

READERS LETTERS

RECOGNITION OF THE LATE PETER ORAM

The following letter is in response to a letter from Martin Ainscough in the last issue of the magazine in which he highlighted his achievements and called for the industry to honour the work that he did for crane safety. If anyone has any suggestions, we would be more than happy to help make it happen.

Dear Leigh

Just a brief note.

I must agree with Martin Ainscough 'Recognition for the late Peter Oram'.

Peter was also responsible for writing a new British Standard for Cranes - The Design and Safe use of Cranes. Aided mainly by Andy McDermott. Sorry that I don't have the full references to hand.

I met Peter in 1979 when he was reviewing and inspecting the J D White and also the Sparrows Demag TC 4000s. From memory of those days, it was felt prudent back then to have Peter - HM Chief Inspector involved. He was of course very able and helpful even though some felt he was not being so!

We - the industry and in particular I - learned a lot from him, and he was always very helpful. We became very good friends and met often.

I do not know if his lovely wife Diane is still around but hope that she is.

Kind regards

Barry Barnes

IN MEMORIAM 2021-2022 IPAF SUMMIT

At the recent IPAF awards dinner we helped produce an In Memoriam presentation in respect of all those who had passed away in the prior year. The following correspondence were sent to us following the event.

Dear Leigh,

Thank you for the wonderful In Memoriam video that you arranged for the IPAF dinner last night, we often forget or overlook all those who we have all known and spent time with, many of them contributing massively to the development of the industry, especially in the early days.

I sincerely hope that this becomes something that you do every year. Hats off to whomever chose the music and timing, it brought a tear or two to my eye.

Many thanks

James

NICHOLAS DAVIN

A point was also made to us that due to Covid having prevented live IPAF Summits since 2019, some of those that died just before the 2021-2022 period covered by our 'video' have 'missed out'.

One notable person that that was mentioned in particular was the late Nicholas Davin, one of the early pioneers of the self-propelled powered access industry in Europe, and most particularly Ireland. A past president of IPAF and one of the founders of the IPAF Ireland Council he died in 2020 at the age of 75.

His obituary and a tribute to his life can be found in the March 2020 issue of Cranes & Access

TONY ANDREW THORNTON

1967-2022

UK tree care specialist and powered access entrepreneur Tony Thornton has died. He passed away on the night of Saturday April 2nd, following a short battle with cancer, he was only 55.

Tony Thornton started out on his career in 1985 working in the tree care business and having learnt the ropes began working for himself, spotting the potential of working with utility companies. He began winning contracts with SSE to survey its power lines, keeping them clear of tree limbs and maintaining the anti-climbing devices on poles. He spotted the potential for using powered access in his tree work early on and regularly rented machines from local suppliers. Everything changed in 2004 when he bought his first aerial lift, purchasing a 26 metre truck mounted lift from Facelift.

The following year he set up as a company in the form of Thornton Associates Tree Services and later that year added Affordable Access, to rent truck mounted platforms and spider lifts to

others in the tree care market.

In order to give himself an edge on his utility contracts he worked with companies such as CTE UK to develop specialist units such as a 20 metre CTE Z boom mounted on a Bimec 4x4 truck chassis.

In 2010 he took the next step when he established Sup Elephant UK and became the Sup Elephant truck mount and CMC spider lift dealer. In 2012 he took on the Comet truck mounted platform distribution for the UK and was joined by Phil Orwin. Cranes & Access editor Mark Darwin visited the fledgling operation and published an interview in the August September issue of the magazine See: See page 44 of issue 14.6.

While building the access business Thornton maintained his tree business - Thornton Associates Tree Services - and when SSE changed its contracts began offering barn installation services as Dunwood Construction, which would also using his aerial lifts and telehandlers. Long time associate Gary Whitfield



Tony Thornton

invested in Affordable Access in 2014 and took over the business fully in 2019. The company remains an active participant in the UK access market.

Tony Thornton was one of those people, you immediately warmed to and loved, or struggled with. A big man, his huge physical presence and direct manner intimidated some, but those who knew him spoke of a kind and gentle side to him that not everyone got to see. He leaves behind his wife Wendy, her two adult daughters, and the couple's young son Hayden.

