accommodates eight industrial plans, expanding to 10, along with two driving plans, making a total of 12 plans from this site.



The overall image of the branch is very impressive, providing a professional environment that is now ideal for conducting client tours. But don't just take our word for it. Here are a few quotes from some staff who've experienced the 'before' and 'after':

Malcolm Barker, B1:

"The cosmetic appearance of the offices has definitely made a difference since the Tyseley team now have more confidence – particularly with regard to customers visiting the premises – and the brighter environment has made a mental difference too, as we now feel more positive working in our new surroundings."

Richard Marsh, B2:

"The refurbishment has been a Godsend! It has resulted in the impression created by the branch being much more professional and has encouraged us to have a more professional approach to our work."

"It's great too that it gives us the chance to show off when customers visit the branch."

Dave Stansbie, B3:

"We used to say the office should be 'twinned with Beirut' and that the builders that Neil Yorke used to visit the offices with must have been actors because nothing seemed to happen for ages!"

"Joking aside, the refurbishment is excellent and has made a massive difference by creating a more efficient working environment which has made working much more enjoyable."

Julie Taylor, Administration:

"I recall how Martin said, during my interview in November 1995, that the premises were due to be refurbished! The condition of the building did not hamper its success. We kept outgrowing our environment and now operate 12 plans, and have 44 employees at this branch."

"Staying operational during the refurbishment was no mean feat! Whilst building work took place we needed to move staff, plans and equipment on a weekly basis - no easy thing to plan! It was, however, well worth the inconvenience and our image is nearly as good as the service we provide, even if it did take five years. Still, you know what they say, "If something's worth having, it's worth waiting for."



Martin Recci

Maria Williams/Katie Bowker – Reception:

"We both commenced employment about three years ago, when reception space was limited. We had three receptionists 'sitting on top of one another' and at times there was only standing room for prospective applicants. Reception is now far more spacious and externals have commented on how professional we look."

"We are now more confident when greeting clients; the interview rooms look how they should, and it is a pleasure to come and work in a brighter, neater environment."

Here's to the continued success of Tyseley.



Martin Recci pictured with receptionists, Maria Williams and Katie Bowker



Changes to the National Minimum Wage

On 1st October 2001 the main adult rate will rise from £3.70 to £4.10 per hour.

A further increase to £4.20 per hour is proposed with effect from 1st October 2002, but according to a DTI statement, this will be subject to the prevailing economic conditions.

On 1st October 2001 the rate for 18 to 21 year olds (inclusive) will rise from £3.20 to £3.50 per hour. In respect of future increases for this age group, the government is examining which category 21 year olds should fall in to, (i.e., whether they should be covered by the youth rate or main rate). This will be clarified in future announcements.

Stakeholder Pensions

With effect from 8th October 2001 the government has made it compulsory for all those with five or more employees to provide access to a stakeholder pension or suitable alternative.

Stakeholder pension schemes are a new way for employees to save for their retirement using their own money together with tax relief and investment returns (there is no requirement for employers to make a financial contribution to the scheme). This will mean that over time a pension fund will build up which can be used to buy a pension when the employee is older or retires.

The government has approved a number of schemes offered by major companies within the insurance and pensions field and employers are free to select any approved scheme from any approved supplier. The scheme provider will administer the scheme, whilst the employer will be responsible for the practical aspects. These will include the deduction of contributions from wages, paying those deductions to the scheme provider on time, supplying relevant employee information to the provider, and ensuring that the rules of the scheme are upheld.

They are low cost pensions intended for those who do not currently have the right pension options available. This includes employees, the self-employed and the unemployed. Membership of a scheme being offered by a company will be open to employees who meet the following criteria:

- Aged over 19
- Resident of the UK
- Earning more than the lower earnings limit for National Insurance purposes
- Has been employed by the company for a minimum of three months
- Is not within five years' of retirement

All employees who meet these requirements must be offered the chance to join a stakeholder pension scheme within three months of starting work.

It is not compulsory for employees to partake, but it is a legal requirement for employers to offer access to a scheme and to ensure that deductions are made from the wages/salaries of those wishing to participate and that those deductions are paid on time to the provider of the scheme.

A stakeholder pension scheme member may contribute up to £3,600 per year regardless of earnings (any contributions made to the scheme by employers will count towards the annual contribution limit). A contribution limit cannot be carried backward or forward to another year. The annual contribution limit operates on a 'use it or lose it' basis. Employees can decide to either make their own payments to the scheme, or have their payment deducted and made through the payroll system.

Employees must be allowed to join the scheme (provided they meet the qualifications listed above). There must be no discrimination based on age, sex, hours worked or length of service.

Employees must be allowed to:

- Choose their level of contributions
- Vary those contributions at will
- Make one-off payments of £10 or more
- Stop and start contributions at will, without penalty (Contributions are paid by employees net of the basic rate of income tax)

It has been said that it is never too early or late to start a pension fund and now it has never been easier. The introduction of stakeholder pension schemes means that everyone can have greater control over the way in which their retirement is funded.



Where to find us

Location	Tel Number	Fax Number
Ashford	01784 256555	01784 257111
Birmingham	0121 628 8000	0121 628 8004
Bolton	01204 394400	01204394455
Bradford	01274 747500	01274 747555
Burton	01283 545333	01283 545075
Chesterfield	01246 209222	01246 206333
Coventry	024 76 228040	024 76 228042
Crawley	01293 515333	01293 516333
Dudley	01384 230003	01384 239691
Halesowen	0121 504 3000	0121 504 3009
Hull	01482 610 160	01482 610 686
Kidderminster	01562 66555	01562 825695
Leeds	0113 243 1033	0113 243 0951
Leicester	0116 251 2363	0116 251 2364
Manchester	0161 237 9333	0161 237 9444
Nottingham	0115 958 5880	0115 958 5884
Preston	01772 201777	01772 201888
Redditch	01527 591141	01527 591142
Scunthorpe	01724 876111	01724 876222
Stoke	01782 209666	01782 209777
Tamworth	01827 53333	01827 53090
Walsall	01922 639000	01922 636500
Warrington	01925 629666	01925 629777
West Bromwich	0121 553 7755	0121 553 7766
Wolverhampton	01902 773000	01902 773001
Worcester	01905 731777	01905 731888



The e-mail address for each branch is
the branch@thebestconnection.co.uk
e.g. **burton@thebestconnection.co.uk**
Individual mail to: **name@thebestconnection.co.uk**

STOP PRESS!

The next edition of Best News will feature:

- Margin Rankings •
- European Agency Workers Directive •
- More Personality Profiles •
- Update on Driving Consultants Course •

Best News

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