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# GREAT WESTERN ENTERPRISE

Taking a look back at the last 30 years of Great Western Enterprise (GWE)

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# A History of Great Western Enterprise (GWE)

In May 1986, the Swindon Development Agency (SDA) was set up in response to the closure of the Swindon Railway Works. In 1989, following a merger with the Swindon Enterprise Trust (SET), it became known as Great Western Enterprise (GWE).

Since 1986, the organisation has been committed to helping the community by providing help and advice to companies. Over the years, through partnership working, pre-empting and being innovative, GWE has assisted in the creation of many jobs and continues to provide a range of services which encourage economic growth across a wide geographical area.



# 1985 - 1986

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The staff at Swindon Railway Works were informed on 11th May 1985 that the Works would close on 31st March 1986. At the time of the announcement there were 2300 workshop graded staff at Swindon and a gradual reduction of staff took place until March 1986 when only 400 staff remained. They were given one year to carry out essential work before the Works finally closed in March 1987.

By March 1986, there were over 1,300 British Rail Engineering (BREL) job losses and male unemployment in Swindon rose to 7,221. British Rail was Swindon's largest employer and had been established in Swindon since 1948 although the Rail works had been operating in Swindon since January 1843. Thamesdown Borough Council (now known as Swindon Borough Council) therefore encouraged BREL to help with the effects arising from the closure.

In response to the closure of the Rail Works, the Swindon Development Agency (SDA) was formed in May. Its aim was to look after the ongoing employment needs of the redundant railway workers with a financial package from BREL of £1.25m. This package was available over a three year period and was paid in instalments.

A board of directors consisting of representatives from BREL, Wiltshire County Council, Swindon Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Swindon Enterprise Trust (SET), BREL Works Committee, Thamesdown Borough Council and Swindon's largest employers was appointed. Rama Nand-Lal (Director of Administration, Marketing and Management at Cranfield University) was appointed as Chairman on a unanimous vote. The office was managed by Ken Tanner, former Personnel Manager at the British Rail Workshops, Swindon and a Secretary, Miss Lesley Golsby. Norman Hayes was appointed to lead the agency and came with a successful track record of running Swindon based engineering and property businesses and securing sponsorship for community initiatives.

The main aim was to find alternative employment for the redundant workers. Unfortunately at the time Swindon had an unemployment rate of 14.8% which made it very difficult particularly for men over 50 to secure work of a suitable nature. There were individuals who wished to pursue their own trades or similar work but the majority were just keen to work. However, the opportunities were few and far between.

The Swindon Enterprise Trust (SET) - The Swindon Enterprise Trust (SET) ran parallel to SDA and their roles were complementary. SET was one of the Network of 300 Local Enterprise Agencies working in association with "Business in the Community" with funding from Thamesdown Borough Council. They assisted start-ups by providing regular enterprise awareness days and business counselling support. SET and SDA agreed it would be sensible to work in partnership.

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By December, SDA had set up the following service portfolio:

#### Start-up grants

Grants provided to the redundant BREL workforce keen to start-up in business

#### Loans and plant machinery grants

Start-up grants were generally made to ex-BREL workers. However, SDA also supported local businesses, large or small, where expansion would create jobs. Initially grants towards plant and machinery costs were made, but the emphasis changed to providing top-up loans at a low rate of interest and frequently without any security. SDA always maintained a continuing relationship with the businesses to which it had lent money, not only to ensure that the business remained sufficiently sound to repay the money, but also to offer any business advice needed.

#### Job Premium Grants Scheme

The Job Premium Grant Scheme allowed any local employer who took on a qualifying redundant BREL worker to receive a grant of £30 per week for the first year of employment. Certain safeguards for the BREL staff were included in the scheme, covering minimum wage rates and the continuation of employment after the first year. The scheme enabled a large number of redundant staff to get back quickly into full-time employment.

#### Jobs Register

Due to the success of the Job Premium scheme, SDA compiled a computerised database to help employers fill job vacancies. Employers could specify the precise skills required and SDA could provide a short list of candidates. Selection was possible by skills, trade, location, age and eligibility for job premium grants.

#### Training Grants

To enable ex-BREL workers to take up job offers from local employers, SDA provided grants to contribute towards the cost of the specific training needed for these roles. A large grant was also

made to Swindon College towards a training programme organised in association with Wiltshire County Council and the European Social Fund, to enable specialised BREL electricians to convert to construction industry requirements.

#### Consultancy Grants

SDA always tried to provide a business with specialised professional help in order for its expansion plans to successfully take place. In areas such as export, sales, market research, patent investigation or public relations, SDA could introduce companies to specialists that could help. If there was a prospect for future jobs, SDA could provide a contribution towards the professional costs involved.

#### Information

SDA were aware of the 'equity gap' for companies seeking development capital in the £25k to £75k range and set up an information service in which they could provide the latest information on regional venture capital funds and arrange the necessary introductions. In conjunction with SET, SDA were able to provide up-to-date information to businesses on labour, premises availability, housing, training facilities and financial incentives.

#### Management Support

Businesses benefited from the free advice of a management consultant. In addition to this help, SDA arranged with Messrs. Ernst and Whinney, Chartered Accountants and Townsends Solicitors, for a monthly clinic to be held at SDA's offices which was open to businesses of all sizes. Many of these services became part of the Business Link portfolio years later.

#### Workspace

Commercial and industrial premises were expensive and required a long-term lease commitment. SDA recognised that new and growing businesses needed premises which were within their means with flexible occupancy terms. To make such premises available, SDA began to provide managed workspace, starting with small units for both industrial and office use. They were one of the first to introduce "easy-in-easy-out" (simple, transparent monthly licenses meaning no long-term restrictive leases and no financial penalties if



# 1985 - 1986

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space is occupied for less than a year) licences for tenants. The SDA recognised that serviced offices and managed workspace would be an effective means of using £1.25m funding from BREL to build relationships and understanding with start-up businesses.

## 'The Lounge'

As all SDA activities were happening, they also recognised that there was still a problem with the older ex railway workers who had a "job for life" philosophy. In response to this, SDA hired a small room at the Central Community Centre on Emlyn Square (which used to be the old GWR hospital) and invited the unemployed rail workers to attend on Thursday mornings for a chat and problem sharing. The meetings were used to promote job opportunities.

However, this didn't help with the unemployment issue and therefore 'The Lounge' was set up. Initially and during the early months of 1986, it was slow to take off with about 30 attendees but grew steadily with an increasingly social element maintaining a gathering of around 80 – 100 over the past 18 years.

The Thursday meetings have survived the years due to the continued commitment of GWE. The Lounge is still as active and popular as it was when it first started and local and national charities receive regular donations from the attendees. Ken Tanner manages the Lounge together with Dave Ellis, former Clerical Officer at British Rail. Since 1986, they have organised speakers to come in and give talks on a number of topics. Day trips have also been organised, the last one in 2009 to the House of Commons. The Lounge is unique as similar projects were tried out at various locations in the UK but were unsuccessful. The Lounge has also generated over £6000 for local charities.

## Sponsorship

Raising capital through sponsors was essential to SDA's success. Norman Hayes and his colleagues would visit various organisations and advise on the good work that was taking place. This resulted in a number of sponsors including Allied Dunbar, Barclays Bank, Imperial Tobacco Ltd, Wiltshire County Council and WH Smith.

## Third Age

SDA developed a partnership with Third Age, a voluntary organisation, whose motto was gainful employment for 50-Plus, in a bid to persuade employers to adopt a more positive attitude towards recruiting and retaining mature workers. The SDA started by helping this age group write CVs. SDA saw Third Age initiatives as additional support and encouraged ex-BREL employees over the age of 50 to take advantage of this. The partnership with Third Age and the Co-operative development agency remained strong throughout the years.

## Louis Van der Pump

Louis Van der Pump joined SDA as a volunteer Business Adviser from WH Smith where he had been a senior Director and was instrumental in helping start-ups. He was also involved in various initiatives such as the Inventor Centre, Shell Technology Enterprise Programme, Support for Innovation and he led the newly formed Swindon Development Capital Fund.