THOMAS WIESBAUER 1968-2022

We have received the tragic news that **Thomas Wiesbauer, managing director of German crane rental and heavy transport company Wiesbauer died suddenly on Thursday 28th April while on holiday. He was only 53.**

He was the third generation of the Wiesbauer family to manage the business and has worked with the company since 1990. He managed the family business with his wife Sabine and brother Jochen, but had started to hand over more of the day to day responsibility for the business to his two adult children.

He has also been active in politics and was a

member of the municipal council in the company's home town of Bietigheim-Bissingen since 2004 and was elected president of the Ludwigsburger IHK regional chamber in 2021.

Mayor Jürgen Kessing on behalf of the town council of Bietigheim-Bissingen said: "His loss is a deep cut in his family, his company and in his voluntary work. The city of Bietigheim-Bissingen will always honour his memory."



Thomas Wiesbauer

"The German crane industry has lost a thoroughly decent individual, an imaginative and committed entrepreneur who put his heart and soul into everything he did.

Beatrice Boom

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ANTHONY DAVID STEEL 1938-2022

David Steel, formerly managing director of Coles Cranes, died on Friday 8 April after a short illness, just three weeks short of his 84th birthday.

David was the son of James Steel and nephew of Eric Steel, the two brothers who established Sunderland-based Steels Engineering Products in 1943 as a subsidiary of family firm Steel & Co which had acquired Henry J. Coles Ltd in January 1939. David read English at the University of Oxford but on graduating he was articled to a firm of London accountants rather than joining the family firm. People who subsequently knew him will not be surprised to learn that he hated it, and in 1962 he quit accounting and joined Coles Cranes as a management trainee.

His father, by now Sir James Steel, the company chairman, insisted that he complete the full management induction programme, which involved spending time on the shopfloor at Sunderland, as well as working alongside both UK and international sales executives. His father had focussed on developing Coles export markets while Eric Steel was responsible for developing the Coles product line. In 1964, David was appointed UK sales manager and promoted to UK sales director in 1966.

In 1968 the company's name was changed to the British Crane and Excavator Corporation with a manufacturing and marketing arrangement with the Unit Crane & Shovel Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin and the acquisition of excavator and crawler crane manufacturer Priestman Brothers of Hull the following year. A new factory was also built in Darlington to build Coles' traditional diesel electric cranes, while Sunderland focussed on telescopic truck cranes. In 1970 British Crane & Excavator name was dropped in favour of Coles Cranes

By 1972 Coles was the largest mobile crane manufacturer in Europe with four UK plants and facilities in Germany and Australia as well as licensed manufacturers in India and Poland. That year the company became the subject of an unwelcome takeover bid from Critall Hope, a subsidiary of merchant banker Slater Walker, which had an eye on Coles' undervalued assets.

David was part of the senior management team which fought the takeover and ultimately negotiated and accepted a 'white knight' offer from Bill de Vigier, founder and owner of the Acrow Group. Coles was a different kind of

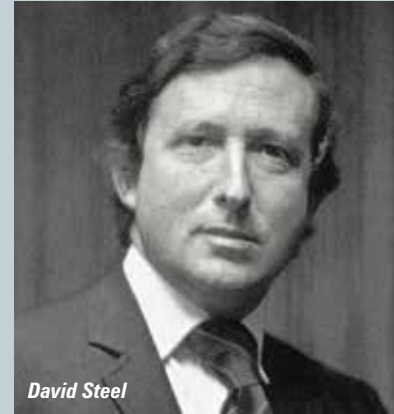
business to Acrow's other business, and once the takeover was completed, de Vigier looked for 'efficiency improvements', including cutting 300 from the Sunderland workforce. The result was a disastrous 13 week strike which badly damaged Coles business and reputation, leading to the resignations of several Coles directors. de Vigier recruited Bill Jacks as managing director, and in 1976 he appointed David as sales & marketing director, while recruiting Duncan Wordsworth to manage manufacturing operations. David created a revitalised marketing department with an emphasis on product benefits and worked closely with a young and energetic international sales team to build a solid presence in new and growing markets such as the Middle East and Eastern Europe.

Over the next few years, the company's manufacturing operations were substantially improved, with new fabrication, test, paint and research facilities This helped Coles retain and, in some cases, improve its market position, leading to the promotion of David Steel to managing director.

