WJ ANNOUNCES MAJOR GROUP RE-BRANDING

THE WJ Linkline Group companies have been operating in the highways service industry for over 26 years and through organic growth and strategic acquisition are now employing over 300 people and operating in excess of 120 LGV vehicles.

2013 saw the group companies come together to form WJ Linkline Group LTD, with the head office based at the Staffordshire depot. From its humble origins in a Cheshire garage, the Group has expanded into a nationwide operation boasting a varied portfolio, with depots at Elland, West Yorkshire, Newcastle-under-Lyme in Staffordshire, Milton Keynes in Buckinghamshire, Croydon in London and Taunton in Somerset.

The Group Management and Board feel that the time is now right to streamline the companies’ many facets under one umbrella, and is re-branding the group as simply WJ with the company strapline ‘think exceptional’.

WJ has always adhered to the belief that “good enough isn’t good enough” and will now build on its strengths to become ‘exceptional’ in the delivery of our core values; deliver, safe, innovate and collaborate.

Managing Director Wayne Johnston who was the originator of WJ said “People, client and supplier relationships are our strength and together we have made the WJ Group the most successful innovator, manufacturer and provider of products and services within the UK’s road marking sector”

Martin Webb Group Operations director confirms “In this special group re-branding edition of Chapter 5 you will see how each of the companies have all interestingly grown within the industry to now be under the WJ umbrella”

The depots will now operate under WJ North Ltd, which will consist of a depot in Staffordshire & Yorkshire. WJ South Ltd, which will consist of a depot in Buckinghamshire & London. WJ South West Ltd operating out of Somerset and WJ Products Ltd based in Buckinghamshire.
In the beginning....

IT was the lure of a life on the open road which provided that ‘Eureka!’ moment for Wayne Johnston.

Then aged 17, Wayne spent college vacations working at his father’s thermoplastics company, Rommco, in Milton Keynes. They manufactured in powder form, the material used in white lining. Wayne recalls watching the white lining trucks coming in to collect the powder, crewed by suntanned individuals wearing shorts, and decided that was the job for him.

For his 21st birthday, he was given a set of boilers. A truck followed and the embryonic WJ Roadmarkings was formed. Initially Wayne worked with C&C Roadmarkings and Bilpots but quite quickly felt the desire to set up his own company. A life of splendid isolation came to an end in 1989 when Wayne was joined by Martin Webb, who is now Group Operations Director based at Stoke. Martin had been working as a roofing contractor but when the recession hit and the housing market declined, he found himself looking for another job. Within a few months, the dynamic duo had acquired another truck and spent the next five or so years travelling around the country carrying out permanent Road Markings, towing a rickety old caravan and camping wherever their work took them.

In 1992 Stuart Farrar joined as a trainee operative and Stuart is now Senior Supervisor working out of Bradford.

In the mid 90’s a transition took place from permanent road markings to temporary markings. Martin confirmed that with the Temporary markings practically all of the jobs were overnight & weekends.

“These were hard times, we forgot what weekends were!” says Martin “We were doing a lot of sub-contracting for a company called Line Markings based in Bradford, however moving over to the temporary markings gave us the break we were looking for which enabled us to accept a contract direct to Chevron Traffic Management for their temporary markings. Wayne adds, “This was when our expansion truly began.”

The history of Linkline and Ambridge

THE story of Linkline began in 1994, in a converted bedroom in rural Buckinghamshire - humble beginnings indeed for what was to become, with WJ, the largest road marking company in the country.

Linkline was started by Tom Henrick with two crews, led by George Hawkes and Gary Sheerin, both of whom are still with the company now. Paul Aldridge and Maria Maher were also involved from the outset.

It was a good team which, through a blend of chemistry, the will to succeed and the ability to listen and learn, has continued to improve. There have been vital additions along the way; Garry Duncan and Andy Stubb brought their own abilities and exceptional passion to the company, without whom Linkline and Ambridge would not be where they are today.

It wasn’t long before the team moved away from the converted bedroom in Tom’s house, to a yard on a farm in Cranfield. From there, all the early contracts were undertaken; Leicester City was one of the first, alongside Luton, Lancashire and Rugby (where the team first met a somewhat younger Andy Stubb). There were also contracts in Grampian and, somewhat bizarrely, for a new contracting company from Bedfordshire, Shetland.

By 1998, the company outgrew Cranfield and moved to its present base in Newton Longville. The site was very different then with just a barn with a small office and room to grow into.