# 1987

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## March

### Graham Potter Units

SDA started managing the Graham Potter Units. This project was initiated by SET. Located in Pinehurst, Swindon, these units were named after a vicar in Swindon who was involved with the local business community. The units were an old school social area and housed a variety of start-ups. SDA managed these until 1992 when the buildings were returned to Thamesdown Borough Council. Staff secondments SDA encouraged staff secondments and representatives would visit local employers to stress the benefits of providing secondees. Charles Moorley was the first to be seconded initially on a 12 month period from Barclays Bank.

## June

### Great Western One

The first development in the Workspace portfolio was the conversion of the former BREL Fire Station in Bristol Street which lay empty. SDA approached BREL to ask if they would lease it to them. This was the beginning of GWE Managed Workspace. The old Fire Station became known as Great Western One. It was converted into nine units for small businesses at a cost of £40k. Allied Dunbar Charitable Trust greatly contributed to this. Nine units ranging in size from 330 to 1000 square feet with full provision of all services, including telephone switchboard and meeting room, were created.

Central to the Workspace initiative was the provision of management support to the businesses occupying the premises. This was made available in conjunction with SET at no charge so that businesses could benefit from free advice. An early form of Incubation service

### Great Western Two

Great Western Two (P1 workshops) was the second acquisition in the Workspace portfolio. This was an empty railway workshop. The SDA negotiated with the new owners of this site, Tarmac Properties plc, for its use as managed workspace until it was required for redevelopment.

Despite a further 800 BREL redundancies, the unemployment figure had fallen to 5,028. SDA had assisted in the creation of over 630 new jobs in the area and managed to secure over £120k from local businesses in support of their activities.

### Ron Poole and Derek Turner

Ron Poole and Derek Turner joined SDA thanks to part funding from Allied Dunbar. Ron was responsible for business premises management and played an instrumental part in developing the Workspace portfolio as well as looking after the company's finances and bookkeeping and Derek had overall responsibility for business advisory services.

### Women's Enterprise Centre

SDA were keen to encourage women entrepreneurs and so started the Women's Enterprise Centre which provided training for women. The scheme secured sponsorship from Thamesdown Borough Council.

## December

### Hobbies Workshop

By December, SDA had set up and funded a 'hobbies workshop' in the Great Western Two workshops to provide occupation for the unemployed BREL workforce. This opened twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays. It cost around £3K and was equipped with saws and various tools. Only skilled men were allowed to use the machines and examples of their output varied from lock gates and a float for the Swindon Carnival. The Hobbies Workshop was later moved to the Shaftesbury Centre.



# 1987

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## **A successful year**

Male unemployment in Swindon had fallen from 6899 (14.3%) in June 1986 to 4628 (8.4%) in December 1987. SDA had agreed a total of 28 loans and plant machinery grants. A total of 194 job premium grants had been agreed representing a total commitment of over £300K. 84 separate employers in Swindon had taken advantage of the scheme.

## **A successful 18 months**

In its first 18 months SDA proved that dynamic results can be achieved when public and private sectors work together in partnership. Achievements in this time included:

- Comprehensive re-training for BREL leavers
- Over 250 separate grants and loans helping to create jobs
- A major joint initiative providing over 300 new jobs and training places
- Swindon's first managed workspace scheme
- Swindon's first managed offices
- 75% of the redundant BREL workforce were back in work



# 1988

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## February

### Great Western Two

The conversion work of Great Western Two (P1) was complete and space was 70% let. The Centre housed a variety of start-up companies but the centre has now been demolished.

### One-stop-shop Business Centre

Being a three year funded project, SDA had for some time been involved in putting together a proposal for a one-stop-shop where business support could be provided under one roof. SDA along with the Swindon Chamber of Commerce, SET, Co-operative Development Agency and the Economic Development Unit of Thamesdown Borough Council sold the idea to BREL. The proposal was successful and SDA negotiated a long lease with BREL to convert the former J Store, an old railway property which stored soft materials for fitting on trains.

## March

### The Great Western Business Centre

The building contract to convert J stores to a business centre commenced on schedule. The building was located at the main tunnel entrance to the Works and dates back to 1840. This became the Great Western Business Centre, the third property in the Workspace portfolio. Swindon MP, Simon Coombs, was instrumental in securing the largest donation for the Centre, made by Imperial Tobacco, following the closure of the Wills operation in Swindon. Meanwhile Norman Hayes toured local companies with a model showing the concept and secured sponsorship so that work could commence.

The other sponsors were: Allied Dunbar, Austin Rover Group, British Rail, Courtaulds Shorko Films, Gordon Russell, Leighfield, Lloyds Bank, NatWest Bank, NEM Insurance, Railway Heritage Trust, Roland Partnership, EMI Compact Disc, WH Smith, Wiltshire County Council and Wiltshire Newspapers. The Great Western Business Centre is now leased from Rail Track Properties.

## June

### The Shaftesbury Centre

The rapidly increasing demand in Swindon for office space led to SDA investing £450k to buy the former Radio Rentals head office in Percy Street, Swindon. This was renamed the Shaftesbury Centre after the seventh Earl, the eminent 19th century social reformer, and was converted to 70 suites of offices. This was SDA's first big purchase. Businesses could rent small offices where the monthly licence fee included rent, rates, maintenance and reception facilities. The building also had two fully equipped conference suites, each capable of seating 100 delegates. Informal video presentations covering a variety of business topics would take place at the Centre. The seminars gave small groups the chance to share experiences and business topics.

## October

By October, the Great Western Business Centre was fully let and operational as Swindon's one stop business information centre. The occupiers were SDA, SET, Department of Trade and Industry Small Firms Service, the Co-operative Development Agency and Thamesdown Borough Council Economic Development Unit

## December

By December, unemployment in Swindon had fallen by 0.5% to 4.5%. The total registered unemployment figure had fallen to 4345 and SDA initiatives played a major part in this. In recognition of their roles in administration and business counselling, Ron Poole and Derek Turner became Associate Directors.



# 1989

## January

The job incentive schemes worked to such an extent that within three years the unemployment figure in Swindon had fallen to 4.4 percent. By the early part of 1989, SDA had secured more than £200k from local businesses in support of its activities.

## February

There were 50 businesses operating in the Shaftesbury Centre, employing 137 people. 94% of space was let.

## March

### Women in Business

As part of its aim to help women get back into work, SDA along with other partners sponsored 'Women in Business' – a major exhibition to encourage women to return to business.

## April

### The Swindon Development Capital Fund

The Swindon Development Capital Fund was launched. Louis Van der Pump, Norman Hayes and Alan Bentley were on the Board. Alan Bentley, former Chief Executive of the investment division of Burmah Oil Trading, was Chairman of the Fund.

This fund received £150k from BREL and £150k from Thamesdown Borough Council. It allowed SDA to provide entrepreneurs with funding. GWE and Thamesdown Council worked together to launch this and it provided a £300k cash boost for Swindon businesses. It provided equity finance (generally between £25k and £75k) for SMEs based in the Swindon area and its aim was to encourage more companies to start-up, grow and stay in Swindon. It provided finance to businesses considered to have good, long-term growth prospects.

### Merger of the Swindon Development Agency and the Swindon Enterprise Trust

SDA merged with SET, and Great Western Enterprise (GWE) was established creating a single Enterprise Agency for Swindon. Rama Nand Lal remained Chairman and Alan Bentley became Vice-Chairman. The reason for the merger was that SDA had developed an income stream from workspace and other initiatives to sustain them. SET didn't have this type of stability but had expertise in helping start-ups. The SDA offered SET stability and in return, SET could share its expertise. As the roles of SET and SDA were complementary, this was a "win-win" relationship.

The move towards the merger was given added urgency by the demand for sponsors in the public and private sector to see some rationalisation of the large number of agencies on a national scale. They wanted to ensure fewer, more powerful and viable units in the future, able to offer a broader range of business services to the small and medium-size business sector.

GWE was now part of the National Local Enterprise Agencies Network (now known as NFEA, the National Federation of Enterprise Agencies) – a nationwide network of 350 agencies which promoted business start-ups. Norman Hayes became Chairman of the Wiltshire Association of Local Enterprise Agencies (LEAs) and then a board member of the National Association of EAs, giving GWE national exposure.

This partnership helped create thousands of new jobs. The objective was to make life easier for Swindon businesses and to back the growth of small and medium sized firms. Now that GWE was an Enterprise Agency, it was much easier to attract secondees with specific expertise and win more contract work.

GWE positioned itself as Swindon businesses, Wiltshire County and Thamesdown Borough Councils, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Trade Union Movement working together to provide information, advice and technology support to small and growing businesses.

