

READERS LETTERS

NOT FORGOTTEN

I hope I am not alone in remembering my beloved husband who was killed three years today whilst working for Nationwide Platforms Loxam. Three years on and still waiting on answers as to why? No one should go to work and not come home, I hope that no one else has to go through the pain, stress and constant struggle that I am enduring due to not knowing why?

JOHN MACKAY IS SORELY MISSED.

The incident this refers to occurred on September 19th 2019, in which an explosion and resulting fireball occurred just below the basket of a Nationwide Platforms truck mounted aerial lift at the closed SSI steelworks in Redcar, Teesside, UK. There were two men in the platform at the time, the operator from Nationwide John Mackay, 49, and Tommy Williams, 65, who were tasked with removing external components from an old storage tank on a long decommissioned coke plant as part of the dismantling process. Both men died in the incident after the fire ball engulfed the upper boom and platform. The incident is being investigated by Cleveland Police and the Health and Safety Executive, with no further information disclosed so far.



John Mackay

Mackay's wife Ann has spoken out over her anger with the way Nationwide Platforms informed her of his death and acted since then. She said at the time: "I am not blaming them for John's death, which is being investigated. It could have been prevented, that I definitely know and more will come out in the future. But this is about employees not realising what is happening. I don't think that people look at things like that and I think that big corporations should have something for being killed in service. I think that needs to change for future employees."

A statement from Nationwide Platforms at the time said: "John Mackay's death on 19 September 2019 at the former SSI steelworks site in Redcar came as a shock to everyone at Nationwide Platforms: he was a much-loved employee. We are aware that the family have unanswered questions and are seeking resolution and closure to this tragedy - we share their frustration and understand the pain this is causing all concerned."

A recent statement from the Cleveland Police said: "We understand and sympathise with Mr Mackay's family as they continue to await the outcome of this investigation. Enquiries have been ongoing, and we have recently provided an update to Mr Mackay's family on where we are with the investigation and the progress that is being made."

A HSE spokesperson added: "HSE are conscious that we are approaching the anniversary of the incident and our thoughts remain with the families. We are supporting the investigation led by Cleveland Police and working hard to help bring this to a conclusion."



The incident at SSI Redcar - 2019

VIRTUAL VS ASSET OWNING RENTAL COMPANIES

The following was posted by a UK crane industry professional who prefers to comment under the name Dannyyy. It was in response to a report on the failure of companies that offer crane rental services - usually contract lifts - but who have no cranes or sometimes premises of their own, hence the term 'Laptop' crane hire companies. In reality there are companies or highly experienced individuals out there offering a lift planning and management service that add real value and have a good working relationship with their crane owning suppliers. However, the comment is thoughtful and inciteful and we thought it was worth giving it a wider readership through these pages.

At the end of the day, the fact remains that there are crane hire firms out there who are making a good profit and there are those that are struggling. Why is this? As with any sector, it boils down to both internal factors and external factors. It is up to company owners to adapt and survive. Some will and some won't. This is normal in every sector and has been for all of time. These factors can include: global pandemics, changes to taxation, competition from other 'laptop' crane hire companies and competition from other asset owning crane hire companies, and the list goes on and on. It is too simple to argue that these asset owning crane hire companies are failing because of competition from 'laptop' crane hire companies. Relative to the size of the UK crane hire market, these 'laptop' crane hire companies have probably captured a relatively small market share and so their impact is likely inconsequential when looking at the issues faced by asset owning crane hire companies.

I think we can all agree that the root issue is with stagnant low rates. However, I would disagree that these are the result of a "race to the bottom from companies without assets or overheads". On the flipside, it is more likely a race to the bottom caused by companies WITH assets and overheads. Many asset owning crane hire companies are competing against each other for ridiculous contracts. I have seen some quote £450/day for a 40t crane (even in this market). Then to make things worse, they send 50t and 60t cranes to site because they don't have enough 40t cranes in their fleet. It could be predatory pricing (which I doubt), or it could be desperation (most likely).

