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Front cover photo:

The Heavy Horse St Giles fire engine display, at the Weald & Downland Museum - this year's Heavy Horse and Working Animals Show is on Sat 5 and Sun 6 June

This month's additional photographic illustrations courtesy of morguefile.com

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Editorial



Time to vote!

By the time you read this month's issue, the election will be the hottest topic of the month! In this issue, the FSB states, "In short, the government most able to get conditions right for entrepreneurs and small businesses to thrive will be the government best placed to guide us out of recession and back to growth." And the Chairman of the BBA, David Weston, surely speaks for us all by stating he "would like to see a new Government that takes tourism seriously." Hugh Caven also writes about 'election fever' and ponders how good it would be, if banks were just banks!

Only time will tell...

Fire Safety

Once again, Peter Reading has produced an excellent article on Fire Safety, the 6th in his series. This month, Peter has given a very detailed and comprehensive guide to upgrading and fitting fire doors. I have spoken to many B&B owners about this particular aspect of Fire Safety and I know it has caused much concern. I trust that many of you will find the clear and concise advice both practical and valuable, in your B&Bs.

As I sign off now, I hope you are enjoying the lighter evenings and are all looking forward to a busy summer season!

Chris

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LEGAL MATTERS



H&S 'Hot Topics'
By Nigel Lea

Citation's Health & Safety helplines are always busy, but we have recently seen an increase in the number of calls regarding RIDDOR and COSHH queries, particularly with what people do and don't have to do under RIDDOR obligations.

Below is a summary of the main focus of the questions and a short response for each. Of course each B&B will differ, but it should provide you with some help and point you in the right directions.

Q1. We have obligations under RIDDOR, but what is classed as a 'near miss'?

Essentially, a 'near-miss' is classed as a situation which could have resulted in an accident where

someone could have been harmed. Examples include:

- Tripping over an object where no injuries resulted
- A piece of equipment unintentionally ejecting a liquid, solid or gas
- Accidental release of a chemical substance that could damage health

Near-misses will generally occur more frequently than injuries, so you can use them for your benefit as they can provide you with a warning that a more serious accident may occur and can also indicate that the health & safety management system requires improvement. It is advisable to record and investigate all near-misses and implement systems to reduce the likelihood of recurrence or a more serious incident arising.

In compliance with RIDDOR, certain near-misses that could have caused serious injury or loss of life are legally required to be reported to the enforcing authorities as "dangerous occurrences". Although hopefully quite rare, these could include:

- Collapse/failure major equipment
- Collapse or partial collapse of scaffolding over 5 metres high
- Electrical short circuit causing fire or explosion which has the potential to cause the death of a person
- Fire or explosion causing the suspension of work/operations for over 24 hours

Q2. I need to implement some COSHH risk assessments, where would be a good place to start?

Hazardous substances can be found in virtually all workplaces, including B&B's and Guest Houses, and could include:

- Chemicals (fuels, acids, solvents, inks, paints, adhesives, anaesthetics)
- Biological agents (certain fungi, viruses, bacteria, pathogens and moulds)

The Control of Substances Hazard to Health Regulations (COSHH) require employers to assess the risks from hazardous substances and implement

suitable storage controls to prevent harm that could arise from their storage, handling and use. It is also important to consider any hazardous substances that are created or generated as part of a process or activity, as well as those that are brought into the workplace.

COSHH assessments

Employers, managers and owners should first prepare an inventory of all substances in the premises, the quantities involved and obtain up to date safety data sheets from suppliers to decide which substances are hazardous. An assessment of the risks associated with those substances which are hazardous must be carried out, by considering factors such as the following:

- The physical, chemical and hazardous properties of the substances
- How & where substances are, or should be, stored and handled
- How much substance is used, stored, handled or created and how people could be exposed to the substance
- Who can be exposed, e.g. users, staff, visitors, contractors, public, guests, cleaners, etc.

Decide what precautions to take

If there are significant risks from the hazardous substances, then suitable and reasonably practicable control measures need to be taken to protect employees and others from harm. You could look to eliminate the risk or at least reduce the risk the substance presents. People who use and store the substances must be informed and trained in the agreed control measures, and if you employ 5 or more people the assessments must be documented and reviewed on a regular basis.

Of course, the above is only a snapshot of what you may have to do to fulfil your obligations under RIDDOR and COSHH legislation, but these starter steps should give you an idea of whether you can make some improvements to your business or whether you are a long way on the road to compliance!

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THE BBA COLUMN

My B&B Manifesto for the new Parliament

By David Weston, Chairman, Bed & Breakfast Association



You will probably be reading this just before – or just after – the General Election. So, what can we expect of a new Parliament? Probably, eventual disappointment – but for the moment let's be optimistic. What would I like to see, in an ideal world? – only looking at the areas relevant to B&Bs, that is: tourism and small business policy.

I'd like to see a new Government that takes tourism seriously. Our industry of some 180,000 businesses generates £19bn pa in foreign revenue for the UK economy (more than North Sea oil) and employs 1.4m people across all skill levels (twice that of the education sector). It also has a number of attributes that make it ideally suited to providing growth and employment – and doing this quickly. Due to the high latent demand for travel to the UK, returns on investment are high. It costs only £14 to attract a new visitor to the UK – 100 new visitors generate one new job and provide the Exchequer with over £3,000 in VAT payments alone.

UK tourism businesses can successfully compete in the global tourism market – provided that we are competing on a level playing field. However, because of Air Passenger Duty (APD) and visa costs, we are not. Labour's planned increases in visa costs and APD mean that, by the end of next year, a family of four from growth markets such as India and China will have to pay a minimum of £568 in government charges to come to the UK. For each family that is deterred from visiting as a result of these charges, the UK economy loses around £5,000 in revenue.

Really "joined-up", sensible Government requires that, while maintaining proper entry controls, charging is based on the net benefit from encouraging visitors to come to the UK and spend their money here.

While the 'Culture, Media and Sport' Department is responsible for tourism, the majority of legislation that impacts on B&Bs is managed by other Departments. Again, joined-up Government is required. Reducing the level of poor regulation will enable tourism businesses to concentrate their resources on maintaining jobs and generating growth. A cross-departmental simplification plan for tourism-related legislation is required to identify areas where the regulatory burden on our sector can be reduced. Just one small example is copyright licensing – can't the next review of the BBC Licence Fee sweep away PRS and PPL licences into a simplified system for the modern world?

All this would be helped by a Department with "Tourism" in its title, and with a dedicated tourism minister to fight cross-departmental battles. Will we get that? The Bed & Breakfast Association will be pressing for it in Westminster. We will hold the politicians to their promises!

David Weston is Chairman of the Bed & Breakfast Association (BBA), the UK trade association for B&B owners - see www.bandbassociation.org (subscription is £1.04 per week). David is also co-author of "How To Start and Run a B&B" published by How To Books - for details and an online offer, go to www.howtorunabandb.com.



Making ironing easier FREE PRESS trial

If you still iron with a hand iron the chances are an ironing press will halve your ironing time, give you a better quality finish, save effort as you iron sitting down and all your linen will last longer. **Fast Systems Ltd** sell two sizes of ironing press: the **Fastpress** with an ironing board size of 62 x 25cm and the larger heavy-duty **Blanca Press** with an ironing board size of 78 x 28cm.