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Supporters and sponsors of GWE initiatives included: Allied Dunbar Assurance, Austin Rover Group, Barclays Bank, British Rail, BREL, Imperial Tobacco, Intel Corporation, Marks and Spencer, Midland Bank, Radio Rentals, Swindon Chamber of Industry and Commerce, Thamesdown Borough Council, Wiltshire Newspapers, WH Smith and Son and Wiltshire County Council amongst others.

**Five divisions were created:**

### **Business Advice**

With a six strong counselling team, up to 40 weekly one hour counselling sessions with advice and assistance would take place.

These included advice on:

- Business start-up advice and counselling support
- Assistance with business plans
- Small business management support
- Specialist marketing consultancy

### **Business Premises**

The Workspace portfolio included:

- Light industrial starter units
- Fully serviced office suites
- Conference, exhibition and marketing centres (some centres such as Shaftesbury and Great Western Business Centre offered fully equipped conference, lecture and seminar rooms)

### **Business Information**

Thamesdown Borough Council's economic development team, Department of Trade and Industry Small Firms Service and the Co-operative Development Agency were able to offer a unique and comprehensive package of business information services. These included:

- A one-stop business information centre
- Skills – labour market audit
- On-line marketing intelligence database
- Credit status database

### **Business Training**

GWE became an approved agent for the Training Agency and over the years ran many training initiatives.

### **Finance**

Finance was made available through loans. GWE allocated £30k and Thamesdown Borough Council allocated £150k towards assisting growing companies. The service included:

- Unsecured small loans
- Venture and development capital
- Investor/investee marriage bureau

### **GWE Newsletter**

The first GWE newsletter was produced on 25th April. GWE established a good relationship with the Swindon Advertiser. Through this, the newsletters were inserted as supplements. GWE were also able to promote many new businesses locally leading to a number of success stories. One client starting a radio car hire firm was approached by the Social Services to liaise with them in setting up a taxi service for women using female taxi drivers.

### **A Royal Visit**

The Princess of Wales opened the Great Western Business Centre on 26th April officially sealing the merger of SDA and SET. Local children dressed up in Victorian costumes, and staff and their family contributed by providing the catering and presenting the Princess with flowers and a model steam engine as a gift for Princes William and Harry. The Princess joined sponsors and directors in the Great Western Business Centre conference room for coffee and a short video presentation. She also visited the Great Western One managed workspace units.

The visit commemorated the completion of the £170k Great Western Business Centre, in which £130k of the conversion costs were contributed by Swindon businesses, all of whom recognised the importance of business growth to their own success.

# Royal visit

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# 1989

The Business Centre showed that Swindon was ready for the 1990s and in particular for the 1992 single market. GWE were prepared for this by focusing on business advice, enterprise training and having access to the information that businesses would need.

## May

Workspace was proving successful with 161 out of 165 workspace units fully let.

## June

### “Meet the Buyers”

GWE in collaboration with Allied Dunbar and Wiltshire Newspapers organised a one-day exhibition in Swindon, “Meet the Buyers”, which gave small businesses the chance to meet with representatives of the purchasing departments of many of the larger companies in the Swindon area. This was in recognition of the fact that many small businesses found it difficult to approach larger companies as they lacked the necessary sales experience.

### Business Enterprise Programme

As part of the Business Training initiative, GWE were contracted to run a Business Enterprise Programme (BEP) course. This ran in June and July at the Shaftesbury Centre. Due to its success, GWE were contracted to run a second course starting in September 1989.

## June – August

### Enterprise Allowance Awareness Days

Throughout this period, GWE ran weekly Enterprise Allowance Awareness Days as part of Business Training. Enterprise Awareness Days were the key way for people to access the Enterprise Allowance Scheme. Participants on the scheme were mentored for six months and were paid £40 per week. The scheme helped find premises for start-ups and provided business advice and support, an area in which GWE volunteers could help. The government encouraged it as it reduced unemployment.

Eleven seminars took place and GWE accepted an offer from the

Department of Employment to extend the contract to March 1990.

## September

### The Women’s Enterprise Centre

GWE launched the Women’s Enterprise Centre to meet the demand of women entrepreneurs. The Centre was specifically tailored to meet the needs of women, and to encourage local women to explore, develop and utilise the full range of skills needed to run a business. The Centre supported women in both training and information. GWE was at the forefront of a variety of women’s initiatives in Swindon, including Women into Marketing, Women and Training, Women into Enterprise, workplace nurseries and childcare provision. By the end of 1989, women represented one-third of all GWE clients. The Centre was sponsored by various organisations, including Midland Bank in 1990.

### Your Business Success Scheme

GWE became an appointed agent to run the ‘Your Business Success’ scheme in the North Wiltshire area. The course was aimed at assisting small businesses with development by means of business auditing and planning.

### Working in partnership with local solicitors

GWE in conjunction with solicitors Bevan Ashford started to hold a series of seminars such as: Debt Collection: Making the business pay; Premises: Avoiding the pitfalls; Employment: Problems and solutions. These were all aimed at small and medium-sized businesses.

When the Law Society launched Lawyers for Enterprise, it was as an initiative to encourage the small start-up business to use the services of their local solicitors. GWE saw this as a unique opportunity to work together with local legal practices and therefore became one of the first to initiate local enterprise agencies and lawyers working together to offer legal clinics to owners of small businesses. These clinics were held on alternate Wednesdays.

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The Rural Enterprise Bus- The Rural Enterprise Bus, the first custom built mobile enterprise agency in the country was launched by the Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire and operated until 1992. This was the Wiltshire Rural Enterprise Agency's single decker bus and visited Devizes, Marlborough, Pewsey, Tidworth and other surrounding villages in the Kennet area. It was manned by the staff from the four Wiltshire Enterprise Agencies, including GWE who also ran a series of seminars alongside this initiative.

## December

### The Pembroke Centre

A major industrial site was acquired in Cheney Manor, Swindon. This was known as the Pembroke Centre. Previously occupied by Yorkshire Imperial Plastics, it offered a mixture of hi-tech assembly units, light industry and high quality office accommodation. It was a 35,000 square foot complex and was converted to provide 47 industrial units and 21 fully serviced office suites. GWE rented the Pembroke Centre from Thamesdown Borough Council and funded the costs of the conversion supported by a £150k development grant from Wiltshire County Council. The Centre was opened by Michael Heseltine and March 1990. In 2002 GWE bought the freehold of the Centre.

### Training and Enterprise Councils

GWE was fully involved in the bid for a Wiltshire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). GWE recognised the importance of having a presence on the formative board of the national and Wiltshire TECs as they would be delivering government programmes such as employment training, Youth Training Scheme and the Enterprise Allowance Scheme. They would also be responsible for providing help and advice to SMEs across the region.

The TECs would be working through partnerships and enterprise agencies would deliver the contracts. By December, Norman Hayes represented GWE on the formative and the full board and was later succeeded by Rama Nand Lal.

### A successful year

By December, all funding obligations of BREL had been met. During 1989, GWE successfully pursued a policy of reducing dependence on sponsorship and grants by developing its properties, training and services and the last BREL revenue grant of £50k had been received.

### Shell Technology Enterprise Programme

During the year, Shell approached GWE to run the Shell Technology Enterprise Programme (STEP). This ran for three years and involved placing students from various universities with local companies. The students were given a role relevant to their studies for a period of 12 weeks, took place over the summer holidays, and participants would receive a small salary.



# 1990

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GWE took a 15 year lease at a nominal rent from British Rail on the former British Rail Apprentice Training Centre in Dean Street. This became known as the Newburn Centre. GWE upgraded the building to create 10 managed offices providing premises for new businesses. GWE collaborated with Thamesdown Training Consortium who also offered a variety of courses at the Centre. This helped fill the skills gap in Swindon. GWE handed the Newburn Centre back to Rail Track in November 2009.

## May

The Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) were set up. As a result of the GWE presence on the formative board, the TEC became confident in their ability to help small businesses and this was instrumental in GWE securing the first Business Link contract.

## September

### **The Young Enterprise Scheme**

The Young Enterprise Initiative was a national scheme sponsored by Midland Bank where GWE Business Advisers and managers from Swindon businesses would provide help and guidance to sixth year students in forming a business. Students could enter a competition which involved forming a trading company, the most successful winning an award. Thamesdown schools were involved in this scheme and by September, 15 schools had expressed interest. The Scheme is now sponsored by HSBC, GKN and Edge and GWE staff and other business people are still involved in mentoring students.

