

# City Lifting -

'it does what it says on the tin'

City Lifting has provided specialist lifting solutions for the last 25 years. With most work in and around London, the company has built up a varied fleet to cope with contractors requirements in the congested city. Mark Darwin of Cranes & Access managed to intercept its busy managing director, Trevor Jepson just long enough to find out a bit more about the company.



City Lifting celebrated 25 years last year. Yet in a relatively short space of time, much has changed with the company and the equipment.

"My father was in the formwork and concreting business in the '60s and early '70s and used self erecting cranes mounted on trucks," said Jepson. "I can remember we had three cranes

Boillot Petolat BP1000s on a Leyland Octopus a Thames Trader and a Guy Invincible - several of those are now collector's items. He either used them on his contracts or hired them out to other concrete firms. When the formwork firm finished he became "Lorry Mounted Tower Cranes Ltd."

However, rather than following his father into the family business, young Jepson trained as a toolmaker and then mechanical engineering at college. Unfortunately (or fortunately) when he qualified there were either no jobs for toolmakers or the money was poor, so he ended up working for his father. At this point the yard was an old bombsite in Bow, East London.

"We were renting off the council and it was very cheap, but we needed more space. So my father decided - against everyone's advice



*Congestion is a way of life in the City.*

- to get a place in the Isle of Dogs in the days when everyone was leaving the area."

More by luck than judgement, the site later was bought by the Daily Telegraph (for rather a lot of money) for one of the early developments of the 'new' Canary Wharf. In fact Jepson seems chuffed that from City Lifting's new premises in Purfleet, he can see Canary Wharf where it all started and where he worked when it was derelict big sheds and empty docks.

Jepson's first direct experience with cranes was operating one of his father's Munster self erectors. He recalls the one and a half hours it took to set-up the crane outside the site before driving it, fully rigged, into final position. "Stabiliser/levelling jacks were 'mandraulic'," he says, "ie turned by hand."

The fleet grew with the addition of two static cranes - Potain 427's bought from utilities contractor J. Murphy & Sons - but a disagreement with his father resulted in Jepson, now 23 years old, leaving and setting up on his own.

"I initially ran the two Potains, drove one and rented out the other," he said. "Living in Romford and securing a long contract in Woking before the M25 was built meant that if I wasn't passing through Parliament Square before 5.50 every morning, I was late!"

It was in the early days that Trevor got used to working seven day weeks - something he still does.

The two cranes expanded to four and Jepson started working with other crane people and companies. This resulted in him gaining a good reputation as a fitter/repairer and offering these services more and more through the early 1980's which proved quite lucrative.

"I used to have a fixed 4 hour minimum call-out charge and diagnosed the problem usually within half an hour. This was far quicker and cheaper than any other servicing companies which seemed to take days to sort out crane breakdowns."

City Lifting grew through the late 80's so that by the start of the 1991 recession it had a fleet of 23 cranes, all Potain.



*City Lifting is the comansa agent for the UK*

"That recession was really hard," recalls Jepson, "very few cranes were out on rental and even when they were, many of the companies hiring them went bust so we didn't get any money."

To keep his head above water, he turned to the booming Far East market, selling most of his fleet to Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. He however looked to Dubai using his skills to gain repair or erection contracts. But he would limit his trips to a maximum of two weeks at a time. One contract was for just one day!

During this time, the business was kept ticking over in the UK by his brother-in-law Phil who has been with the company for many years - since he was 20. Jepson has never stopped diagnosing and fixing problems and dovetails well with his business partner of 10 years, Bob Jones, who's main role is looking after all aspects of the tower crane side of the business. Jepson's wife Clare also works in the business as well as his eldest son Daniel.

Today City Lifting has a fleet of 120 machines and employs about 65 staff.

The company is probably best known for its fleet of Spierings hydraulic folding cranes, the first being purchased in 2000/2001. The company still has one of the first cranes made by Leo Spierings - number 10 of the 500 or so that have now been manufactured - although it is not currently in use.

"We bought it second-hand," said Jepson. "It has an old type engine and the steering is poor, not many drivers like taking it out any more.

Each Spierings we purchased had improvements over the last, they have got better and better. I now think they are without doubt, the best cranes for the job. We currently have one of the new, seven axle Spierings SK2400 - AT7 on order for delivery in June and the old machine will be used in part exchange. We also have a five axle on order."

In total, City Lifting has about 14 Spierings, 12 mobiles - mainly Demag - with capacities up to 100 tonnes, three mini cranes (Meada and Unic) and the rest top slewing tower cranes. The self erector fleet was boosted to about 30 in October when it purchased the Vanson Cranes' Vicario rental fleet which according to Jepson are 'strong, simple, reliable and easy to drive'.

"I like the Demag cranes and the City versions in particular. The AC55 City and AC30 City are invaluable in London where the more compact the crane the better," he says. New additions to the mobile fleet sometime later in the year will include a four axle, 100 tonne Demag AC 100 and a 35 tonne AC 35.