Sheets can be folded and ironed several layers at a time, tablecloths and napkins the same. Shirts, trousers and blouses can be pressed in half the time of normal ironing. When not in use the press closes and the handles lock together for easy carrying and storage. Maintenance is minimal requiring only occasional cleaning of the heating plate and occasional replacement of the ironing covers and foams.

The retail price of the **Fastpress** is £249 including VAT and the **Blanca Press** £629 including VAT. There are schemes to spread the payments and both presses are offered on a 14 day or more **free trial**.

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Focus on Food



**The latest news.
By Bob Salmon,
Director,
Food Solutions**

Do you want to continue trading?

What a silly question to ask! Yet the chairman of the Food Standards Agency has said in a recent interview that any food business not "conforming" would be effectively closed down. His words as quoted were "They will get inspected every week and charged for it. They will be out of business pretty quick".

Lord Rooker was giving an interview to mark the tenth anniversary of the Food Standards Agency which he helped set up when he was a Government Minister. His remarks were specific to the national Scores on the Doors scheme that the Agency is promoting over the existing schemes being operated in many Council areas already. The scheme scores businesses on three headings:

Your level of compliance with food hygiene and safety procedures

Your level of compliance with structural requirements The Inspector's confidence in your management and control systems.

Do you fully understand what the inspectors are looking for when they visit your premises?

Food Solution's research among businesses and comments from inspectors shows that it is this last one that many people fall down on as they do not keep enough records for the Inspector to know what they have been doing. You probably do everything necessary, but without documents and written procedures he or she cannot be sure.

To help you fully understand the requirements to achieve a high rating under the Scores on the Doors scheme, Food Solutions has produced training modules and procedure templates that you can adopt or adapt to your business to demonstrate that you comply with the regulations. Our handbook explaining the regulations in simple terms and the checklist are available at www.food-solutions.org/BandB.htm

It is unclear just how Lord Rooker will enforce his ideas. The average Environmental Health Officer currently has around 230 food businesses to monitor as well as all the other duties they have

under other regulations. To achieve weekly visits to many premises might be difficult. His words were "any pub, café, hotel, restaurant or take-away not openly displaying its rating under the scores on the doors system faced weekly official visits". Any premises considered "dirty" would be treated like a high risk business and inspected so frequently that "they might decide it is not worth the candle".

On the topic of food labelling the European Environment Committee – know as the ENVI committee – has voted to drop some of the more outlandish demands put in as amendments by altruistic MEPs. The whole goes to the full Parliament in May. Your MEP needs to hear your views, particularly on whether catering meals should be labelled with lists of ingredients, nutritional values and so on. We continue to speak on behalf of small food businesses in Britain but we need to hear your opinions. Our arguments are far more effective if we can quote more real business opinion. Contact details are on the website www.food-solutions.org

Focus on Food

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WHY USE RESERVATION SOFTWARE TO MANAGE YOUR BOOKINGS AND GUESTS?

Many B&B owners prefer to use good old pen-and-paper to record their reservations. But modern software can save you a lot of time, and doesn't have to be hard to learn.

Software saves you time

Save time sending booking confirmations and reminders: software can do this automatically for every guest.

Save time searching for guest's contact details: computers can find things faster than any manual filing system.

Save time doing your accounts: your software can instantly produce a summary of your takings, for your accountant or the tax man.

Online bookings save you time

Good reservation software will link to your existing website, allowing guests to check availability and book online. Guests who prefer to phone still can, of course.

Not all B&B owners want to take online bookings, but the vast majority of guests want to make online bookings.

How much time do you currently spend answering email enquiries? If guests could check availability and book online, all that email to-and-fro would disappear.

And online bookings will keep your B&B busier: the guest won't go off and book elsewhere while they wait for your email reply. How much would an extra couple of room-nights per week be worth to you?

Software doesn't have to be hard work

There is a quiet revolution going on in software: software is becoming much easier to use. You don't need an instruction manual to learn how to buy a book on Amazon. You are still using Amazon's software, over the web, to buy that book. But the process is so straightforward you don't think of it like that.

And look at the iPhone: the most sophisticated phone ever built. But it doesn't come with an instruction manual. Apple designed the phone so you can just play around for a bit and figure it out.

Before long, all software will be as easy to use as Amazon and the iPhone. **KeepMeBooked** is one software package which aims to be easy for B&B owners to learn and use. B&B News readers can try it free for two months by signing up at www.keepmebooked.com AND USING PROMO CODE 'BANDBNEWS'.



Federation of Small Businesses
The UK's Leading Business Organisation

FSB COLUMN

The FSB General Election 2010 Campaign Manifesto:

The UK will go to the polls in the midst of an economic crisis. Recovery is tentative and unemployment could still increase.

A sustained recovery will require more finance than the banks are currently able or willing to give; it will require a sympathetic tax regime, a stable and predictable business environment, and targeted measures to bring on innovation and entrepreneurship.

Small businesses can deliver a strong economic recovery if they are given the chance to grow and flourish. They drive innovation and with 500,000 people starting up new businesses every year they also hold the solution to the unemployment crisis.

on more staff. This could create more than half a million new jobs and additional revenue for the Treasury. The FSB would like the Government to introduce a National Insurance rebate for new jobs in small businesses.

Stop the repeal of **furnished holiday lettings** rules that could cost the UK tourism industry £200 million and jeopardise 4,500 jobs in rural and seaside economies.

Finance: The cost of loans and overdrafts has increased for small businesses. More competition in the marketplace, through the establishment of a Post Bank and better use of state-held banks, would ensure fairer borrowing. The future health of our economy depends on restoring the trust

relating to climate change. The value to the UK economy of low-carbon goods is already £106 billion a year. The UK Innovation Investment Fund should target the small-business sector, which finds it hard to raise venture capital but is at the forefront of low-carbon innovation.

The scale of waste dealt with by most small businesses is similar to that of a domestic household, but their access to waste and recycling facilities is lamentable. To ensure that businesses can go greener, local waste infrastructure such as civic amenity sites must be available.

Local Communities: Over 50% of turnover in independent retailers goes back into the local community. Seven pubs close every day and 24,000 people

Small Business, Big Vote

Small businesses are the solution

In short, the government most able to get conditions right for entrepreneurs and small businesses to thrive will be the government best placed to guide us out of recession and back to growth.

Employment: Between 2002 and 2007 over 84% of new jobs were created by small businesses. Studies show that new small firms grow faster than larger companies, creating more employment opportunities.

The UK needs to make sure that self employment is a real option and the creation of an Enterprise Allowance Scheme would enable more people to start their own businesses. In 1992, over 36,000 businesses were created through this scheme; they had a 74% survival rate and created over 10,000 new jobs.

Job creation is easier in a predictable regulatory environment. 60% of small businesses regard regulation as an obstacle to job creation. The government can reduce the burden on small businesses by simplifying the legislative framework for businesses and by not introducing any changes in employment regulation until the economy recovers.

Taxation: 44% of FSB members say a cut in payroll taxes would help them take

of small businesses in the banks. Promoting and emboldening the Financial Intermediary Service would help.

4000 closed in 2008 because of **late payments**. The late payments directive should include a 'social clause' stipulating that large businesses should pay suppliers and sub-contractors within 30 days.