In the late 1990s, it became apparent that, given the rapid growth and the vagaries of the market, it was necessary to have security of material supply. Garry Duncan was recruited to set up and run Ambridge Thermoplastics. His remit was simple: to produce good, reliable material that was easy to apply and met the required standards under all conditions. This he did. The plant started in a very basic form and Garry, along with Dave Evans, sometimes resembled the ‘McDougals’ more than technicians.

“Garry has an innate ability to organise and make even very difficult things happen, so the plant was soon running well and producing good material” said WJ Linkline MD, Paul Aldridge. “We have not rested but continued our continuous improvement model: plan, do, check the results and act to improve the results. Once again simple and effective management.”

In 2000, despite a very serious fire which destroyed the office and all its contents, Linkline started to work on the HA Network in Area 8, again offering a local, reliable service.

“We realised at this point that we needed to become more professional in our approach as the market was changing and demands were becoming more diverse,” said Paul Aldridge. “We needed someone who understood these demands and could embrace our values so we
The contract was secured in 1994 and the break with Line Markings was made. In September of that year their old Contracts Manager at Linemarkers, Nigel Bayley joined Wayne & Martin. The team then established its new base in the salubrious surroundings of Wayne’s fathers garage in Congleton.

Nigel is now Company Secretary and a member of the board.

Shortly after they were joined by former Line Markings Contracts Manager, Jimmy Smallwood, who continued in the role, but more importantly Jimmy started to build the lorries and specialised machinery which he continues to do today working with the team at Elland. Jimmy plays a very important part in the ongoing innovation, research and development. Around that time Nick Holt also joined as a roadmarking operative and today Nick is the Operations Manager and a member of the board.

Both Wayne & Martin are very proud of what they have all achieved over the years and re-iterate this would not have been possible if they did not have these firm foundations and support of these key people and all the other staff who have helped WJ Roadmarkings to get where we are today. Martin says, “We operate with family beliefs and care for our people. This principle continued in the acquisition of the other companies along the way and will be maintained as we believe it is one of our major strengths throughout the whole group.”

recruited Andy Slubbs, who has continued to help us meet the challenges of a volatile market.”

The culture of Health and Safety had always been paramount and the company has always striven to provide good, well-serviced equipment operated by well trained and enabled crews. The philosophy that people want to work in an environment where their safety, and that of the highway community comes first, has made recruitment easier, attracting high calibre people who care about their company.

In 2007 Linkline was acquired by WJ Roadmarkings.

“It was a period in which we showed that change and teamwork is not only something we can manage but embrace” said Paul Aldridge. “Wayne and Martin gave us the support to develop and use our skills and together we have striven to improve not just the company but, through our work with the RSMA, HTMA and clientele, to support wider industry safety and efficiency targets.”

Ambridge has continued to thrive under the stewardship of Garry, who has always endeavoured to “think exceptional”. Weatherline was the first RW3 flat line product on the market, production has broken the 10,000 ton barrier, the laboratories have grown and grown and he has engaged in setting up a KTP with the Open University, all this on top of the ACBWJ joint venture, where Ambridge have developed a preformed thermoplastic product which is now selling worldwide.

Douglas Ewing joined the company and set up the Specialist Markings division, laying waterborne paint on the Olympic Route Network and adding to the companies’ offerings through MMA and other cold products. Douglas also developed the new Weathergrip products for the ‘Cycle Super Highways’ in London and as a colour stable, and reflective if required, traffic calming product with high friction capability.

In 2013, Dave Clark moved into an office in Croydon and set up a depot to service the LohAC Contracts with two crews and a contracts manager within the space of little more than a year. This has evolved into a successful business with nine screed crew and machines covering London and the Area 3 ASC.

When asked about the development of the company, Paul said “We are a people business and all that we have achieved at Linkline and Ambridge is down to the people who work here and their care and commitment. It’s about servicing our needs and those of our clients without comprising those of the wider community or the environment.”

Above: One of the original WJ compliment slips. Some of you may remember them!
Far left: The new iconic WJ site in Knutton and the old site at Parkhouse Industrial Estate which was outgrown in 1998.
Below left: The dedicated staff at Linkline outside the depot in Milton Keynes.
Below right: Linkline’s successful annual Health & Safety training has been rolled out across the whole group

**NEW NAME**

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<th>Company Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>WJ Roadmarkings Limited</td>
<td>NB Includes Eland and Stoke operations</td>
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<td>WJ Roadmarkings (SW) Limited</td>
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<td>Linkline Maintenance Services Limited</td>
<td>NB Includes Milton Keynes and Croydon operations</td>
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<td>Ambridge Thermoplastics Limited</td>
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WJ NORTH LIMITED
WJ SOUTH WEST LIMITED
WJ SOUTH LIMITED
WJ PRODUCTS LIMITED
The story of Elland

THE base which would eventually become WJ Elland has had a colourful history.