## December

### **The Swindon European Information Centre**

In order to meet the needs of SMEs in preparing for the single European market, GWE added the Swindon European Information Centre to its portfolio of services. It was part of the Economic Development Unit and was officially launched by the Local MEP Dr Caroline Jackson. For the first time, any firm could gain access to an immense amount of information at the Great Western Business Centre. The Centre introduced an Infosearch Database with access to more than 1000 other databases meaning that firms could check patents, register of names and logos and get a credit rating of any company in Europe. The Centre also provided the facility for those planning to submit a tender in Europe to list the number of other tenders submitted.

An online information service incorporated more than 40 UK and international newspapers and other media. This service was jointly sponsored by Wiltshire Newspapers and Austin Rover and marketed by Wiltshire County Council, Thamesdown Borough Council and GWE.

### **The Small Business Programme**

GWE secured an exclusive licence to run the BBC Open University/ Cranfield School of Management Small Business Programme, a modular programme aimed at owner-managers and key personnel of small firms with between five and 50 employees. It was designed to help businesses grow successfully. GWE held lunchtime seminars to cover specific modules. The cost was much lower than buying an individual module. Co-sponsors of this initiative were solicitors Brain and Brain and Barclays Bank.

Hailed as model for the UK's 300 other agencies GWE was hailed as a model for the UK's 300 other agencies. It was one of the few agencies to receive an unqualified accreditation in the new Business in the Community ten point charter. After an independent assessment, GWE's 22 strong team were congratulated by the BITC assessor, particularly for their business counselling, including the Women's Enterprise Centre and provision of small workspace units.

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In the early 1990s, growth continued with the absorption of the North Wiltshire Enterprise Agency and the Wiltshire Rural Enterprise Agency and, by 1993 they were fully absorbed. This led to GWE purchasing a listed building in Chippenham to replace the former first floor rented accommodation.

### **Nicky Alberry**

Nicky Alberry joined GWE on a 12 month secondment from Midland Bank (now HSBC) initially as a Business counsellor. She is now a Non Executive director of GWE Business West having been Chairman. As Chairman of Northern Arc and Chief Executive from 1996 – 2005 she played a key role in the growth of the company through bidding for new contracts, developing workspace and establishing a number of joint venture companies as well as overseeing the merger with Business West



# 1991

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GWE started managing Bassett Down, an old chicken farm that had been converted into workshops, on behalf of the owner. These were managed by GWE for two years.

## January

### **The Great Western LINC Service**

The Great Western LINC service was established. This stood for Local Investment Networking Company and was a matchmaking service that linked up start-up or expanding small businesses seeking finance and those with funds seeking a business opportunity in which to invest capital and management skills. After an initial telephone call to LINC, a company would submit its business plan.

The company would then be advertised anonymously in a monthly bulletin sent to an extensive list of potential investors throughout the UK. Investors interested in any companies advertised would contact LINC which would in many cases lead to an agreement. GWE ran this service for approximately three years. The service in Swindon was supported by BP who provided GWE with a secondee, Alan Macgregor, to run it.

## April

The Wiltshire TEC began operating. GWE responded to it with a number of initiatives, not just for the unemployed but also for those considering starting up in business. As a result, GWE started running skills modules on behalf of Wiltshire TEC.

## May

GWE started winning contracts from the Employment Service. This made them unique within the 350 strong local enterprise network. The Inventor Centre - The Inventor Centre was launched. This was a

support for innovation initiative which different enterprise agencies ran on a three year scheme. Louis Van Der Pump was instrumental in this. Good publicity was generated via local radio interviews and this GWE initiative got substantial press coverage. It encouraged entrepreneurship and innovation.

## November

GWE held the first lunch time meeting of its new Business Club. The aim of the club was to bring together people who had started their own small businesses and who had received support from GWE and the Enterprise Allowance Scheme. The launch of the club was sponsored by the Wiltshire TEC and 54 small business owners were in attendance.

## December

### **EURADA**

GWE was accepted as a founder member of EURADA, the newly formed Association of European Development Agencies. Twenty of the largest development agencies in the European community joined together to form the organisation. The aim of EURADA was to exchange good practice between development agencies. Norman Hayes, on behalf of GWE, made presentations throughout Europe on their experience in job creation. EURADA received funding from Brussels to carry out various projects and encourage good practice.

### **Employment Action**

This was a Government initiative for the long term unemployed which the Wiltshire TEC was running. GWE also implemented the scheme in conjunction with Wiltshire Training, in the 200 small businesses based in the workspace premises. The scheme involved creating job placements within start-up and small businesses that required additional manpower.



# 1992

GWE along with Project North East and London Enterprise Agency, was one of only three enterprise agencies in the UK with a turnover of over £1m a year.

## October

By October, GWE was managing more than 250 office and industrial units. It was also the largest supplier of enterprise training for the Wiltshire TEC.

### Norman Holland

Norman Holland, President of Swindon Chamber of Commerce joined the board of GWE.

## December

### TSB Enterprise Agency 92 Award

GWE won £5k as national winner of the TSB Enterprise Agency 92 Award. Over 100 agencies entered the regional heats with each regional winner moving on to the national final. The award scheme was launched to highlight best practice among Enterprise Agencies and to find the agency which was doing the most for its local business community.

GWE won the award in recognition of its highly successful employment action initiative where it worked with local job clubs and centres to arrange placements in local companies for the long-term unemployed. The award was awarded to Norman Hayes, Nicky Alberry and Ron Poole by Magnus Magnusson (from TV's Mastermind) and Mike Sommers, then Marketing Director for TSB. They all got to sit in the famous black chair. By the end of 1992, GWE were providing over 2000 free individual counselling sessions each year from 10 trained small business counsellors. Weekly free legal, accountancy and patent clinics from 30 professional practices were taking place. Export and European single market advice was being given using EURADA. GWE were also running the Wiltshire TEC Business Programme, with over 150 day and evening workshops annually. These included start your own business, business plans,

marketing, cash flow and other business modules. Annual Meet the Buyers and Meet the Professionals exhibitions were also taking place. These initiatives created a great spirit of business.

### Work Based Learning

Work based learning was a government scheme that GWE participated in. This allowed the unemployed to retain their benefits whilst getting work experience for a certain period of time. They would also get an extra £10 per week. The idea was that the worker created their own role. GWE were able to offer various opportunities through workspace tenants who were willing to provide placements for the unemployed.

### Work Based Training

Due to their experience in helping start-ups, GWE also ran a work based training programme which involved running training courses for the unemployed. This was managed by the Employment Service and subcontracted out to other organisations, including GWE.

The Work Based Learning Programme started off in Swindon but then spread to Chippenham after GWE took over North Wiltshire Enterprise in the early 90s. GWE representatives would visit job centres to interview the unemployed, assess business plans and if appropriate, put an individual in contact with a Business Advisor.

When GWE merged their Business Link Contract with those in Trowbridge and Salisbury in the late 90s, the work based learning programme was spread out across the county and was very successful. GWE won Provider of the Year for getting the most people back into work in Wiltshire.



## 1993 - 1994

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The first “soft loan scheme” was set up in conjunction with Midland Bank by Nicky Alberry and Alan Fletcher.

This was quite ‘cutting-edge’ and one of only three nationally in which the Bank was involved. These small loans helped approximately 180 different businesses in the Swindon and Wiltshire area. A GWE Business Adviser was allocated to each loan and this proved very effective as there was a very low default rate at only 3% over the entire course of the scheme which ran until 2001. The loan lent almost £1m during its existence.

GWE was ranked 31 by PricewaterhouseCoopers ‘Fast Track 50 Growth Companies’ in the South West. By 1994, through delivering a wide range of services, GWE had become one of the country’s largest economic development organisations.

The Centre for Professional Development - The Centre for Professional Development (CPD) was established to provide training and development opportunities to SMEs. The centre offered:

- In Company Programmes – Courses in business skills created specifically for businesses together with coaching for senior management.
- National Vocational Training – GWE became an approved centre for OCR and City & Guilds, delivering NVQs in various business areas such as customer service, sales and business administration.