Entrepreneurship and Innovation: 53% of small businesses have introduced new or improved products or services in the last 12 months, 51% will introduce more in the next 12 months. The lack of broadband speed reduces productivity for a third of businesses. Service providers must guarantee minimum upload and download speeds. Increased diversification and greater competition must be brought to broadband provision.

Public procurement is a key driver of innovation. A new procurement programme should inform the small-business community of purchasing needs and timetables, thus creating a market for new products and innovation.

Low Carbon Economy: 57% of FSB members have changed the way their business operates because of concerns

have lost their jobs due to pub closures over the past year. Tenanted pubs struggle with high rents and hikes in the price of alcohol enforced on them by the Pubcos. A reform of the 'pub tie' would ensure that tenants can make a fair profit.

One in five small businesses visit a post office branch every day. The Post Office should offer business banking and provide hubs for small businesses with a full range of business support services and advice.

In 2005, local authorities made £1.6 billion from parking charges and fines, up from £628 million in 1995. On average people travel 893 miles yearly to buy food. To combat this and bring back trade to the high streets parking schemes and charges need to be tailored to the individual locality.

For a full copy of the Manifesto and more information visit www.fsb.org.uk

Let's VOTE!

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FINISHING TOUCHES

Allergies and Asthma

By Rosemary Parr

I've mentioned dietary allergies and intolerances in previous articles. This month, I'd like to consider other allergies and how to turn them to your advantage. Approximately 10% of the population suffers from seasonal allergies, potentially between 10% and 20% are affected by allergies all year round and roughly 5.4m people in the UK suffer from asthma.

Pollen & Scents

Already, the hay fever season is with us. People react to pollens at different times of the year. Some start with the first buds on the trees, others dread the warmer months. There's nothing we can do about what happens outside our premises but there's a lot that can be done inside to make visitors feel more comfortable.



The heavily scented flowers of the Corn Palm – beautiful to look at, quite rare, but suffocatingly perfumed! © Rosemary and John Parr

Hyacinths make a lovely indoor splash of colour leading up to Christmas but their heady scent sets the sensitive guest streaming. Even bunches of daffodils give off a pungent scent. Lilies look wonderful in arrangements but the Stargazer lily, especially, is an extreme irritant. Some advise removing the stamens to reduce the aggravation but it doesn't work particularly well. When choosing cut flowers or pot plants, avoid scented ones.

Scents that irritate don't stop at flowers. Bowls of pot pourri can be an irritant, as are scented soaps and other skin care products. We all like visitors to be met by a pleasant smell when they walk in. (Some will question what an air freshener smell is masking.) An old trick that makes a place feel warm and welcoming is to have a pot of coffee brewing. The aroma from it permeates quite well and

will override something less savoury.

Food & drink allergens

In the dining room, one of the most common allergens is dairy products. Not everyone has a full-blown intolerance to cows' milk but it can set off coughs and snuffles. Make sure you have alternative spread and milk products available. Avoid cooking mushrooms in butter, too. Red wine is another allergen but most people who drink it are prepared to put up with any discomfort. That's their responsibility!

Another culprit is feathers. Feather pillows and duvets may say luxury but when a guest wakes in the morning red eyed and catarrhal, they're not likely to thank you. From an economic perspective, synthetic pillows and duvets are usually less expensive to replace. Add that to keeping at least 20% of your guests consciously happier and it's worth considering.

Fibres & mites

Think, too, about scatter cushions on the bedroom chairs and in the lounge. What are they filled with? Fortunately the trend for cushions is to supply synthetic inners.

Allergenic rhinitis increases year by year. It's thought that one of the reasons is the growing numbers of dust mites. How often do you vacuum your mattresses or move the beds to give a thorough clean underneath them? Is it worth investing in anti-dust mite mattress protectors or even bed linen that's hypo-allergenic? This brings us back to an economic consideration.

Promote your B&B's awareness

It also leads onto how to turn allergies and asthma to your commercial advantage. In the same way that some B&B's mention in their marketing materials that they have memory foam mattresses and pillows, if you have hypo-allergenic bedding, let your potential visitors know. But don't just mention that you have this; couch it in the terms that your future guests will respond to. Position yourself as an establishment that is allergy and asthma aware. Those are the trigger words and once you've used them you can go on to say

what you do to ensure visitors with these conditions have a more comfortable stay.

Once again, it's back to the old adage, "The more you tell, the more you sell." People who have dietary or allergy issues are harder to win as future guests. They don't want to spend time telephoning every B&B in the area to find out whether they can cater for them. Showing them in your brochure and website that you're aware of the issues they have, helps you onto their shortlist.



Allergies can be exhausting for some guests – even the little ones!

Costs & results

As with any specialism, there are possible costs to make your accommodation accessible to a wider market. Some expenses are one-off; others recurring. However, it's worth weighing up not only the amount you invest and how many extra bookings it will take to recover your investment; it's also worth considering how many guests each of those 'special ones' brings with them and how many referrals will come from them. There are many online forums for people with allergies and asthma. Some of them have places where they refer favoured suppliers. Think what a recommendation on these sites could do for your business!



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VIVA LA VIE!

By Vanessa Lackford
Chop, chop, chop



I have come to realise that vegetarian cooking involves a lot of chopping. Having never cooked meat, I did not give any consideration to all the slicing and dicing of vegetables that making a vegetarian or vegan meal entails. But, people have pointed it out to me, and indeed it is true, chop, chop, chop!

Having the right pieces of equipment is paramount if you plan to make many vegetarian meals and want to avoid doing all that chopping by hand! Most people will have a good knife to hand; make sure you keep it sharp. A quality food processor makes light work of nuts and breadcrumbs and making houmous is a cinch! If I could only keep one kitchen gadget it would have to be my food processor, I don't know how the world went round before it was invented.

I love my "pressy-downy chopper thing with a zig-zag blade" which rotates on each press. These vanished from the shops some years ago, to appear in car boot sales. A quick Google search just now (main intention of which was to find a better name for it than the one above) didn't reveal anything identical to mine which is falling to bits, but I have seen similar ones online in the past. It is brilliant for getting nice chunky pieces of nuts for



the muesli and for small quantities.

A good sturdy blender is essential for making soup really smooth and my mixer also does sterling work for baking. Yes, I do love a kitchen gadget! There is nothing as satisfying as peeling carrots with a good quality

peeler which glides over the muddy, recently-under-the-soil surfaces, to reveal the gorgeous orange within! And nothing so irritating as losing it, only to find it days later in the rotting recesses of the compost heap. We were a two peeler household for this reason, but I left one of them in a holiday cottage, as the peeler is up there with a sharp knife, my glasses and a good book on the packing list for our holidays!

A few good chopping boards are also essential. Plastic or wooden, the advice and fashions seem to change as to which is considered most hygienic; I have some of each to keep in with both camps. Keeping garlic away from the surface you may roll marzipan on is more important! Most of my boards are for savoury dishes, but a few, round ones to distinguish them in case anyone else uses them or I get more confused than usual, are kept for fruit and sweet food preparation.

Washing up can be a pain with all these gadgets, but there is one simple rule, do it straight away after use and it is easy-peasy; or at least put it in to soak. Alternatively, get someone else to do it! Huh, fine chance.

