

Reflecting on 20 years



THIS YEAR MARKS 20 YEARS SINCE **JAMES CLARK** JOINED BITA, INITIALLY AS ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL BUT THEN TAKING OVER AS SECRETARY-GENERAL. HERE HE LOOKS BACK OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES OF CHANGE BOTH FOR BITA AND THE INDUSTRY.

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Since joining BITA from the flour and grain milling industry in July 1996, James has

worked with 10 BITA presidents and seen and presided over many changes. "I was the purchasing director for one of the biggest milling companies, but was looking for a change and something a little closer to home. Plus I was active in the trade association, British & Irish Flour Millers, so when I saw the opportunity with BITA I was immediately interested."

Once he had taken up the post and then the secretary-general role, he quickly realised that it was an organisation with a lot of unrealised potential which needed a bit of a shot in the arm. "It may seem an obvious thing to say, but a trade organisation exists to serve its members, so that's what I set out to make sure was the case."

"Transparency and openness are key pillars in the way I do business, so we set about reinvigorating the organisation with these principles at the centre of things. Part of this was clarifying the role of BITA directors, by agreeing specific areas of responsibility."

James praises the 10 presidents he has worked with, saying that all have been supportive of this philosophy. "The president is the head of the organisation, but I have had a very close working relationship with them all, so there have genuinely been very few instances where there were differences and a compromise wasn't possible."

As well as organisational changes, there have been changes in technology too. "In 1996 there weren't that many mobile phones around, and of course they were a far cry from the 'smart phones' we now all take for granted – and no BITA website."

HEALTHY BALANCE SHEET

With his financial background, James was very aware of the need to ensure a healthy balance sheet for the organisation – and 2001 was a

James has served under 10 BITA presidents

Industry safety is a priority for BITA, which organises the Design4Safety awards. Entries are still welcome, visit www.design4safety.com

BITA is co-owner of IMHX, the logistics industry's showcase event, taking place this year at the NEC, Birmingham, from 13th–16th September

BITA and the FLTA collaborate closely on CFTS, the training of apprentices, and will share a stand for the first time at IMHX

key moment in securing this. "After negotiation, which began in the late 1990s, we entered into joint ownership of IMHX, the key logistics showcase for the industry, which was something we really wanted to be part of. As the leading industry trade body, it made sense for us to be part of this – and it has helped us move forward with our agenda on safety in the industry via our Design4Safety awards which are now a firm part of the show."

Apart from the IMHX relationship, perhaps the greatest source of satisfaction for James has been the growing closeness of the relationship between BITA and the other main trade body for the industry, the Forklift Truck Association (FLTA).

"It gives me real pleasure that our relationship with the FLTA is now on such a firm footing. I work closely with FLTA chief executive Peter Harvey MBE and we have a number of joint initiatives. For example CFTS, which manages the Thorough Inspection regime for forklift trucks, essentially the MoT system, and the BITA Academy, now the new Forklift Training Engineering Centre (F-TEC), the training centre for apprentices and engineers, in what is one of the most significant developments in the industry for many years. Also this year, for the first time, we will share a joint stand at IMHX at the NEC in Birmingham in September."

LIFTING STANDARDS

When James looks at potential projects and opportunities, his first question

always reflects the BITA strapline 'Lifting Industry Standards'.

"I always want to know if what is being proposed will contribute to raising standards in our industry – lifting industry standards isn't just a slogan, it's a major part of the criteria around what we do and how we do it."

In the past two decades BITA's technical work, driven by Technical Consultant Bob Hine, has also expanded, as has its profile and work on European-wide bodies. "Having a place at the table where technical standards are debated and decided has become more important in influencing such decisions. If you don't have a fly in the water, you don't catch fish!"

In the past 20 years BITA has raised its profile and increased its influence but it hasn't been all work, and with a wife and four children, sporting interests such as fishing and following the fortunes of the London Irish rugby club, plus community involvement, things have always been busy.

"With the growth of online shopping, the logistics industry has never played such a major role in the UK economy, employed so many people, or impacted so directly on our day-to-day lives. I won't be here for all of the next 20 years, but I am sure they will be just as eventful and successful as the last 20 years," concludes James. ■

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