The strength of sterling and growing competition in the early 1980s imposed particular pressures on many UK manufacturing businesses, and while Coles managed to remain profitable, the Acrow Group became over extended and called in a liquidator in September 1984. David and his senior management team attempted to mount a management buyout, but struggled to develop a financially viable offer, and were thwarted by a superior and successful offer from Grove Manufacturing.

Grove's chief executive Martin Benchoff took an instant liking to David and retained him, initially in his role at Coles, while a merger of Grove's European operations with those of Coles was arranged. He later told the story of his experience of visiting the unemployment office with the intention of 'signing on' as unemployed, prior to the sale of Coles going through.

Once the merger went ahead Benchoff appointed David manager of the combined sales, marketing and distribution efforts of the business which was rebranded Grove-Coles. In 1987 Hanson acquired Grove's parent Kidde group, and while it divested themselves of several Kidde businesses, it surprisingly retained



David Steel

Grove. Steel remained for a while but had left the business by the early 1990s.

He then took up a London based role with JCB before joining York Trailers, neither of which seemed to suit him. His recruitment by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development gave him a role to which he was much better suited, and where he was able to put to good use his knowledge of Eastern European markets as they developed, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. After several successful years with the bank, he retired in 2000. He is survived by wife Jane, children Harriet and Robin, and four grandchildren.

In the words of those who knew him well: "He will be fondly remembered by friends, former colleagues and customers around the world. It is perhaps, a mark of his success in building a dedicated, committed and successful team at Coles, that former employees still meet regularly in an organisation they call COBBLERS - the Coles Old Boys, Been Left and Early Retired Society, of which David was an enthusiastic member until his death. He will be greatly missed.



David Steel hands over a 45 tonne Coles truck crane to Alf Sparrow of GW Sparrow Crane Hire in late 1977

IN MEMORY OF DAVID STEEL

Dear Leigh

David Steel and I were colleagues, friends, and for a time he was my boss, for 60 years from the day on which we first met in 1962. To me, he combined the qualities of his warm hearted mother, Margaret, father, James (later Sir James), and his uncle, Eric, the human dynamo who directed Coles Cranes from the time that they were taken over by the Steel Group just before the start of WWII and manufacturing moved from Derby to Crown Works, Sunderland.

Eric died from a heart attack in 1956/7 at the early age of 49, and it was James who endorsed my appointment, fresh from National Service in the Royal Engineers and Oxford, with a degree in Jurisprudence, as export sales trainee in September 1957.

When David started his own career with Coles in 1962, he accompanied me on my London rounds of Communist country Embassies, in particular the Romanian one, where an astute man called Nicolae Cocos was surrounded by a battery of phones to which he kept answering: "I am in another line - please ring back in five minutes." My imitation of this caused David difficulty in keeping a straight face!

It was David, who found the true reason why I had left Coles for Hymac in 1965, to escape the devious machinations of my boss at the time, whom he eventually got rid of. He invited me to re-join the Steel Group as export manager for Priestman in 1970 and recommended to Bill de Vigier of Acrow that I be offered a seat on the Priestman board, which I held for 12 years until the Acrow collapse in 1984. Whenever he came to the Acrow head offices in Paddington, he would come into my office for a chat. I spent 1985 under a short term Contract with Sennebogen, but in 1986 he rescued me with the offer of a job looking after Poland and Communist Eastern Europe with Grove Coles at Harefield. After the offices were moved to Bicester, he allowed me partially to work from home, upon the basis of a Consultancy Agreement, as by then I was beginning to re-establish Grove in Poland, without the advantage of purchasing Polish components as Coles had done for years and Grove did not continue.

When Grove decided to close the Grove Coles offices and make changes to the local management including David's departure, I had just signed a Consultancy Agreement with him, to give me more independence, and Grove had little option to accept it, but my personal stock improved with them when I sold the last RT1650.



David Steel (R) with Vic Canham of Coles

David got a London based job with JCB and was therefore unable to take up a UK Government funded assignment to train Polish manufacturers in marketing and he recommended me, which helped the finances of Grabcranex, the fledgling post-Communist agency that my wife Audrey and I had started, and which struggled financially in its early years. During our respective retirement years, David and I (prior to Covid) met regularly for lunch in Oxford or at his comfortable Old Vicarage, where Jane often provided refreshments or lunch, to chat and reminisce and he generously endorsed my Memoir '40 Years a Salesman'. He was, in every sense, a true hearted gentle-man who will be sadly missed.