Vanessa Lackford

NEW SKIRTING SKIFFERS SOLVE PAINTWORK PROBLEM



The innovative **Skiffer** is a smart and simple way to prevent scuffed and chipped paintwork on skirting corners. Particularly suited to guest houses and bed and breakfast accommodation, where suitcases and frequent vacuuming typically cause most damage, Skiffers from Stairrods (UK), are cast in solid brass, and available in three alternative sizes and seven metal finishes.

Shabby paintwork or worn varnish are unsightly and can undermine an establishment's image and reputation. Fitting Skiffers on skirting board corners immediately after re-decoration, will maintain their smart appearance for longer. Skiffers are easy to fix and do not require polishing or special cleaning.

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PROPRIETORS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Brae House, Aberfeldy

Patti Walker-Booth, a former TV Production Manager and Jim, an Engineering Designer, moved to Brae House in May 2008. The historic and scenically beautiful town of Aberfeldy in picturesque Highland Perthshire forms the perfect backdrop for their new way of life, as hosts of Brae House. Running a B&B in Scotland was a far cry from their former lives in the bustling Capital, but they have taken it in their stride, putting great deal of care and attention into making every detail just right.

"After spending many years living in London and working in the erratic, pressured and somewhat unstable world of television, the feelings for change grew stronger every day."

Since leaving School, Patti was constantly on the move, relocating to Canada to work in the theatre at the tender age of 17 and subsequently travelling the length and breadth of her own country with various theatre tours and to the many locations used by the BBC.

After deciding that 'enough

was enough', she settled on a career change that led her into the more sedate, but scarcely more stable, business of property and letting.

Jim's work had taken him away from his native Scotland and 'down South' to more lucrative jobs in London. Based only a stone's throw from each other, they met on a chance whim, trying their hands at Internet dating..."We fell in love and that was it!"

Meeting each other was life changing enough in itself. But having a partner gave Patti the encouragement she needed to set off travelling once more and through frequent visits to Jim's ailing father in Edinburgh, she rediscovered the beauty and tranquillity of Scotland, where she had worked in the past. As a result of this, relocating seemed the most natural choice to make.

Making the Change

"On our regular trips to Edinburgh, we stayed in a mixture of hotels and guest houses and eventually found a lovely B&B on the coast. It planted a seed that slowly grew over the next few months...."

In trying to combine the possibility of life in Scotland with a means to making a living, Patti came up with the idea that would change their lives completely.

"It dawned on me that we too could run a B&B!"

Starting the Search

However, finding the right property posed a slightly greater problem than they had anticipated!

Based at a rented cottage in Perthshire, with Jim working over a hundred miles away in Aberdeen, Patti had moments of

doubt. Visiting her South London garden flat only moments from a busy high street brimming with shops, cafes and bars, made her wonder what on earth she was doing living in rural isolation with no work and only the deer and red squirrels for company. However, she carried on trawling the Internet, searching through property papers and feeding the squirrels!

"We had clear ideas of an older property with out-buildings, crying out for redevelopment..." But it just wasn't happening!

Finally, after months of searching, a contemporary property caught their eye: A detached building, with four bedrooms and the most stunning views over The River Tay and the Ben Lawers mountain range, Perthshire's highest peaks. It was ripe with potential. The decision to buy and develop the B&B idea was made rapidly.

"The rest is history!"

Choosing the Decor

Patti's clear ideas about décor and wonderful taste have created a restful, calming atmosphere for their guests. Helpful suggestions from "Visit Scotland", a great service providing advice and guidance, confirmed that they were moving in the right direction to obtain the all important Four Star rating.

On a short Easter break in Oban, they stayed at a lovely B&B, where they made firm friends with the owners.

"Over the following months, their help and support was invaluable and they shared many of their secrets on running a successful business."

Cooking the breakfast

Patti was also introduced to a neighbouring B&B owner, who invited her over for a coffee, with a second visit to see the breakfast run in action. "By now, Jim and I felt as though we were living on eggs alone and there was nothing we couldn't do with an egg, as we poached, boiled, fried and scrambled our way to perfection!"

Of course, as everyone knows, breakfast is the most important meal of the day for B&B owners and it was crucial for Patti and Jim to be able to offer a varied and appetizing menu for their guests to start the day.

Photos clockwise from top left: Patti & Jim, proprietors of Brae House, A painting of Brae House, The Guest Lounge



“Where possible we wanted to be able to offer local produce. With farmer’s markets and deli’s offering a wide selection, ranging from delicious bacon, sausages and soft fruit to the wonderful Dunkeld Smoked Salmon, we have been able to achieve this.

Not to be missed are the Scottish Kippers with Jim’s mustard butter.”

Harmony achieved

Meanwhile, work on the house involved a complete makeover with the paintbrush and total refurbishment of the ensuite bathrooms. Patti has chosen neutral colours to reflect the light and create a warm, airy feel to the rooms.

“We have a lovely open plan hall and dining area with large windows and french doors leading out onto the decking. To reflect this and add a feeling of depth, we have laid oak flooring throughout. It certainly creates the wow factor as you walk into the house!”

Patti and Jim have had fun with the layout, choosing to have their own bedroom and ensuite bathroom on the ground floor and guest accommodation, complete with open plan living room, above

them, on the first floor.

With all the decorating done, Patti enjoyed the frivolity of choosing curtains, bedding, throws and cushions. Finally, with the china and cutlery chosen, fluffy towels hanging on the towel rails and the website up and running, Brae House was ready to greet it’s first guests and opened for Easter in 2009.

Future Plans

After an encouraging first season, we are now entering our second year and have recently been listed in “Scotland’s Best B&B’s”, proving that all the hard work has paid off. This summer, we plan to introduce picnic lunches full of appetizing home baked goodies, for days out or long walks.

For the more energetic guests and serious walkers, we will be offering a choice of guided walks of varying grades. They can be tailor-made to suit the ability of the individual, from leisurely woodland strolls to more strenuous hill walks, taking in some of Perthshire’s breathtaking mountain scenery.

Location

Brae House, located on the edge

of the town of Aberfeldy, offers its guests stunning views.

Highland Perthshire was made famous by Queen Victoria, when in 1842 she and Albert spent part of their honeymoon at Taymouth Castle, just down the road. Sadly the castle itself is not open to the public, but there is a golf course and some fine walks. The area, with its rich history, is the very heart of Scotland. It is home to Ben Lawers, Perthshire’s highest mountain, Glen Lyon, the Highland’s longest, loneliest and loveliest glen, The Tay, Scotland’s longest river and the Yew tree at Fortingall, Europe’s oldest resident.

The area is popular with walkers, cyclists, golfers, fishermen and thrill seekers, having in recent years been established as The Whitewater Capital of the UK. The River Tay regularly hosts international kayaking competitions and other adventure sports, including canyoning, gorge walking and rafting.

Brae House can be viewed on www.braehouseaberfeldy.co.uk



Photos from top:
Breakfast al fresco
& in the dining room



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FIRE SAFETY

By Peter Reading
Part Five: Upgrading and fitting fire doors



During our last article I concentrated on the current standards for fire doors that can be used in bed and breakfast accommodation. Since then, I have received several telephone calls from readers enquiring whether they can upgrade existing doors and if it is necessary to have a fire door in a very small B&B. The Chief Fire Officers Association on behalf of the Government published, in response to the disquiet expressed from the B&B industry, a short information booklet called 'Do you have paying guests' and can be found on the CLG website. Elements of this document explain the 5 step process well, and that is all it does. What this pamphlet achieves, and the reader will note it does not have the status of a guide, is to 'dumb down', reasonable and well proven fire safety. An example is on the question of fire doors:-

"If you decide these would be unsuitable, 'in-frame closers' or rising-butt hinges may be acceptable alternatives. Doors need to be strong enough to hold back smoke and fire long enough to give you time to escape. For small premises, a reasonably solid timber door that fits well into its frame is likely to be good enough".