# 1995 - 1996

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Alan Fletcher joined the board of GWE. He was Chairman between 2001 and 2005. He is now a Non-Executive Director of GWE Business West.

## **The Princes Trust**

The Princes Trust funded a Business Adviser to work with GWE where a number of people under the age of 26 benefited from advice and support. GWE and the Princes Trust worked together until 1998.

The Government set up three Business Links in Wiltshire. In February, GWE began to deliver Business Link services, starting with Swindon and North Wiltshire, then South Wiltshire and Salisbury, West Wiltshire (by 1999) and finally extending into Berkshire in 2001.

Through their involvement with the TEC, GWE were involved in setting up Business Link for Wiltshire and Swindon, consolidating existing smaller services across the county. As a result, GWE gained a good reputation facilitating their bid for the Wiltshire and Swindon Business Link contracts.

## **Merger with the Swindon Chamber of Commerce and Industry**

Peter Stratford, Director of Swindon Chamber of Commerce retired and GWE negotiated a service level agreement to provide management services to the Chamber and it became known as Swindon Chamber of Commerce and Industry. One of the reasons for the merger was the arrival of the Business Link contracts. It allowed GWE the opportunity to develop training programmes and gave them an introduction to chamber clients.

## **Martin Wyn Griffith**

Martin Wyn Griffith joined GWE initially as a Business Adviser Martin was instrumental in merging three Business Link companies within Wiltshire and building one of the most highly regarded and high-performing Business Link operations in the national network. He played a key role in persuading the board members of Business Link South Wiltshire and Business Link West Wiltshire to merge with Swindon and North Wiltshire in order to accomplish economies of scale.

## **Park House**

GWE acquired Park House on a 120 year lease. In 1907 Park House became the accommodation for the GWR medical staff and continued as a medical examination centre for some years. GWE acquired Park House in order to reach wider sectors. It took some time to renovate and in March 1998, opened as a business centre. Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England officially opened the Centre.



# 1997- 1998

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Norman Hayes retired after 10 years as managing director and was succeeded by Nicky Alberry.

## **New Deal**

Labour introduced 'New Deal', a programme for the under 25s. Modelled on the Work Based Programme, it was designed to help this age group back into work. The Local Employment Service (through tender) allowed GWE to run New Deal. This was very successful and achieved good publicity. It ran until 2001.

## **Economic Development Agenda**

GWE agreed a five year contract with Wiltshire County Council to deliver their Economic Development agenda through to 2003. Working in partnership with Wiltshire County Council, GWE provided economic development initiatives in economic policy, regeneration and tourism. Partnership of this kind was most unusual and this initiative was a great success. As a result, the relationship still remains strong. The contract marked the beginning of the GWE Research service.



# 1999

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## **Norman Holland**

Following the successful merger of three Business Link companies within Wiltshire, Norman Holland became Chairman of Business Link Wiltshire and Swindon, a wholly owned subsidiary of GWE.

**Turn over to see a glimpse  
of the past...**



1987  
Cheque presentation  
Grant to Swindon Development Agency



1987  
Swindon Enterprise Trust



1987/88



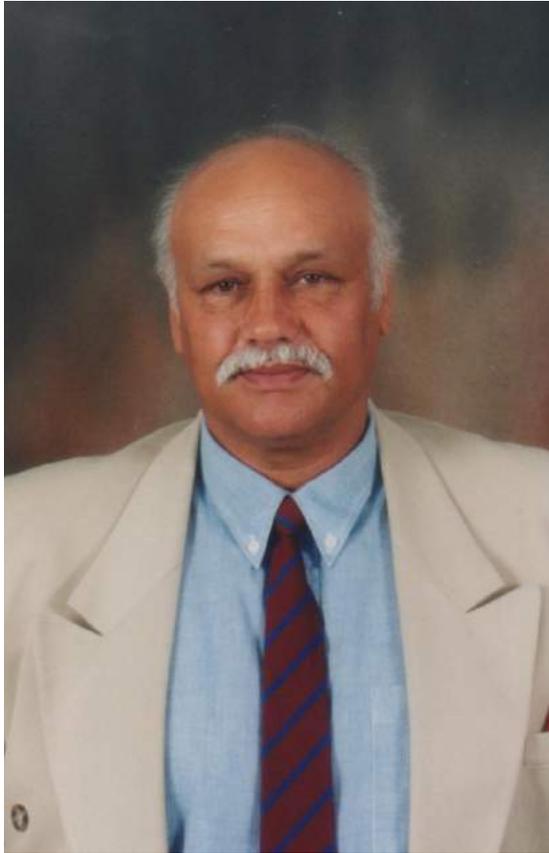
Cheque presentation in recognition of being an outstanding National Enterprise Agency



Ian Larrard offering business advice in a bus.



Ron Poole



Rama Nand-Lal



Norman Hayes



1993  
Cheque presentation



1997/98  
Cheque presentation  
Littlewoods Pools with Barbara Windsor



Simon Coombs and Michael Heseltine



Nicky Alberry and Ian Larrard at The Business Show Swindon 2012



Emlyn Square - Swindon  
1988 - 2012



Basement at Emlyn Square before re-fit



GW1 - Swindon  
1987 - 2014



Pembroke Centre - Swindon  
1990 - 2007



Bentley Centre -  
1990 - 2007



Park House - Swindon  
1996 - Present



Shaftesbury Centre - Swindon  
1998 - 2007



Tetricus Science Park - Wiltshire  
2000 - Present



Crossbow House - Swindon  
2002 - 2012



Newburn House - Swindon  
1990 - 2012



Faringdon Business Centre - Oxfordshire  
2007 - 2012



Adur Business Centre - Shoreham by Sea  
2007 - 2012



# GREAT WESTERN ENTERPRISE

1986 - 2002



2002 - 2006



WORKSPACE

A home for your business

2006 - 2009



2009 - Present



# 2000 - 2001

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GWE and the Swindon Chamber of Commerce and Industry demerged in May and the name reverted back to GWE.

## **The Small Business Service**

In 2000, the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) created the Small Business Service and it was decided that it was not sustainable to have 83 Business Link operations across England. This resulted in each contract holder having to rebid for their contracts and meet the new guidelines set. GWE had to rebid for the Wiltshire and Swindon contracts and were one of five exemplary bids in the country. As a consequence they were also asked to look at extending their geographical "reach" and bid for the contract in Berkshire. GWE became the first Business Support organisation to work across two regions – South West and South East.

Following the successful bid, Norman Holland became Chairman of Business Link Berkshire and Wiltshire (BLBW) and Martin Wyn Griffith became Chief Executive.

In under a year, Business Link Berkshire and Wiltshire achieved a 50% increase in market penetration with significant growth in customer satisfaction.

Through their relationship with Wiltshire County Council, GWE became a partner in some of the initiatives run by the Wiltshire Economic Partnership Swindon (now known as the Wiltshire Strategic Economic Partnership). These were:

## **BioApproaches South West**

GWE was a key partner along with the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) and regional higher and further education institutions. BioApproaches involved delivering a student placement programme (University of Exeter were contracted to do this) and develop sector specific training modules.

## **Social Enterprise Support**

Key partners were GWE, Community First (a charity that works at the forefront of community development to help improve the quality of life and economic well being for people and local communities throughout Wiltshire and Swindon) and Co-Operative Futures. Co-operative Futures employed a social enterprise adviser to work in Wiltshire. The adviser's role was to help social enterprises get started and support them with the help of Business Link. Support was provided to 50 social enterprises.

## **Community Loan Fund**

Partners were GWE, Wiltshire County Council, Swindon Borough Council and SBS. The loan supported disadvantaged communities and by the end of the year, had attracted support of £99k. The fund was branded Fund2Grow.

## **Tetricus Science Park**

Tetricus Ltd was formed in March. This was part of the BioApproaches initiative where a joint venture was formed, its aim to build a science park as managed workspace. The various shareholders are DERA (the MoD agency, which preceded the present shareholder, Dstl, who provide the accommodation; GWE (who provide the business support, accounting, secretarial, financial management etc) and New Sarum Enterprises (a Salisbury-based partnership which provide access to a network of specialist service



# 2002

providers). The shareholders set up the operation and obtained funding from the DTI and the SWRDA to fund refurbishment and the initial three years of operation. Based in Porton down, Tetricus is still in operation and has seen many successful businesses grow thanks to the facilities and support provided.