Dick Lloyd



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REINHOLD BRÄUNER 1936-2022

We received the sad news that tower crane veteran and entrepreneur Reinhold Bräuner of MTI-Lux had died.

He passed away on March 24th following heart failure while asleep at his home in Norway, he was 85.

Reinhold Bräuner was born in Stuttgart in 1936, the middle brother of three boys. His parents were not at all well off, so daily life involved few luxuries. At the age of eight as the war moved towards its final stages, he and his elder brother were evacuated to live with an uncle who ran a farm around 70km away as the bombing of Stuttgart and other large cities was stepped up. He never spoke much about the two years he spent on the farm, but the life seemed to have been crucial for his development and the way his life panned out. They were certainly tough years and his parents had to walk the 70km to see their children, something which they did once every six months.

After the war he moved back to Stuttgart and was enrolled in school where he appears to have done well, gaining sufficient results to qualify to study engineering. This led to him becoming a civil engineer and going to work for an elevator manufacturer, possibly C. Haushahn which was later acquired by Schindler. He then made a move into cranes, joining the design department Liebherr Biberach. He began to realise that being a design engineer was not really what he wanted from his working life, and when the opportunity to join Liebherr Export came along and the chance to move into sales, he jumped at it.

It proved to be the kind of work which suited him 100 percent, he travelled a lot and was very happy and also successful, selling cranes all over Europe. When the 'oil adventure' took off in Norway at the beginning of the 1970s he spent time in Oslo, helping with the provision of cranes building the first offshore platforms for the Norwegian sector of North Sea. Bräuner, now in his early 30s was "enthusiastic out of his mind about the development of the Norwegian oil industry."

In 1977 he married a Norwegian girl Grete and promptly whisked her off to Brazil after Liebherr offered him a posting as a sales director. The couple remained in Brazil for the next three years, during which time their daughter Christine was born. By the time his three year contract came to end, the Brazilian economy and political situation had entered a challenging period and with a young daughter to take care of the couple made the decision to move back to the relative stability of Europe. Reinhold managed to land a job with German tower crane manufacturer Peiner as sales manager. They settled in the town of Peine between Hanover and Brunswick, where Peiner Schraubenwerke AG, as it was formally known, was based.

In 1986 the company began to cut back its activities to a single plant in Trier, so the couple relocated to the town in the Moselle



Reinhold Bräuner

wine region, near the Luxembourg border. He continued to work for the company until the next cutbacks. By then his wife Grete had started her own business - MTI - Machine Trading International - selling cranes in Germany and Scandinavia. As she says: "MTI was more of a hobby than a business, and I ran it from home near Trier, but in actual fact my activities were not unsuccessful, so we decided that Reinhold would join me in selling used and new cranes."

When the next downward cycle in the crane business came along the couple were obliged to extend their sales worldwide, which led to them working with the banks in Luxembourg, and able to raise letters of credit quickly and easily. The business took off and in the years that followed the couple sold a lot of Jost cranes in the UK, while buying and selling used cranes all around the world, including the USA, UK, South Korea, Australia, Thailand, Singapore and many others. Three employees joined them including engineer, Thomas Reschke. The name was also changed to MTI-Lux, when the two moved the business to Luxembourg.

When the financial crisis hit in 2008 the crane industry took a hit, including MTI-Lux. As the crisis bit Grete and Christine - who was by then working in the business alongside her parents

- decided to exit the crane market and do something less cyclical. Grete returned to her translation business, while Christine eventually decided to start a new life in Norway.

In late 2010 Bräuner launched his own flat top crane line under the Lux Cranes brand, which he had built in the same Arneburg steel fabrication plant in Germany as Jost. In 2014 after Jost had some issues with its cranes, he launched the Lux Cranes line of hydraulic luffers. After several years of travelling back and forth between Germany and Norway to spend time with daughter Christine and the arrival of Covid 19, the couple decided to join her in Norway, moving in April last year buying a house in Tromøya on the east coast south of Oslo towards Kristiansand and not far from the holiday home that they owned.

Reinhold Bräuner leaves behind his wife Grete, daughter Christine and three daughters from a former marriage, Susanne, Sabine and Beate, along with six grandchildren - three boys and three girls.