I cannot imagine any local fire authority inspector or fire safety consultant accepting this statement except say for a Grade 1 listed structure where the doors are of substantial construction, irreplaceable and the owners are prepared to undertake extensive necessary work to make the door smoke stopping. Such statements are quite simply downright dangerous, what is deemed to be a substantial door to one person, may not stop smoke or hold the fire back. Also, never use rising butts as a self closing device, they rarely work effectively, and in time can cause mechanical damage to the door frame.

Doors that cannot be upgraded

Increasing the fire resistance depends on the strength and construction of the door, and the following doors are unsuitable for

upgrading:

- Unframed, hollow core;
- Flush type;
- Ledged and braced type.

A hollow door may stop early cooler smoke but any internal hollow 'egg-box'-type door would not offer adequate protection from fire and should be replaced. Within certain parameters there are some solid timber doors which can be upgraded to a satisfactory level. Many local fire and building control authorities issue specifications of deemed-to-satisfy methods of upgrading. Information is also available from a number of manufactures and trade organisations. The following information is intended to provide guidance on the factors to be considered in upgrading existing timber door assemblies and points out areas of weakness and suggests various solutions.

The technique to be used for upgrading door assemblies means special attention must be applied to the fit of the door in the frame; it is a waste of money to have an upgraded fire door only to have the smoke and fire track behind the door frame, which is covered with a low grade timber architrave. The door leaf should be no less than 35mm throughout the main frame. Internal panels can be upgraded, but you should check with the manufactures products you are using for the type and dimensions of the panel.

It is unwise to flush over one face of a door leaf with a sheet of fire resisting material because this puts an uneven load on the door, which can cause it to distort out of its frame, affecting its potential fire resistance.

In summary of this quick overview an existing timber door can only have its fire resistance improved to a maximum of 30 minutes.

How we upgraded our B&B

When Joan and I took moved in to our property all the bedroom doors were of light pine timber construction, some 80-150 years old. They were not original to the property but introduced piecemeal by previous owners. Smoke stopping they were not.

Just one door was 35mm thick so I attempted to upgrade this door. Having suggested it over the years; I was keen to put into practice what I had preached and applied a product called Envirograf®, which uses a range of chemical treatments, gluing intumescent card to the centre panels then applying coats of sealer, intumescent treatments all over the door then finally the paint to match the décor.



I ended up applying paint and treatments over six times. That was just to stop the fire, I then used a router to take out the 10mmx4mm channel to accommodate the intumescent strips and cold smoke seals to both leading edges and the top of the door. I should also point out that you must place intumescent card behind the latch, or in the lock mortise and behind the hinges all of which are the weak parts of the door where the metal will conduct heat. Make sure you use three sets of hinges solid steel with melting point above 800 degrees Celsius.

Do not forget also to fit a good quality door closer capable for closing the weight of your door. The total cost was some £90.00 and a lot of my time, and further £30.00 for the closer.

We have nine bedrooms including our private quarters, and a number of habitable rooms on the ground floor. Our fire risk assessment significant findings identified a total of 15 doors need to function as fire doors this, was an expensive option. Our choices were therefore to keep all the pine doors and provide some other compensating features, the only acceptable solution is to prevent the fire from growing in the first instance and install either a:

- Water suppression system using high or low pressure water misting into the room on fire or
- A residential sprinkler system.

Both systems would extinguish or check the fire at the incipient stage and I obtained quotes to cover the whole house which ranged from £10K for the misting up to £40k for the provision of a residential sprinkler system.

We choose to replace the pine doors instead, because

- They were unsightly
- The locks needed constant maintenance;
- Draughty doors with a poor 'U' value;
- A poor decibel rating and 'Tiffin time' was sometimes an issue!
- Gaps and shrinkage of the wood had occurred due to the introduction of central heating.

And install new oak veneered doors from Magnet having obtained a trade account; cost: was £110.00 each. I obtained a good quote through eBay for the door closures at £30.00, normal cost was between £35 and £40.00.

Each door was given three coats of Danish Oil and we were pleased with the final finish.

The down side of veneered fire doors

The 44mm thick doors are fire tested with a limited amount of oak on the leading edges that you can work with and in our case a maximum of 5mm was permitted to be planed off for fitting in the frame. Any more reduction and the fire certificate for the door is invalidated. I am content to cut some material off the bottom of a fire door for the fitting of carpets, etc as the dynamics of a room fire creates a negative pressure drawing cold air underneath

the door, you must though never remove any material from the top or leading edges of these doors above that specified by the manufacturer. This means that your door frame must be 27, 30, or 33 inches wide x 78 inches high, if not, (and in my case six doors were an odd shape) a new fire resisting door frame has to be installed as well. The advantage of a new door frame is the intumescent and cold smoke seals can be planted in the frame rather than rebating out the doorway.

Blank Fire Doors

In one particular location the door was 32 inches wide and only 71 inches high and nearly all manufactured fire doors



are supplied 78 high. This would have necessitated considerable reconstruction work not to mention disturbance which was disproportionate to the outcome we were trying to achieve.

The solution here was to purchase a standard blank 44mm solid timber fire door supplied 84 inches high x 36 inches wide. These solid sheets of wood are very heavy and can be cut down to fit any size. In an attempt to blend the door into the décor and the existing doors I have purchased Burbidge readymade door panels from B&Q (they were half price) The decorative mouldings can be attached to the door blank and I will again apply Danish Oil. If the appearance does not blend then we will either scumble the doors or apply two coats of gloss paint. In conclusion, upgrading a door to a 30 minute fire and smoke stopping standard is not usually a cost saving option, but does allow the retention of existing doors, and should only be undertaken after careful consideration. Some web sites that provide further useful information are:

BS EN 1634-1:2000. APPLYING FIRE RESISTANCE Building Research Establishment Information Paper 8/82 "Increasing the fire resistance of existing timber doors" www.bre.co.uk

Timber Research and Development Association's Wood Information Sheet, 1-32, "Fire Resisting Door sets by Upgrading. www.trada.co.uk/techinfo/ www.firesafe.org.uk/html/fsequip/firedoor.htm

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IN SEARCH OF A NEW LIFE

Sarah Lintern continues her story...

So much has happened this month! Sometimes I struggle to believe that I'm unemployed - the search for our dream B&B is certainly full time and all consuming! I seem to be busier now than I've ever been!

We've taken several 650 mile weekend round-trips to the Lake District and seen 10 properties, in the Windermere, Keswick and surrounding areas. We wanted to get a broad feel for what was on offer, so saw a wide selection: old, new, big, small, town, country and established businesses. All had something unique to offer.

And encouragingly, we instantly fell in love with one of them! But inevitably, our favourite has already been snapped up by

another interested party... Still, there seem to be plenty to choose from and we have two other favourites.

These couldn't be more different. One is a thriving, established and busy guest house in the centre of Windermere town centre. The other is a beautiful house in the quiet countryside, about 3 miles outside of Keswick. We've listed positives and negatives for each and are constantly reviewing them in our minds. It's proving such a hard decision! This is our future!

