

“VIEWPOINTS”

GREEN Is The Word

The setting for this year's GCA AGM may have been historic, but the theme was most definitely topical.

A 'full house' of greeting card publishers took their seats in the legendary Stationers' Hall, next to St Paul's Cathedral to have their senses and brains stimulated by some punchy talks on the issue of 'the greening of the greeting card trade'.

With a common thread of environmental issues weaving between their respective presentations, Tim Barker, environmental manager of paper company Robert Horne set the scene by dispelling many mysteries of 'green sourcing'; Sue Morrish, director of 'dark green' publisher Glebe Cottage showed how by taking up the green gauntlet it has ploughed the furrow for others to follow; Tim Mason, managing director of Paper House showed how the gains of becoming greener can be commercially advantageous for publishers as well as morally and socially while Mike Bugler, managing director of Clinton Cards explained how it is part way through the process of considering how it can improve its environmental footprint, pledging its commitment to 'sit around the table' with other retailers and publishers (working through the GCA) to create a "better future" for our world.

PG was on the edge of its front row seat and came away inspired, educated, empowered and also relieved that the UK greeting card trade, if not perfect, is at least part way down the road in getting its act together on its environmental credentials.



Above: (left-right) Sharon Little (GCA), speaker Tim Barker (Robert Horne), Ann Griffiths (Paper Rose) and David Hicks (Really Good/Soul). Left: Among the many attendees were (left-right) Laurence Prince (Danilo), Martin Nevin (Is It Art) and Mike Short (Potato Academy). Above right: GCA president Ian Hylands (Noel Tatt) catches up WITH the GA president (right) Michael Grant (Yarto) and PG's Warren Lomax.



Hylands And Lowlands

When Ian Hylands, president of the GCA took on the presidency of the Association he was in no doubt as to what he saw as the major focus of the GCA during his reign – the environment. The adoption of a single-themed AGM therefore was totally in keeping with this focus.

As he told the full audience in his opening address, this main thrust of the GCA is "not just to be defensive, but to protect and promote these issues positively."

Summing up the four areas in which the greeting card industry needs to take on board to properly address this issue, Ian cited:

- **Sourcing** – the origin of our board and paper as well as the production process and the various accreditation schemes.
- **In-house** – ensuring we, as publishers have good-housekeeping and the best practice regimes in our own businesses.
- **Retailer relationships** – how publishers can work with their retail customers to reduce waste through returns etc.
- **Post Purchase** – how we can encourage the public to recycle where appropriate.



The last year has seen Ian, together with members of the GCA Council involved in various meetings with environmental charities (such as Greenpeace and the Woodland Trust) as well as exploratory discussions with major greeting card retailers. "It is early days in this process, but I have been hugely encouraged with the developments, the pace and the momentum on this score."

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A Bugler Calls

The last time Mike Bugler attended a GCA AGM was seven years ago. Then though he was a publisher (managing director of Hallmark Cards) and member of the GCA who, coincidentally had come to hear Clinton Lewin (now his boss!) address the audience as to the plight of card retailing then and in the future. Interestingly, there were some common elements between Clinton Lewin's speech back in 2001 and the thoughts delivered by Mike a few weeks ago – namely the constant strive for product innovation, not selling sentiment cheap and the importance of safeguarding this industry being treated as commodities like “meat and potatoes.”

However, when Clinton Lewin gave his views on the market and predicted its future trials and tribulations, environmental considerations were not mentioned as they were not really on the social, business or political agenda.

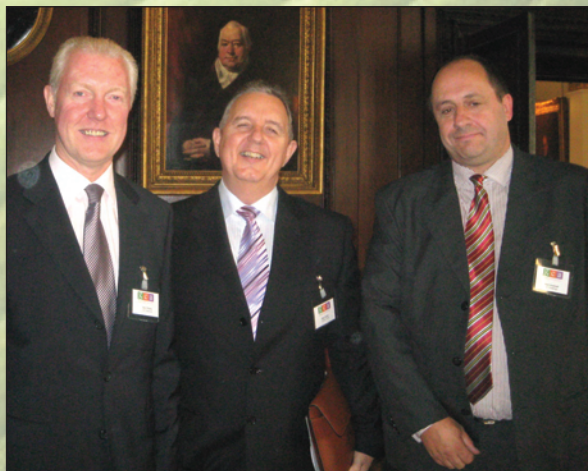
However, as the second part of Mike's speech confirmed, environmental issues are registering strongly on the radars of retailers, their customers and their suppliers. Now firmly a part of Clinton Cards' remit, the issue even prompting him to touch on that unmentionable subject of Sale or Return!

But Mike has shied away from making hollow statements about Clinton Cards' environmental stance recognising that while green issues have come to the forefront of retailers' agendas, some retailers quite rightly have found themselves taken to task by journalists for making their 'green wash' pledges.

“I believe you have to be particularly careful, especially if you are a retailer of our size that things you decide to do are not just headline grabbing sound bites. Instead they need to be more embedded in the culture of the business.”

Mike then went onto explain how Clintons' green approach has been a combination of it being “the right thing to do” coupled with any changes “also making commercial sense.”