### **The Crossbow Centre**

GWE acquired the Crossbow Centre in Slough on a ten year lease in order to gain a presence in the South East and demonstrate their commitment to Berkshire and the new Business Link franchise. The Centre was opened by Fiona Mactaggart, Labour MP for Slough. It is still managed by GWE Business West.

### **Foot and Mouth disease and the South West Emergency Fund**

In response to the 2001 Foot and Mouth crisis, GWE appointed two new Business Link advisers to work on a business recovery scheme, the South West Emergency Fund, funded through the South West Regional Development Agency. The Business Advisers as well as third party consultants were appointed to work on the development of company action plans and GWE would report back to the Wiltshire and Swindon Economic Partnership.

By the closing date for grant applications on 28th September, 175 enquiries for business support and grant aid had been received. 135 of these were eligible to receive business support from a consultant. All grant applications had to be based on financial information showing a downturn in turnover over a year on year period within set criteria. Initial enquiries were spread across the following economic zones: Kennet, North Wiltshire, Salisbury, Swindon and West Wiltshire.

The programme was set up to support businesses that were viable before the onslaught of foot and mouth disease and that would remain viable post the grant support through implementation of their action plans. By the end of the project, 50 businesses were successful in receiving grant support and with a 91% success rate with grant applications, GWE's professionalism was apparent.

As part of the Wiltshire Economic Partnership and as a result of their contract with Wiltshire County Council, GWE took the lead on an initiative to improve the quality of life for people living and working in the Salisbury Plain area.

Key partners were Wiltshire County Council, four District Councils, Community First, BLBW, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, SWRDA and TDT. The project was known as the Rural Regeneration Partnership (RRP). SWRDA committed funding for year one and was committed to supporting the partnership as part of Rural Renaissance which is still ongoing. Due to its success, GWE partnered a sister initiative in the South East which helped businesses and disadvantaged communities. One of the most visible successes of this initiative was the re-introduction of the great bustard into Salisbury Plain in 2006.

### **May**

#### **Daphne Milner**

Daphne Milner joined GWE as Chief Executive of BLBW as turnover increased to £11.8m. She was instrumental in setting up one Business Link service across the County, forming Northern Arc and the merger with Business West. She left in 2009.



# 2003 - 2004

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GWE with partners set up South West Angels Investor Network (SWAIN). This is an independent not-for-profit company supported by SWRDA and the regional Business Link companies. SWAIN acts to bring together investors and companies seeking equity finance.

## James Monk

James Monk joined GWE in February and his first project was to deliver the newly formed Incubation South East. Incubation South East is a joint venture company between GWE and DPDS Ltd. The purpose was to deliver a South East Regional Development Agency (SEEDA) contract to create a turnkey solution for SEEDA's Enterprise Hubs and Gateways programme.

The idea was that DPDS would work with GWE to develop managed enterprise gateways/business centres. Both organisations would work together to identify areas of need, working closely with SEEDA. Once a site had been identified and acquired by SEEDA, DPDS would manage the design, construction and fit out of the centres consulting with GWE as appropriate. GWE would then manage the properties as part of their managed workspace portfolio, working in conjunction with Business Link to provide business support services.

GWE won the tender for the SEEDA contract and set up two centres in the South East. These were in Shoreham by Sea (Adur District Council and Faringdon in Oxon).

Manufacturing for the Future, a three month project, set up in January 2004, was an excellent example of partnership working with educational institutions, for example, Wiltshire College and the Dorcan Technology Centre.

The aims and objectives of the project were to improve the competitiveness of the manufacturing industry in the sub region and support the development of the training infrastructure in the Automotive and Polymer sectors through the following actions:

- Developing learning materials and short course provision to be able to offer the EDEXCEL (a leading provider of internationally recognised qualifications) Professional Development Certificate in Polymer Studies through on-line learning
- Increase the availability and accessibility to the Dorcan Technology Centre for school students; and
- Capitalise on the success of the Automotive Centre of Expertise's (ACE) Quality Cost and Delivery (QCD programme by continuing to deliver sustainable performance improvement to manufacturers, whilst addressing key skills needed within the sector on the terms and conditions set out in the SWRDA contract.

The project was a success and objectives achieved. Wiltshire College completed the task of completing the modules to offer the EDEXCEL Professional Development Certificate in Polymer Studies through on-line learning. Accessibility to the Dorcan Technology Centre was a major success. The original target was to achieve 1200 people days per year. This was achieved and in year three of the project, 2581 people days were recorded.

The success in encouraging both students and teachers to be more aware of engineering possibilities was proved by the success of Dorcan's work with Swindon Pressings, a wholly owned subsidiary of the BMW Group. The Company provides side panels, body shells, and other parts to the automotive industry and a number of apprentices had some contact with the Centre.



# 2005

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Norman Holland retired as Chairman of BLBW in March and GWE restructured its business.

### **GWE Restructure**

The Divisions were rebranded to give GWE a clearer identity and the sub brands were introduced. These were GWE Workspace (the property division being the first to be rebranded), GWE Research and GWE Enterprise Services. GWE became a corporate centre with divisions offering good economies of scale. The Business Link company was closed and became a division of GWE. Following the restructure, Nicky Alberry was appointed as Executive Chairman of GWE and Daphne Milner became Chief Executive. The restructure set the tone for the new business. A corporate services team was set up and a concept was born. It quickly gained a reputation for being flexible and able to deal effectively with any contract.

### **Wiltshire and Swindon Learning Skills Council ESF Project**

This was a contract between GWE and the Learning Skills Council which ran from 2005 to 2007. GWE played an active role in this project which encouraged staff of SMEs to obtain Level 3 and where appropriate Level 4 qualifications, which due to European Social Fund (ESF) eligibility criteria, had to be delivered through the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) element of the project. Candidates were sourced using the Skills4Business brokers who at the outset of the project in 2005 were employed by the Learning Skills Council (LSC). With the arrival of Train2Gain these brokers were subsequently transferred to GWE, Business Link Wiltshire staff in 2006. Beneficiaries were encouraged to complete their training by their provider assessors and were also encouraged to continue appropriate training through the links with the Train2Gain brokers. The project was a good example of partnership working. For example, it was path finding in developing the Skills4Business partnership and it was a forerunner in developing methodology within Train2Gain, the LSC and improving delivery mechanisms in GWE/Business Link. By encouraging flexibility in delivery, GWE met the needs of the sectors and all participants irrespective of their previous level of education. The project was also instrumental in enabling GWE to develop working partnerships with the principal providers, as evidenced by being able to find alternative suppliers when three ceased trading. Overall, this was a successful project with GWE also contributing to economic growth by encouraging beneficiaries to complete their training.



# 2006 - 2007

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GWE sponsored the Swindon Advertiser with a special supplement marking the 20th year anniversary of the closure of the Swindon Railway Works and GWE's 20th anniversary. This included information on some former railway workers and their subsequent employment history.

## **Faringdon Business Centre**

Faringdon Business Centre was opened in May as part of Incubation South East and we managed this for 7 years. It housed around 20 businesses. Due to its success, planning consent was gained to extend the available space by the potential construction of additional office space and workshop/studios. It enjoyed very high occupancy until it was sold in 2013.

## **Skills South East**

GWE became a partner in Skills South East Ltd (SSE), an organisation set up in May by SEEDA and the six South East Business Link providers to deliver the Train to Gain service across the region until March 2009.

## **Adur Business Centre (Shoreham by Sea)**

Adur Business Centre opened in July as part of Incubation South East. A state-of-the-art iconic new build with 50 offices, it had a fully managed reception service, easy-in-easy-out leases etc. It was very successful and exceeded delivery outputs. It was profitable a year earlier than budgeted and assisted many companies to commence trading and grow within the area. It was sold in 2013.

Northern Arc was formed in April, the partners being GWE, Business West and Business Link Gloucestershire.

This consortium was established in response to the RDAs taking over the management of Business Link contracts from the Small Business Service. This resulted in regional Business Links. By forming Northern Arc, GWE avoided having to bid again for the contracts held. Pre-empting in this way enabled GWE to successfully bid for contracts and meet the needs of the RDAs.

Approximately one year prior to forming Northern Arc, the three partners met with the other Business Link operators in the South West (Dorset, Somerset, Devon and Cornwall). All parties worked together to draft a proposal to merge and form two operators, one for the North and one for the South of the region. Nicky Alberry was appointed Chairman of Northern Arc.