Whilst we were in the Lakes, we spoke to many B&B owners who were all happy to share their stories and tips for a smooth running guest house.

On our return, I created a budget forecasting spreadsheet with numerous variables, allowing us to demonstrate different financial illustrations. I also drafted a business plan for our two favourite properties, collecting additional occupancy information from Cumbria Tourism.

I've been speaking with the

Cumberland Building Society to secure our commercial mortgage and although we haven't formally submitted our application, verbally it's looking encouraging.

We've also had the HIPS done on the London flat and the solicitor has been instructed. Viewings are sparse and our biggest fear at the moment is a slow house market delaying us from buying our dream B&B.

Amongst other training, I've also completed a Pre-Start Up business course with the Entrepreneurial Club, and feel far more prepared to launch a business. Having said that, this is still a rather big and overwhelming life change but of course very exciting!

If you thought that wasn't enough excitement for one month... my car got recalled with a faulty accelerator pedal, I got trapped in a bathroom, escaping through the window, and the best news of all: Chris (my partner) proposed to me!

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A panoramic view of Windermere

LATEST NEWS

News, Views, Awards & Events

Zero Waste Scotland

Scottish government has announced plans to unite its various waste-delivery bodies under a single Zero Waste initiative to provide support to businesses. Iain Gulland of WRAP Scotland will lead the initiative which will combine: Waste Aware Scotland, Community Recycling Network Scotland, Remade Scotland, Keep Scotland Beautiful, Eco-Schools, National Industrial Symbiosis Programme and, Envirowise.

Fun for Dads

Dads can have a special day at the Weald & Downland Open Air Museum on Father's Day, 20 June and the chance to experience countryside skills including driving a vintage tractor, archery and the opportunity to drive a horse-drawn cart pulled by one of the Museum's team of working Shire horses. Further details call 01243 811348, or visit www.wealddown.co.uk

The Railway Children

Welcome to Yorkshire are supporting a production of The Railway Children at Waterloo station in London, using real steam trains in the show. In what is seen

as a major coup, an area of exhibition space at the entrance will also showcase the whole of Yorkshire, enticing Londoners and tourists in the capital to visit Yorkshire. The show will run from July 4th to the end of September 2010.

Check your credit status

Leading instant online credit information provider, Equifax, believes that many small business owners don't realise the significance of their own personal credit record when starting a new venture. The Equifax Credit Report, with the facility to access credit information for the first 30 days free, gives new and small business owners a valuable insight into their credit status. Accessible simply by logging onto www.equifax.co.uk it is designed to help individuals understand their credit file and see what lenders see to assess new credit applications.

All at sea

One of the country's top seaside destinations, Southend-on-Sea, has launched a new tourism campaign to attract both repeat and new visitors. The 'On Sea' campaign, which is backed by Southend-on-Sea Borough Council and builds on the town's name, includes both advertising and marketing material titled

'Dine On Sea', 'Smiles On Sea' and 'Events On Sea'. The first phase of publicity material is being distributed to rail stations, through local accommodation providers and information points, as well as being available to view on www.visitsouthend.co.uk.

'Are you ready?'

Is the question being asked by Thames Translations, who have developed a free downloadable checklist for the tourism industry to use in their preparations for what is expected to be a very busy summer indeed. To obtain a copy of the free checklist 'Are you ready?' please email marketing@thames.net

Green Start

Tourism businesses across the South East will be able to up their green credentials by getting involved in Green Start, which gives advice for those unsure where to begin and Green Advantage workshops which share hot tips on how to reduce resource costs, add local flavour and gain market share. For further information please contact Andrew Gostelow on 023 8062 5496, agostelow@tourismse.com

CASH CONCERNS

Choosing an Accountant - Part One



There are two things to bear in mind when choosing an accountant. Firstly once you have made your choice you are likely to have a long term relationship with the practice. I know accountants who are advising the third generation of a family business. The second point is that many business people pay 20% plus, and sometimes substantially more, of their profits in tax, national insurance, etc. So it is worthwhile investing your time in finding

the right practice for you.

So how do you decide the right firm for you? As a general rule you should look for a firm which is similar in size to yours or has clients of the same size as your business; they will be more understanding of the issues and problems you will face.

Where do you find a list of practising firms? You can look in your local business telephone directory, or go to accountancy bodies websites - the ICAEW has a Directory of Firms covering all its practices- or go to independent sources such as the Businesslink.gov website. Many businesspeople value a recommendation of other businesspeople and this is frequently a good source. But you should remember that what works for one business may not work for another, so if you are recommended a practice you must find out what it is about the practice that makes it valued by the person recommending it.

Once you have a potential short list of practices you should telephone between 3 and 6 firms and arrange to meet with at least 3 of these. You should check in advance whether the first meeting to discuss their appointment is free of charge; specific advice may be charged for.

Once an accountant has been appointed the relationship should quickly build so that they become your "trusted advisor". Many accountants have deep links with the local business community and through their client base. It is always worthwhile talking to your accountant even on non-financial matters. If they don't have the answer within their practice they will usually know somebody who will be able to help you.

In part two, next month, we will discuss what questions you should ask, during your initial meeting with a prospective accountant; what to expect afterwards and how you should proceed in future, to get the very best out of your relationship.

Clive Lewis

Head SME Issues. ICAEW

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STI LAUNCH ALERT POINT 'LITE'

Fire and security specialists STI (Europe) have extended their Alert Point range with the announcement of the Alert Point:Lite, which offers an ideal solution for smaller premises that require a simple and effective means of raising an alarm. Alert Point:Lite shares many of the features of the Alert Point, including a resettable operating element (with an activation warning flag), seven different alarm tones, a 100 dB integral sounder and a range of colours to suit different fire, security, and safety applications. However, as a more cost effective option, it is a stand alone, battery powered alarm system (with low battery warning indication) whereas the Alert Point can also be linked to other devices.

Ges Wallace, MD of STI (Europe), said –“The Alert Point is itself a simple alarm system that can satisfy the needs of many smaller establishments. However, from our market research we recognised that for some, connecting to other fire alarm components such as detectors, call points, strobes or sounders is not a requirement. We have therefore redeveloped the Alert Point by removing some advanced features and creating a simplified version for more basic applications for establishments that want a simple, cost effective means of raising an alarm, that requires no connectivity.”

An optional extra available for the Alert Point and Alert Point:Lite is the capacity to incorporate a beacon - an important measure in meeting the requirements of the Disabilities Discrimination Act (DDA) which recognises the needs of providing for those who are audibly impaired.

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GILL'S DIARY

Spring cleaning and more...



Welcome to spring – that time of year when thoughts turn to longer days, better weather and - spring cleaning! On the topic of cleaning, we have just acquired a new addition to the small but highly efficient collection of natural products that inhabit the cleaning cupboard at Bedknobs B&B here in Bodmin, Cornwall. Readers familiar with this page will know that at Bedknobs, synthetic chemicals are not suffered gladly – or indeed at all!

A 'miracle cleaner'

As one of our current 'jobs-in-waiting' is the removal of algae and other matter from the fascia boards and other exterior woodwork; we began to search for something kind and gentle, yet effective. The criteria was: that it had to be kind to us; harmless to the environment; tough on algae; contain zero synthetic chemicals and also be 'cheap' - that would be the icing on the cake!