Recognising the complexity of the subject, Mike revealed that Clintons' 'green pathway' has not been without its challenges. “I certainly do not stand here



today with all of the answers. Areas that on the surface appear to be very simple turn out to be more and more complicated the deeper you delve into them and expert advice becomes confusing, depending on which end of the telescope you look through!”

He cites plastic bags as one such “confusing subject”. He revealed that Clinton Cards uses in the region of 1.8

million merchandise bags a week! Putting it into context, Mike pointed out that in the time taken for his speech that the retail chain would have dispensed 10,000 plastic bags!

With this in mind Clinton's

Above: Mike Bugler (centre) with UKG's Gary Rowley, GCA Council member (left) and Mark Goshawk. Left: A card from Soula.



purchasing department was instructed to move to biodegradable bags believing them to be more environmentally friendly, but its investigations proved that in fact DEFRA (the Government environment body) actively dissuades such a change as biodegradable bags would still contribute to landfill and would create CO² gases as they break down (an environmental hazard in itself). Another investigation into moving to paper bags also threw up some contrary arguments. Mike asked the audience to imagine a smallish pallet (3.5' x 3.5' standing 2.5' high). “Now imagine a 40ft container. Both hold 150,000 bags.

“Plastic bag production uses one third of the energy, results in half the pollution, and requires one eighth of the raw material needed by the equivalent paper bag production,” said Mike explaining the rationale which has led Clinton Cards to in the end opt for recyclable bags.

He also shared the news that Clintons has been working closely with Phillips Lighting and some

energy consultants to come up with a high frequency light fixture for its stores that will not only reduce its financial costs of its energy usage, but also its environmental costs. These lights will be introduced as part of its store modernisation programme, with the benefit that stores will be using approximately a third less energy as well as offering cost savings to the group.

On the supply side, Mike explained that Clintons has been talking to all of its suppliers about moving towards (wherever possible), paper products that can be FSC accredited, but recognises that this can be more problematic for goods that are produced in the Far East (again accepting that the latter have a carbon footprint of several thousand miles).

Mike then ventured into the tricky territory of Sale or Return – the thorny issue that inevitably results in excess stock that has to be disposed of – at a cost to publishers and of course to the environment. But as he rightly pointed

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out ours is a fashion industry and as such a certain amount of excess stock is inevitable.

While accepting that to ‘outsiders’ the solution would be to stop SOR, Mike proposed that everyone in the room “knows that for the retailer to give up SOR it would simply mean enhanced terms being negotiated to replace it. That is just a fact of life.”

Telling it like it is, touching on two pithy subjects (SOR and Far Eastern production), and drawing on his 35 years of experience as both a publisher and a retailer, Mike drew his speech to a close.

“I do not have the answers; frankly at the moment I am not sure I understand



Above: ‘Green’ awareness can help conserve the environment.

all of the issues and problems. However, what I do know is that this industry is resourceful – we have had to solve many challenges over the years,” he said.

Uttering words that rang like sweet music in the GCA Council’s ears, Mike

said: “while we many not solve all of the issues, we do have to work together in order to mitigate the impact. This situation needs to be addressed as over time it will become unacceptable to allow this waste to continue. None of us want an external organisation setting our agenda, especially if that could mean them creating a public perception that sending cards is an environmentally unfriendly act.”

Using the GCA as the appropriate forum, Mike extended an offer for Clinton cards to sit around a table with GCA members and other retailers to work towards a common solution “for the greater good of our industry and, at least in some small way, a better future for our planet.”

Morrish Dancing To The Green Tune

Anyone who believes you have to be a large publisher or large retailers to really make a difference in this industry has not been tracking the progress Glebe Cottage has made on the environmental front over the last year.

From being the first DTR publisher to gain FSC accreditation; to championing the cause for verifiable ‘green claims’; pushing for more choice on envelopes made from recycled stock and ensuring that false ‘compostable’ claims made by a bag supplier have been removed – standing up for what she feels is important in business and life, Sue Morrish director of the Devon-based card publishing business, shone a light that others will continue to follow.

Right: The Morrish green warriors – Scott, Sue and Sam (who also came to the AGM).



Glebe Cottage’s Eco Commitments

Sue and Scott Morrish have drawn up seven eco-commitments for Glebe Cottage:

[1] Exclusive use of FSC or recycled content papers – (“The FSC is the only Forest Certification scheme approved by all the major environmental NGOs, which in our eyes, gives it credibility. It is seen as being more stringent than it’s main competitor PEFC and we like the fact that it also contains rules on social responsibilities towards indigenous communities, as well as to the environment. In essence, paper used in FSC certified products fulfill verifiable environmental standards. We also felt that the FSC tick tree logo had higher public recognition,” explains Sue).

[2] Printing using vegetable-based inks.

[3] Low-or-no-alcohol printing techniques – (According to Sue “10% of the UK’s VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) emissions are believed to emanate from the printing industry! As ink dries, industrial alcohol (IPA), which is used as a damping solution, evaporates at room temperature, releasing VOCs. VOCs are colourless, odourless gases that are harmful to human health and contribute to global warming and the production of the ozone.” Glebe Cottage started printing without alcohol printing techniques in 2000).