The freehold properties within the Workspace portfolio (Shaftesbury Centre, Bentley Centre and Pembroke Centre) were sold in May and staff were transferred to the new owners.



# 2008

After the initial three years, GWE no longer had any connection with BREL. However they always did and still remain loyal to the rail workers, e.g. through initiatives such as the Lounge. GWE grew over the years to respond to the requirements of businesses and fulfil its ongoing commitment – to provide advice, information, funding and premises for new and existing organisations while continuing to plough its profits back into the development and delivery of services to the local community.

### **GWE Business West**

GWE merged with Business West and GWE Business West was formed in April 2008. This resulted in the formation of a larger and stronger organisation that could meet the needs of the Regional Development Agency when tendering for public sector contracts such as Business Link. GWE Business West's vision is to become the most influential chamber membership-based representative business organisation in the South West.

### **Delivery of UKTI core services across the South West of England**

Since April 2007 GWE Business West has been delivering the UK Trade & Investment South West contract. This contract delivers UKTI international trade services to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) across the South West. A Customer Services Centre provides general information, guidance and process support while advisers visit and work with clients to facilitate international trade. R&D/innovative companies are prioritised and an important contribution is also made to the development of regional key sectors and inward investment objectives. A significant part of the work is undertaken in conjunction with UKTI/FCO staff in markets around the world. Outward and inward missions are designed and implemented by the organisation and GWE Business West has significantly improved utilisation by South West companies of the Overseas Market Introduction Service (OMIS).

GWE Business West has been successful in developing two-way relationships with a number of key markets across the World in countries whose priority sectors correlate well with the South West. The objective is to encourage markets to think 'South West first' when supporting South West exporters or promoting UK locations to potential investors.

### **Enterprise Europe Network South West**

On 1st January 2008, GWE Business West was awarded the Enterprise Europe Network South West contract. Funded in part by the European Commission, the Enterprise Europe Network helps small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to trade in Europe and beyond. It offers a unique business partnering co-operation service and complements the services of UKTI demonstrating that GWE Business West is the first point of call for those companies wishing to trade overseas.

### **ERDF Internationalisation**

In April 2008, GWE Business West began providing an integrated approach to the promotion of international trade and foreign direct investment and the development of new Solutions for Business services for businesses in the geographical area of the South West ERDF Competitiveness and Employment Programme. Activity is ongoing and continues to be integral to our business support.



# 2008

## **Business Link Berkshire Case Study Specification Project: Leadership skills for increased innovation**

This project relates to a publication commissioned by the South East Development Agency (SEEDA) in support of its flagship Leadership for Global Competitiveness (LGC) project, which supported the development of skills and mind-sets of owners and managers enabling them to become more innovative and entrepreneurial.

SEEDA were seeking to develop a series of two publications consisting of case studies from the LGC project and academic articles that would link explicitly the development of leadership skills with a company's ability to innovate. The purpose of the publications was to demonstrate a positive relationship between leadership skills and a company's capacity to innovate. The case-studies were to be developed primarily from participants in the LDAs project.

This was a SEEDA contract and GWE, through Business Link, were to ensure that the final publications were fit for purpose. The project was a success. 11 case-studies with contributions from 11 leading academics were produced, making a practical contribution to the leadership for innovation debate and helping intermediaries and providers to effectively engage with employers in the Leadership for Innovation agenda. The publication also provided SEEDA with the opportunity to share best practice with other Regional Development Agencies and regional/national policy makers.



# 2009

Funded by the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA), the Women's Business Service pilot was a project run by GWE (Business Link Berkshire) from 2009 to March 2010. The aim of the project was to test the principles of the US Women's Business Centre model and to provide intensive women friendly business support to Business Link mainstream and Enterprise Gateway Service priority groups and areas. The additional support would add value to current clients and add to the number of women the services could support.

The main area of work was based in Slough and Reading, two areas with a high rate of unemployment, redundancies and hard to reach areas. Other areas included Windsor, Maidenhead and Newbury. The target market was pre-start clients from disadvantaged groups and areas, the hardest to reach areas of the community and female-run enterprises who were struggling.

### **Key objectives were to:**

Increase the support for pre-start and pre-existing businesses; support the aims and objectives of priority regeneration areas in Berkshire and engage with women from hard to reach communities; provide intensive support to increase the numbers of women becoming self-employed; support struggling women-owned businesses in the early stages; work in partnership with specialist agencies who could provide redundancy support and advice to women; test a variety of approaches to bring all services for women together in an easily accessible and non-threatening environment; create a sustainable model for the Women's Business Service and work closely with partners and providers.

There was a great deal of support from local stakeholders and partners via referrals, events, workshops, group presentations and networking. Key partners included: Business Link, Enterprise Gateway, Local Authorities, Slough Council for Voluntary Services, Slough and Eton College, Slough Young People Centre, Thames Valley Police, Job Centre Plus, Destiny Support and YMCA amongst others.



# 2010

This was a successful project and key highlights were as follows:

- 1325 individuals engaged in considering enterprise through outreach engagement activities
- 261 individuals actively engaged and registered to the Women's Business Service
- 207 individuals received one to one mentoring support
- 170 individuals accessed Business Link mainstream support services
- 906 individuals attended peer to peer networking events
- 81 young people were engaged through promoting enterprise
- Delivered in-house self awareness workshops to the Women's Refuge in Slough
- Delivered an introductory workshop to long term economically inactive people in Slough
- An International Women's Day collaboration with Slough Borough Council and Destiny Support to encourage enterprise opportunities, targeting ethnic minority hard to reach areas in Slough
- Encouraged local community engagement through event and gained support from stakeholders and partners to encourage women from priority groups and areas to participate
- Provided an additional support mechanism for Business Link Advisers and clients

As a result of partnership working and commitment to the local area, The Initiative in Swindon & Wiltshire was established; its aim, to become a business leadership, membership and services organisation enabling the business community to play a part in influencing the way the area is shaped, managed and developed.

This goal has been achieved with GWE The Initiative continuing to take the lead in developing an effective link between the private and public sectors and ensuring that the interests of commerce are taken into account when key decisions are made at local, regional and national levels. GWE The Initiative will use their 30 years experience to benefit the wider region of Swindon and Wiltshire. Their vision, which derived from the SDA, was to continue building a future environment for the region which was not only pleasant but productive, popular with its people and capable of competing in the global market place. As a result of listening to business leaders and members main concerns, GWE The Initiative concentrated on developing policies for six priority areas which themselves pose some complex and controversial questions. The six priorities for Swindon are still relevant in 2016

### Transport

What actions need to be taken to improve accessibility and ease congestion? GWE The Initiative are committed to addressing the problems posed by traffic congestion which have a serious impact on the social and economic potential of Swindon and are pressing for improved public transport locally and nationally. Along with Swindon Borough Council they are committed to holding regular transport forums to discuss these issues. The re-doubling of the Swindon-Kemble line, along with the electrification of the Great Western Mainline from London to Cardiff are only the start of many successes to come.



# 2010

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## **Economic Development**

How can investors be persuaded to come to Swindon? By being fully engaged in ensuring the area remains an attractive place to work, live and do business by encouraging enterprise in all its forms, building on significant and emerging key sectors in particular.

## **Planning and Development**

How many homes should there be and where should they be built? The Initiative also challenges to make certain that there is sufficient employment land availability and helps in the promotion of Swindon as a destination for investment.

## **Education and Skills**

What needs to be provided to make the most of the available local talent? Support the activities that improve the standards of the local education system and encourage employers to invest in skills and training. Since 1986, GWE has been bringing learning, education and skills to those who most need them.

## **Quality of Life**

What needs to be done to improve the lifestyle of the population? GWE The Initiative are committed to ensuring that Swindon is recognised as an attractive and vibrant place to live and are involved in activities to accomplish this.

## **Sustainable Development**

How can economic growth be sensitive to the needs of the environment? Taking long term economic sustainable growth very seriously and continuing to encourage business to consider its approach to climate change, energy use, sustainable construction and the development of truly sustainable communities.

Initiative members attend regular quarterly meetings with MPs and Leader of the Council. At these meetings, matters of strategic importance are discussed and action is taken on behalf of Swindon businesses.

