

PRESS RELEASE

MERSEYSIDE PRINTING COMPANY CELEBRATES A CENTURY

Merseyside Printing Company is celebrating 100 years in business this summer and plans to mark this achievement with a small exhibition of old and new photographs at Runcorn's Heath Business Park on Thursday 29 and Friday 30 August.

Owner John Dagnall, 66, is also marking a significant anniversary himself – 50 years in the printing business, having started as an apprentice at Pilkington's Glass in St Helens, straight after leaving school at the age of 16 in 1969.

Through a series of coincidences and chance encounters, he ended up buying the company in March 2000 and establishing its new base at the Heath Business Park – a move which won him new customers and later the accolade of Halton Business of the Year in 2009. He currently serves both trade and public customers with a wide range of printed matter from brochures and leaflets to posters, cards and calendars from his printworks next to the restaurant complex.

Merseyside Printing Company originally started life in 1919, the year after the end of the First World War, in a fourth floor room above Rigby's pub on Dale Street in Liverpool city centre. The first owner, an entrepreneurial Mr Ridge, tapped into the needs of the thriving port and printed all sorts of posters, billing sheets and letterheads for world class companies such as the Bibby Line shipping group and Tate & Lyle sugar company.

With no lift, he and his staff brought all deliveries of paper and finished printed goods up and down four flights of stairs – a situation which prevailed for several decades until the next owner Gerry Lees moved the company to a new base in Knowsley in the mid-eighties to avoid rocketing city centre rates.

On several occasions, fate steered John towards Merseyside Printing Company. As a youngster looking for his first big break after school, he attended a mock interview programme at a local printing company. They didn't have any jobs to offer but the valuable experience led to his securing an apprenticeship at Pilkington's where he first met Gerry Lees.

Only a twist of fate meant he didn't buy the company with Gerry in 1974 when it came up for sale for the princely sum of £7,000.

However two decades later a chance encounter resulted in John bumping into his old former colleague, just as he was made redundant along with 45 staff when a Manchester printing company that employed him closed down.

Gerry had bought the Merseyside Printing Company but was now retiring and looking for a buyer. It seemed a golden opportunity that John grabbed with both hands, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Although a good head for design and a sharp eye for detail have always been important, John has watched a technological revolution change in his industry beyond all recognition over the last few decades.

He says: "In 1919, they would have been using wooden type for large posters and signage. How different it is today! We have gone from being able to process around 2,000 sheets per hour a hundred years ago to an alarming speed of nearly 15,000 sheets per hour today.

"Today it is heavily computerised, with graphic designers using PCs or Apple Macs in reprographic departments instead of compositors setting moveable type by hand. Proof reading is also much easier today. Printers used to have to read their work 'back to front' in a mirror image – hence the term 'watching your Ps and Qs'. There used to be no handy electronic spell check!"

With his current team of four staff, John is inviting the public to take a trip down memory lane and see how the printing industry has changed over the years. The photographic display will be on show in the Heath Business Park restaurant on Thursday 29 and Friday 30 August, between 11.00am – 2.00pm. The restaurant is open to the public for lunch and refreshments.

For more information about Merseyside Printing Company, check out their website www.merseysideprinting.com or call 01928 513142.

Notes to editors

Photo captions: 1. Merseyside Printing owner John Dagnall (left), with his staff (Lto R) Neil Dyson, Ian Dewer and Neil Owens. 2. Former owner Gerry Lees with his father in the old print works. 3. Rigby Buildings in Liverpool, where Merseyside Printing was founded 100 years ago.

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