[4] Printing that is powered by green energy.

[5] Using 100% recycled envelopes.

[6] Compostable packaging.

[7] Printing in the UK – (“If you are in the UK, and your customers are in the UK, why manufacture your products half way around the world? We all understand the attraction of low prices... but at what environmental cost?” asks Sue).

● All the products sold as part of Glebe Cottage’s branded portfolio meet the above commitments.

“While it is certainly true that business activity can be bad for the environment there is no reason why it has to be,” Sue Morrish began her presentation. By the end she had shared the proof, prompted publishers to consider their supply chain, highlighted the worry of making false green

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Getting One Aspect Licked

“Envelopes are a simple product. An envelope has a simple task - to get from A to B - but inevitably it will be ripped open, screwed up, and thrown away - so why cut down a tree to make an envelope?” prompted Sue Morish of Glebe Cottage before highlighting the paucity of choice of envelopes made from a high recycled paper content.

“In our experience envelope manufacturers have been painfully slow to offer recycled stock lines or papers. Until recently, the only recycled options seemed to be light manilla, dark manilla, or just plain old manilla!” Sue relayed.

Sue and Scott’s endeavours on this count have paid off and the company now has envelopes with the environmental specifications that they sought, which involve 100% recycled paper, 50% of which is post consumer waste, “but we had to have the paper made especially for us! This should not be necessary in 2007,” states Sue.

Accepting that buying paper for the greeting card itself is a good deal more complex than buying paper for an envelope, Glebe has put in place a minimum requirement that all the paper and board used is FSC certified with a preference for a high percentage of post consumer waste – with of course the appropriate print quality.



Below: GCA Council members, (left) Paul Woodmansterne (Woodmansterne) and Steve Baker (Pigment) with (right) Ian O'Brien (also Pigment).

claims and reminded those attending of the collective power they held in their hands.

Inspired by a general interest in the environment and environmental issues, the last couple of years has seen Sue and her husband cum business partner Scott seek to minimise the company’s environmental costs.

“We do believe that greeting cards can, and should, be produced in ways that are ‘environmentally responsible’. We are not experts on any of these issues but we believe that consumers should be able to buy greeting cards in the light of ‘environmentally meaningful’ and ‘verifiable’ environmental claims.”

But as Sue told the delegates, in her view it is very hard to really understand what your environmental impact is, unless first you understand the relevant environmental issues and learn the ‘green’ language of the environment.

She took the audience through the four logical steps in becoming a greener greeting card company.

- **Step One** involves learning the ‘language of the environment’ and learning about your business’ ‘environmental impact’.
- **Step Two** is to create genuine ‘green’ products.
- **Step Three** involves finding environmentally meaningful and verifiable ways of communicating ‘green credentials’ to consumers.
- **Step Four** involves ‘greening up’ all of your other business activities.

Reiterating some of the points made by Tim Barker of Robert Horne, Sue explained how it is imperative that publishers should be wary of making green claims on their cards that they cannot substantiate.

“For consumers who want to make positive choices in favour of the environment the ‘green claim’ is the only way of distinguishing between competing products,” explained Sue who has worked with the Forest Stewardship Council and DEFRA for Glebe Cottage to be able to make claims on its cards which are both meaningful to the consumer and verifiable.

“Despite the mountains that have to be climbed at times, particularly in the context of environmentally meaningful and verifiable ‘green claims’ we remain very positive about the future!” concluded Sue.

Landfill is not inevitable and forests can be managed responsibly, Sue claims, adding that printing techniques can be cleaner, greener and better. “If everybody here today goes back to their envelope suppliers and clearly states that envelopes need to contain a high percentage of post consumer waste, we believe the market will change and the environment will benefit. Think about the ‘collective purchasing power’ that is represented in this room today!

The environmental genie is out of the bottle...we believe that change is on the cards.”



In The Bag

Glebe Cottage uses bags made from Biophan, a film that is made from cornstarch. It is certified as compostable by the Composting Association and meets the EU standard EN 13432 - that means the bags break down in just 45 days! The logo tells consumers that the material is compostable!

However, Sue warned publishers against a product that is being promoted as biodegradable polypropylene. The material concerned is a polypropylene with a chemical additive which enables it to break down in landfill, over the course of between 18 months and two years! She explained how this particular kind of polypropylene is called an oxy-degradable plastic, and samples are being supplied to card publishers with the compostable logo printed on them and the friendly little instruction... ‘Put me in the compost.’ “The big problem is that the material is not compostable! So for a start the use of the compostable logo on these materials is illegal. Inevitably, as it is not compostable, the material simply breaks down into much smaller bits of polypropylene! It does not conform to the European Composting Standard and the Compostable Association has made it very clear that it will take action against companies that use the logo illegally.

In an exciting conclusion, while she was at the AGM, Sue received a call from the Compostable Association to say that, partly due to her efforts, the offending company has in fact now removed its compostable claims.