City Lifting has a depot further north in Grantham purely as storage for the tower cranes. If any maintenance or repair work is required, the cranes are brought down to the main workshops and the new paint shop facility in Purfleet.

The company is currently re-organising the new facility but is struggling because of the continuous amount of work and the quantity of equipment that came from its two previous yards in Brentwood.



*Erecting one of the first City Lifting Potains, in the early days there were no harnesses, yellow jackets or hard hats.*

The company is also the Comansa agent in the UK and offers the full range of its flat top cranes for sale and hire. However, due to the nature of the UK tower crane hire market with most major hirers 'in bed' with a manufacturer, they are effectively just for hire.

"We are in the process of getting rid of some of the older tower cranes but keeping the Tornborg Magni S46's and looking at a new Jost hydraulic luffer to replace the smaller Tornborg Magni S40's."

The Magni S46 is a slightly unusual crane in that it has a 'K-type' articulated jib, jointed at the half-way point, making it ideal for working close to other cranes or when oversailing adjacent property is an issue. It also has Wolff 100 B luffers and Potain 331B's - similar he says to the new IG70.

City Lifting has more recently dipped its toe into the mini crane market with the introduction of three Maeda and Unic mini cranes. In fact it has ordered the first of Unic's new URW-706 currently under development. With a six tonne lift capacity at three metres and hook height of 19.5 metres, the 706 claims to be the world's largest 'spider crane'. The company also runs a zero tail swing, remote control Manitex 30124 boom-truck crane which is useful in certain street applications.

Two other very portable cranes worthy of a mention in the fleet are a seven tonne capacity Vanson VC20 mini luffing roof top crane which can be broken down into pieces no heavier than 120kg, taken in a lift and hand assembled if required, and five Ferro mini tower cranes which again can be erected by hand.

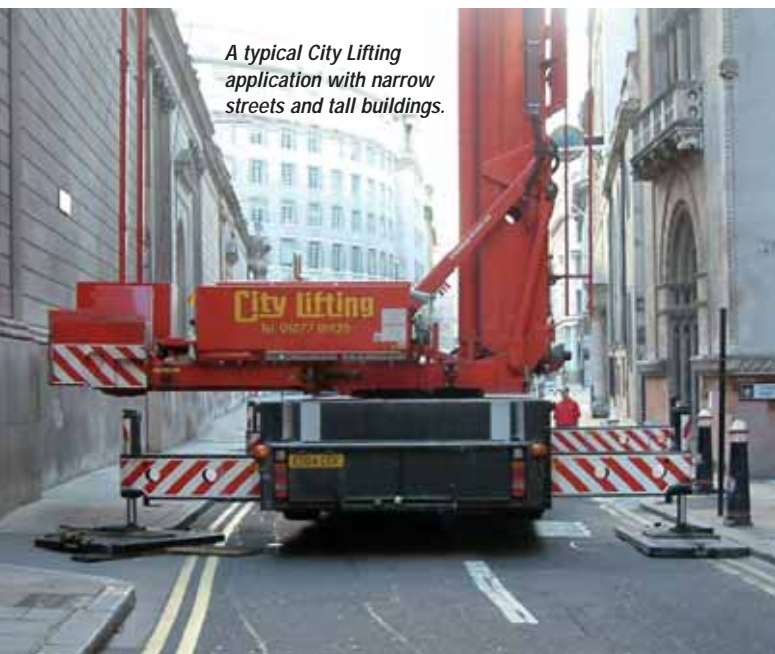
"We used a Ferro mini tower crane for the regeneration of Brighton pier after the fire - specifically for rebuilding the big dipper," said Jepson, "it was the only crane light enough yet with enough height and lifting capacity to do the job safely."

"Although I still enjoy being at the sharp end of fixing cranes, it highlights a problem that affects the whole crane industry but particularly in tower cranes - a lack of good technicians and drivers," he says. "Drivers need to be trained to a higher standard and be more mechanically aware of the equipment for which they are responsible. They all sign for the condition of the crane every week but when I visit site it can be a real eye opener." The new CPA tower crane interest group booklets for project managers and crane driver will explain and spell out everybody's responsibilities.

Until recently City Lifting insisted on supplying its own drivers for every hire but with the introduction of the mini cranes it has made an exception.

"Drivers tend to have their own machine, but will take out similar machinery," he said. "Most of our drivers like the Spierings cranes, but for a few the 30 metre high cab is a bit of a problem. These guys stick with the Terex Demags."

"We currently have very good drivers but I am looking for a tower crane electrician and three fitters - one vehicle and two for tower cranes. We advertise locally but it is getting increasingly difficult to find good people, primarily because there are no specific college courses. This is a good industry to work in, school children just need a bit more encouragement and the industry needs to be more positive about what it can offer."



*A typical City Lifting application with narrow streets and tall buildings.*