The reason they are having to do this is probably simply due to a mismatch between supply and demand in the UK market. Eventually, demand might increase or enough of these firms will go bust or downsize their fleet and, assuming these cranes leave the UK, the market should return to a better state of equilibrium. In reality though, a return to equilibrium won't be this simple. There are too many other variables involved and too many unknowns that lie around the corner. The UK crane hire market will continue to adapt and evolve. Some firms will succeed and flourish. Others will fail.

One thing I think we can all agree on is that firms like Maxim and the various other Shawcross firms have been run poorly. It is most likely the low barriers to entry (not having to purchase their own cranes) that provide these ambitious (and I use that term loosely) people with the ability to start their own business when they don't actually have the business acumen required to make it work in the long run.

However, is it fair to then state that these 'laptop' crane hire firms are all poorly run? That is definitely a sweeping generalisation. Is it also correct to say that these firms are really causing asset owning firms to fail? I think we are crediting them with too much influence over the market.

Dannyyy

RICHARD VICTOR SOWTER 1956 - 2022

We received the sad news this week that Richard Sowter who worked for Grove and Grove Manlift in the 1980s has died. He passed away last Thursday, following a short battle with cancer, he was 66.



Richard Sowter's crane and access career began when he joined Grove International as a sales trainee based at its offices in Cowley, Oxford in the UK at the start of 1981. He was soon appointed to his first overseas posting as a district manager for Manlift sales in Saudi Arabia. He later took over a similar role for the Nordic countries working from the Grove international offices in Oxford.

In 1988 he was recruited for a job with BP Solar and went on to set up BP Solar in 1995 and also worked with the company in Bangalore, India. After leaving BP at the end of 1999, he worked with a number of companies in the clean energy field and eventually set up his own consultancy business.

Richard was always conscientious, thoughtful and a lot of fun in his days at Grove, always making the most out of life, with a wide circle of friends.

The funeral service will be held on Tuesday 8th November at 10:30 at Christ Church in Fairwarp, East Sussex.

**SO SAD**

"It was very sad to hear news of Richard Sowter who passed away on Thursday after only a recent diagnosis of an aggressive form of cancer. Richard and I were colleagues at Grove International, both joining the Europe Africa and Middle East cranes and Manlift marketing team in or around 1980 and became great friends working (and playing) together for many years thereafter.

Richard moved as district manager to Saudi Arabia in the early 1980's and I to the USA, reuniting in the UK in 1984 to join the Grove Manlift (soon to be joined by Coles Starlift) international sales team formed by Mike Lamb and then Charlie Rich following Grove's acquisition of Coles Cranes.

Richard covered Scandinavia and northern Europe where he will be fondly remembered by the many friends he made in the nascent aerial lift industry at that time. During our many escapades, one anecdote that sticks in my mind is from The ICE exhibition at the NEC in Birmingham in 1981 where - likely courtesy of this magazine's publisher! - we had a 'uniform' of what can only be described as 'shitty' brown blazers and beige trousers.

Richard and I shared a room at the show, and I set out very early one morning with the coach and several crates of Carlsberg to Heathrow airport to collect some (of Richard's) Scandinavian customers. A little hazy after a late night and the early start and a few beers en route, and having been sat down most of the morning, I hadn't taken much notice of my slightly ill-fitting trousers. Richard, who was a good two or three inches taller than me however, had been standing all day at the exhibition wearing my trousers 'flying at half-mast'!

In the late '80's Richard had a change of industry and joined BP's Solar Energy division, living and working in Asia, and thereafter Texas. He was most recently running his own solar power consultancy business from his base in Surrey.

My condolences to Caroline and family.

Paul Richards.



A dinner in Saudi Arabia following a Grove Manlift/Kanoo training school - Richard Sowter and Paul Richards are on the bottom left