The story began in the late 1800’s when one George Moxon founded a joiners, funeral directors and wheelwrights at a yard on Liley Lane in Mirfield, which is approximately eight miles from the current base at Elland. The business evolved under various family members to become a builders merchants in the 1950’s and a plant hire operator in the 1970’s.

Mark Fawcett joined the company in 1976 and continues to head the depot nearly forty years later. Mark was closely followed by Anthony Schofield, who joined in 1978, and who, keeping up the family tradition, brought in brother Keith in 1985. The traffic management contractors division started in 1988, headed by Anthony Sandom and Nick Gee, who also later remained with WJ, completing the strong management structure which is still in place.

1990 saw the Moxon Company branching out into the road marking industry. It was then that WJ Roadmarkings first came in to contact with Moxon Traffic Management / Moxon Road Markings, being employed to carry out temporary road marking on major motorway contraflow schemes.

In 2000, the Moxon family sold the business to Stenoak Associate Services plc, who were heavily involved in road surfacing through Associated Asphalt Ltd, and motorway barriers through Stenoak Fencing Ltd, with a head office located in Henley-on-Thames. This relationship lasted for just eighteen months until Stenoak Associate Services PLC went into receivership. The remaining assets of Stenoak Associated Services PLC, which included Moxon Traffic Management and Moxon Road Markings, were purchased by Aggregate Industries UK Ltd, a partnership which again lasted just 18 months, when in 2004, due to road markings not being considered part of their core business, Aggregate Industries decided to sell Moxon Roadmarkings.

It was at this point, on September 1st 2004, that WJ Roadmarkings stepped into the breach and bought Moxon Road Markings. The rest, as they say, is history!

The company has gone from strength to strength, moving in 2010 to its current depot at Elland. It is here that all the vehicles for the WJ Group are made and it is fair to say that the team at Elland are pivotal to the on-going success of the business.

Further key appointments have included Mark Archer, who joined the management team in March 2011, followed by Loren Jackson in December 2012. Mark, who has worked in contracting for 31 years with the last 14 years spent in the road marking industry, and Loren, who has 22 years of highway surface expertise, have brought more talent and expertise to the company, taking WJ Elland to a new and exciting level.

The rise of WJ South West

In 1982, a road marking company was founded in Taunton, Somerset, by three partners, only one of whom knew anything about road marking. He knew two others who could white line, one of them being Mike Trevelyan, who still works for WJ and is due to retire this year after 45 years in the road marking industry.

More staff joined the Somerset White Lining Company and stayed. These include David Milford, Terry Trevelyan, (Mike’s son), Matthew Hancock, Neil Porter, Andy Jackson, Steve Rankin and Catherine Caple (all now working for WJ).

In 1986, Dave Milford started the road stud division of the company and soon became Managing Director. Terry started white lining in 1985 and soon trained as a steersman. Matthew joined in 1987 and after 10 years working as a screed operative and feeder driver, trained as an operator. In 1995 Terry came off the road and became the Contracts Manager and in 2005, on Dave Milford’s retirement, Terry assumed his role as Managing Director and Matthew came off the road and became the Contracts Supervisor.

In the years to follow, more staff joined both as operatives and office staff, but sadly eventually things took a different direction and the company was no longer quite the happy ship it used to be.

In April 2010, WJ Roadmarkings (South West) LLP opened a base nearby offering employment opportunities for 16 former SWL staff. Within a few months, more vacancies became available and more SWL staff moved to join WJ: Jeff Brown, Anna Lewis, Gary Abson, Paul Hayman, Richard Wyatt, Kieran Wyatt, Mark Wyatt, Stephen Leigh, Ian Lincoln, Ashley Hunt, Martin Mills and last but by no means least, Kirstie Manning.

Company growth has exceeded all expectations, necessitating the move to larger premises in 2013. There are now 43 employees and, with an impending move to larger, purpose-built premises in Wellington this year, there is a lot to look forward to. The enthusiasm and commitment of all the staff is so encouraging, and coupled with support from management, WJ South West is a great place to be.