Kim began trawling the Internet and after some initial research, stumbled across **Pure Sodium Percarbonate** which turns out to be a real 'jack of all trades'. Its common name is **solid hydrogen peroxide** and it comes supplied in powder form. Mixed with water to the correct ratio, it quickly becomes a powerful oxygen bleach that will perform a multitude of tasks whilst having absolutely no environmental impact whatsoever.

Sodium Percarbonate

will remove organic stains such as tea, coffee, wine, blood, grass and many more and can be used together with detergent in your washing machine. It prevents white fabrics from yellowing yet will not affect colours. It can de-odorise, kill bacteria, mould, fungus, viruses and thank goodness, algae! It is odourless, non-toxic and totally non-polluting. Upon decomposition, it simply breaks down into oxygen, water and sodium carbonate.

Oxygen bleach is ideal for cleaning just about anything from work surfaces and fridges to carpets, toilets and garden furniture. Yes, **Sodium Percarbonate** really is a jack of all trades. We made our particular purchase from www.mistral.ie but of course there are other sites for you to choose from.

Duvets

Now back along last year, I reported upon the travesty of live geese being plucked up to 3 times or more during their short but excruciatingly painful lives, in order to make cheap goose-down duvets for you and me. I urged everyone with a goose-down duvet to write to the manufacturers and/or suppliers to enquire as to the provenance of the down in their duvets. I wrote to John Lewis, supplier of our (not so cheap) goose-down duvets and received a verbal assurance by telephone that the birds from whence the down in our duvets had come, were all reared organically and were free-range and they were plucked only at the end of their lives.

Whilst it would be flattering to think that my letter alone had prompted the current 'Bird Welfare and Ethical Sourcing Policy on Feather and Down Products' that now appears on the John Lewis website, I suspect I was not alone and many others wrote too to express grave concern over the

sheer cruelty aspect of plucking live birds. And whilst here at Bedknobs, we can sleep with clear consciences, safe in the knowledge that no cruelty occurred in the manufacture of our goose-down duvets, I suspect that such practices do still continue. I would therefore urge fellow readers not to buy cheap duvets unless you are able to trace the supply chain of feathers and down right the way back to a cruelty-free farm.

Green Travel

We have just signed Bedknobs up to www.greentraveller.co.uk a website founded by renowned travel journalist Richard Hammond. It began as his online blog in 2006 and in January 2010, was launched as a fully-grown website. It tells you everything you need to know and where to go, to plan a proper 'green' holiday. It excludes 'greenwash' the bandwagon so commonly jumped on by directory sites nowadays and I hope that it will bring in some extra business for Bedknobs.

Sponsorship?

You may recall that last year I took on the Marie Curie Cycle Challenge and I'm contemplating doing it again at the end of May. I raised a little over £200 last year and would like to raise a whole lot more this time – just to make the pain of cycling 28 miles along our lovely Camel Trail and back, agonisingly worthwhile! I hope to set up a Just Giving Account but not in time to meet the deadline for this edition. Therefore, if anyone is willing to sponsor a 'Grumpy Old Woman' to a day of pain, yet most definitely in a good cause, please e-mail me at gilly@bedknobs.co.uk. We never know when we, or someone we know, will need to call on the services of this wonderful Charity. Thank you

And finally, I daresay none has failed to notice that we have reached the end of a Diary Page with barely a moan or a whinge!

Gill



THE CHEF'S TABLE

By Hugo Woolley



A helping hand with your B&B Breakfast Menu Part Three - Perfecting your Art!

Specialising

After perfecting your Muesli, lovely bread and jams, a delicious and beautifully cooked Full Breakfast, you might then consider putting something 'special' on the menu. If you have perfected good scrambled eggs; perhaps some Smoked Salmon and Scrambled Eggs, poached eggs; Smoked Haddock with Poached Egg for example. If you are proficient in making Hollandaise Sauce (see my February contribution), you have Eggs Benedict etc. But these 'specials' are never as popular as the 'old stalwarts'. You should also consider the wastage and hob-space issues. A large 8 to 10 bed roomed Guest House is going to find it easier to have a large varied menu with minimum wastage and will possibly have a large griddle and plenty of

cooking hobs. A two to four bedroom B&B will have to limit the menu to avoid wastage and having nowhere to heat lots of different frying pans. But then you can be more personal with your guests and possibly ask them for their breakfast preferences.

Proficiency

The breakfast menu should only consist of dishes you are proficient at. Practice the dish over and over again and give it to your nearest and dearest for supper for 'objective' criticism. Restaurants do this – it is called a 'Silent Launch or Opening'. They ask all their friends and family to come along for free and they treat the 'guests' as though they are real customers. They practice both the dishes and service, to see where the service or the menu can be tweaked. B&Bs should do the same, before they open. It is terribly useful and, if they stay the night, you can find out about the beds too! We had the staff from where my wife used to work come and stay with us here, before we opened. It was then that we found we had sighted a towel rail badly when a chap burnt his bottom, when he switched on the taps for his bath! Thank God he was staying free and not a paying guest.

Ordering & times

Finally, my views of serving breakfast in a B&B: I do not like to order my breakfast the night before like they do in hospitals – I know it is done by a lot of B&B owners to help with speed of service and wastage. Guests do not like it, nor do Quality Standards Inspectors. Cook to order as much as you can. Give guests (especially holiday guests) a good long time for breakfast 8:00am to 9:30 or even 10:00am. Rushing them through between 7:30 to 8:00 (so you can get the rooms done before rushing off to work or lunch with friends) is not going to make for happy, returning guests. It is always good to have a menu, no matter how many rooms you have or even if you have three items on it – guests

are a little blurry in the morning, and it can tell the guests that it is homemade and locally produced – even to ask them to turn off their mobile phones!

Presentation

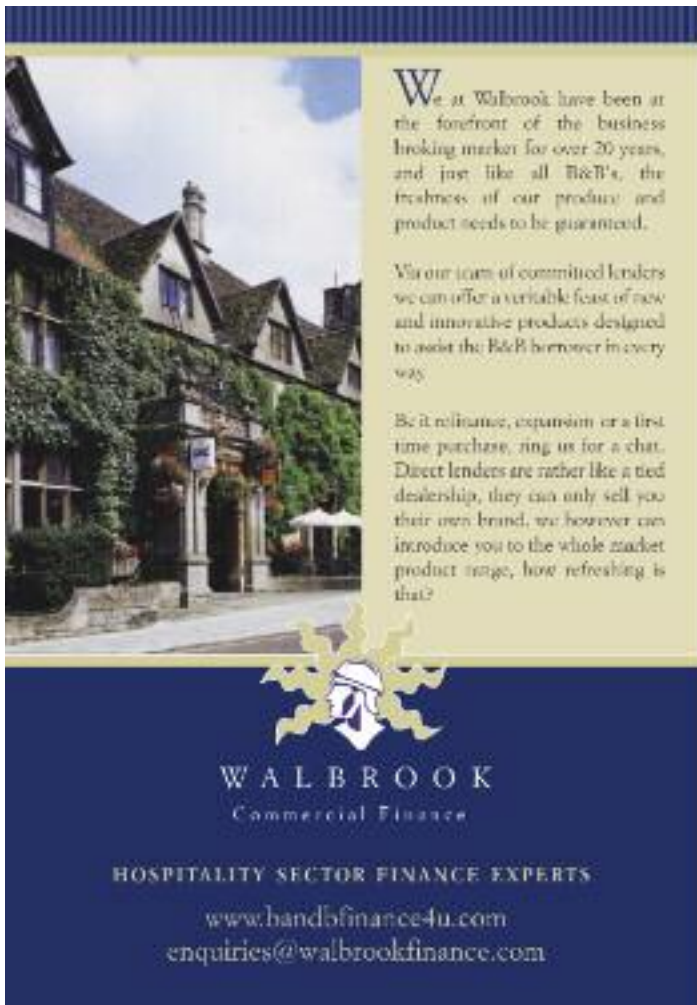
Keep the Breakfast menu simple, consider the guest's comfort and wants above your own, offer a written menu and have a happy morning smile for your guests, don't bombard them with questions other than "Good Morning - tea or coffee? Help yourself to my homemade muesli and fruit compote", cook only what you are very good at and present the cooked breakfast, neatly on a warm plate. The dining table should be stylishly laid up with nice matching quality cutlery and crockery, possibly a clean, crisp tablecloth and/or a place mat – a little flower from the garden or sprigs of flowering rosemary will just finish it off. You will have guests returning in their droves and your breakfasts will become a 'stuff of legend'!