Entrepreneurial Swindon companies have a great chance to improve their prosperity by joining the Initiative in Swindon. A significant

number of local organisations have signed up to be involved in making a difference to this area. Businesses are as enthusiastic as Swindon Borough Council when it comes to formulating a strategic approach which will help to deliver imaginative destination and town centre management plans now and in the long term.

June

## **Ian Larrard**

Ian Larrard joined the company to head up The Initiative, having previously been on secondment with GWE from Midland Bank (now HSBC) in the early 1990's. His knowledge and experience of the area through working with businesses enabled The Initiative to move forward at a fast pace. He is responsible for maintaining close relationships with the local MPs, Councillors, Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and other key partners so that The Initiative can effectively represent the views of members and the local business community, ensuring their voice is heard by key decision makers.

Throughout the forthcoming years we continued to deliver business support under many different programmes with a broad focus on start up, growth, exporting and innovation.

We also continue to support The Lounge where our railworks colleagues meet every Thursday and we hope to keep this going for many years to come.



# 2011

In February 2011, over 500 attendees and 80 exhibitors made Swindon their destination of choice to attend the inaugural Business Show Swindon organised by GWE Business West and sponsored by Lloyds TSB Commercial. This was the first business show of its kind for many years in Swindon and from feedback received, was a resounding success and just what the Swindon business community were looking for.

### **GWE's 25th Anniversary**

To coincide with GWE's 25th anniversary, the decision was made to once again bring GWE to the forefront. The decision was made to keep the well known and well respected GWE brand in the Swindon and Wiltshire area whilst making reference to it being part of the wider Business West Group.

### **Priorities**

Each year we draw up a list of priorities based on our members' views and concerns. In 2011 we saw some excellent progress on some of these priorities which included:

- Confirmation of government approval and support for the electrification of the Great Western Mainline between Bristol and London.
- Linked to this is the agreement on re-doubling of the Swindon to Kemble line, making connectivity to Gloucestershire and the Midlands far better.

- **Plan 500**

We were one of the founder members of this initiative in Swindon. It was Swindon's employer response to the dramatic rise in youth unemployment in the town during the recession. The Plan 500 partnership consisted of Swindon businesses and public sector representatives working together to act as the single point of entry for those employers who want to engage with young people as a route to employment.

Plan 500 created more than 500 opportunities in Swindon across work experience, apprenticeship opportunities, mentoring of young people, work based qualifications and diploma opportunities.

### **Business Link**

At the end of November 2011 we saw the closing of Business Link following the Coalition's decision. This saw many of our colleagues move on to new roles both within the company and externally. Clearly a sad time for all after a successful twelve years and saw the start of many configurations of business support across the country.

### **University Technical College (UTC)**

We were involved in early discussions, through Nicky Alberry and Ian Larrard concerning the UTC which opened for students in September 2014. We represented the business community along with founding members – Swindon Borough Council, Swindon College and Oxford Brookes University.



# 2012

## Business Show

Following the successful inaugural Business Show in 2011 we again held this business to business show with even greater numbers attending. This has firmly become part of the business calendar for the town and adjoining area.

Key priorities for 2012 were:

- Working with the Council to ensure that the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was implemented with due engagement from the business community.

Working with a lobby group, GWP, and Councils to lobby Government for a Reading/Heathrow rail spur and in connection with the Great Western franchise replacement.

Train fares were a major barrier and we lobbied to redress this, which in turn aided our inward investment activities.

Supporting Wiltshire Council/Military in the redevelopment of RAF Lyneham to the new Defence Technical Training Centre.

Working with Forward Swindon to help shape the Town Centre Masterplan.



# 2013

The Initiative developed its membership and diversified its delivery via working groups focusing on Property & Transport, Retail & Visitors, Low Carbon including Hydrogen and International. These were on top of the regular quarterly meetings with the Borough's two MPs and the Leader of the Council.

Key priorities for 2013 were:

- Rail focus was again around the push for Electrification start dates, continuing pressure of rail fares and the Heathrow link.
- Continuing the transport theme, the focus was on the A419/417 and cross border working with our Gloucestershire colleagues to progress plans for the Air Balloon roundabout. Improvements to the A420, as a vital supply chain link, were also a key area of attention.
- In the planning arena we input heavily into the Borough's Local Plan representing the business community, plus helping with the prioritising of the finalised Town Centre Masterplan.
- Coming out of recession the Skills agenda was starting to be more important and our involvement on local committees gave great insight into the demand from employers.
- At the end of the year we sadly made the decision to move out of Emlyn Square where we had operated for most of our existence, relocating to nearby Park House. Although a wrench at the time it made absolute sense to merge all of our office accommodation under one roof.



# 2014

The newly re-named Swindon & Wiltshire Initiative continues to grow with more than 60 key employers in the town and immediate area being members. Their workforces make up approximately 20% of the working population. This is on top of a further 3,000 members of GWE Business West in Swindon and Wiltshire. We can truly say that we are the largest business organisation in the area.

Key priorities for 2014 were:

- The north/south divide of the town, created ironically by the railway, was a project that we worked on during this year. Working with the Borough and in Swindon we floated the idea of Pods that would operate through the tunnels similar to T5 at Heathrow. Sadly as we go to print we are still endeavouring to solve this issue in order that there is a united town.
- The brand and image of Swindon was also a concentration during 2014 and beyond. Working with businesses and Forward Swindon/ Swindon Borough Council this is probably the single most important aspect for our economic development.
- The direct rail link from Bristol to Oxford, through Swindon, was promoted by us to Government on behalf of business. This has again been pursued in early 2016.
- Sadly we closed down our business centre at GW1 in order to make way for the new UTC, which fittingly has a focus on engineering. The latter opened in September 2014 and we still continue to have strong links with them, and thus the site, today.



# 2015

**2015 saw the start of two major initiatives by us:**

- Swindon 175 – marking the 175th Anniversary of the railworks and the birth therefore of New Swindon. This was the brainchild of an ex GWE employee, Ian Surtees who, as we got to print is employed by the Council managing the STEAM Museum and Lydiard House. A year long set of celebrations was planned for 2016 commemorating the town through past, present and future.
- We led on the creation of a Cultural Partnership in the Borough. This celebrated the great cultural and artistic organisations that we have locally, strengthening their resilience, widening participation and developing talent.
- Both these linked closely with the 'spirit of place' that we try to engender locally. They helped to build Swindon as a great location to live, work and invest.
- Our work on the north/south rail crossing continued in 2015 – and we were able to help a trial of a shuttle bus from town centre to the Outlet Village and back, which proved a great success.



# 2016

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## Swindon 175

Chaired by Ian Larrard, we had a tremendous start to the year. Celebrations took place commemorating the exact date of the GWR board meeting 175 years ago involving many schools in the town.

Replica hooters were made by a local company, and installed on the roof of STEAM. Once again they were sounded thirty years on from the sad closure of the railworks. It was a fitting tribute to all the men and women who worked 'Inside'. The event was attended by many ex railway workers from The Lounge, together with civic and business leaders, plus the whole board of the present day GWR. Many other events are planned for the year which promises to be a real catalyst for the new brand and image of Swindon.



# Summary

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## Final Summary

Both Swindon and Wiltshire were hit hard by the closure of the railworks. GWE provided a huge amount of support and was pivotal in encouraging business start-ups and providing business support. Many of the businesses trading in Swindon today started at that time.

In recent recessuinary times, both Swindon and Wiltshire were affected by the downturn in the economy with people losing their jobs and businesses struggling. However, with over 30 years experience as a leading business organisation, GWE has been able and continues to support the economic and social prosperity of the area.

When it was established, one of GWE's main objectives was to increase and enhance its business support provision by expanding the range of services and availability whilst helping to shape the development and growth of the environment and economy. Through partnership working and mergers, this has been achieved proving that pre-emption and business co-operation have been key to its success. GWE has also remained rooted in its local communities and as a result is a well known and trusted organisation.

As we close this part of the history of GWE it is fitting to be in the Swindon 175 year. The company's origins and development owe so much to the railworks and its legacy, both for today, and as importantly for the future.

## Thankyou

The following people have been key in ensuring the success of GWE and many thanks go to:

- Nicky Alberry
- Norman Hayes
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- Louis Van der Pump
- Norman Holland
- Ron Poole
- Derek Turner
- Daphne Milner
- Martin Wynn Griffith
- Alan Fletcher
- James Monk
- Ian Larrad



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