Why B&Bs are best!

The big hotels are not able to provide a lovely breakfast in my view; if they do master the art of a decent breakfast, they will be the top of the line, boutique, and very expensive hotels. They cannot cook to order so have buffet-style help-yourself chafing dishes, full of rubber eggs and overcooked leather bacon. They have portioned, mass produced butter and preserved and the toast is inevitably cold by the time it gets to your table. The expensive/boutique hotels can produce some good breakfasts, but for an affordable night, individual, personal service and an unsurpassed breakfast, us B&Bs win every time. Business people are catered for with Premier Inns and alike, but holiday B&Bs must take advantage of this gap and become well known that for a comfortable night and a wonderful, locally produced, culinary magnificent breakfast, the **only place to stay** is at a **British B&B**.



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SEARCHING FOR THE APPRENTICESHIP STARS OF HOSPITALITY

The Hospitality Skills Alliance has teamed up with leading awarding body EDI and partners to launch the Hospitality Apprenticeship Awards 2010. The Awards celebrate practical skills, competence and achievement, with winners from each of the work areas within hospitality. These include professional food preparation and cookery, restaurant service (both bar and wine service skills), housekeeping, reception, portering, pub, concierge and customer service.

Entries are invited from everyone who is registered on, or recently completed, an apprenticeship or advanced apprenticeship in the hospitality industry, along with employers and providers across the UK. The three categories are Apprentice of the Year, Apprentice Employer of the Year and Apprentice Provider of the Year and the closing date for entries is 14 May 2010.

On 29 June the Awards will be presented at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London as part of the British Hospitality Association Annual Lunch. The National Skills Academy for Hospitality is offering a fantastic Disney Bursary to the winner to help them develop their skills even further. This includes 3.5 days training at the Disney Institute in Florida, with free flights, accommodation and park access.

For more information and details of how to enter visit:

www.apprenticeships.halm.co.uk



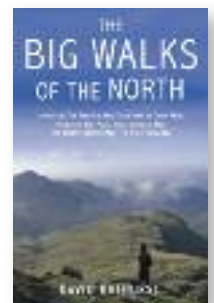
THE BIG WALKS Win a fabulous new book!

An indefatigable walker, David Bathurst, has unlaced his boots to produce two invaluable and definitive companions to the ten best-loved long-distance footpaths in the north and south of Britain, with each walk split into manageable sections. Combining practical, detailed descriptions with an appreciation of the beauty and history of the British countryside, these are indispensable guides for both experienced and novice walkers alike. Whether you enjoy exploring green and gently rolling dales or tackling rugged mountain paths, there are walks here to keep you rambling all year round.

The Big walks of the North - From the great Glen Way to the Coast to Coast Path, there is no better way to discover the spectacular diversity of northern Britain's Landscape than on foot. Includes a chapter on the Pennine Bridleway featuring new sections of the trail which opened in May 2009.

The Big Walks of the South - From the South Downs Way to the Pembrokeshire Coast Path, Bathurst proves again that there is no better way to enjoy and appreciate the stunning and varied landscape of the South than on foot.

Both of these books are published by Summersdale and available through all good bookshops and internet booksellers.



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You can win a copy of The Big walks of the North or The Big walks of the South by sending your name and address on a postcard to Win a Big Book Prize Draw, Bed & Breakfast News, PO Box 533, Northwich, Cheshire, CW9 9DZ and state which book you would prefer. Entries must be received by 15th June 2010.

CAVEN'S COMMENTS AND CONUNDRUMS



The election is upon us, but to me, chest of drawer handles are far more important!

Fever or apathy?

Well now we know the day, May 6th Yippee another 5 weeks of the country bouncing around all over the place like a boxer who has been hit too many times but just will not lie down.

Do you know, this time I really don't care, and that is shocking because I have cared about every single election since I became old enough to be treated as an adult with an opinion that mattered.

It has been said that before an election, you ask ten London cabbies their opinion and you will have the result! I was in London twice recently and whilst not ten, I asked four different black cab drivers, and quite honestly there was not one single response that can be repeated let alone printed.

The other historically reliable litmus test has been my father. Whilst always favouring a single party, he has always called the result correctly. Well it appears we have a recurring family trait;

he at 89 has stopped caring as well. This has nothing to do with his age, he is far more mentally alert than most men half his age, this is down to the fact that he believes as I do it will not make any difference who receives the hospital pass, in the short term it will matter not a jot.

The MP's who have been caught out on their expenses and have chosen not to stand this time around we are told that on average they will receive a golden goodbye package of £1m apiece.

Well based upon what has unfolded in parliament this year, tomorrow I intend to go shoplifting at Sainsburys. When I get apprehended in the car park I will say that I saw no signs that said I had to pay for anything, prices are after all an invitation to tender. However now that I understand that I should have paid, and now having been caught I will pay for the items that I have taken, and on the basis that I am not welcome at the store anymore I expect a few hundred thousand pounds in compensation.

Which party has any realistic plans or even any form of understanding of the banking crisis? Which party has the guts to take these institutions on? Hang on...we own most banks don't we? Therefore we don't need guts - we need a plan.

Here is a good plan. Make them lend, insist they lend, fire the chairman if they don't lend shut them down if they don't lend. It's simple and so necessary for our home economy. Lets go back in time and eradicate some terms from the dictionary. Securitisation is the most evil word ever to emerge in banking, closely followed by derivatives, short selling, treasury mechanisms, swaps, floors, caps and collars, bin them all.

If I had my way banks would not be able to do anything other than take deposits, offer loans, and manage bank accounts. They would not be allowed to own or create insurance companies, or trade on the world stock exchange markets, they would just be banks, boring I know but reliable and stable and just what we need, in fact what we used to have when I was a lad.

The missing handles!

Turning to other matters Sarah and I have been away a couple of times last month; two visits to not

only the same hotel, but the same hotel room. First visit: reception was bright and breezy; nicely informative; the room was a very pleasant surprise with a balcony and separate TV room; Jacuzzi bath and all crisp and clean. Room turned down with complimentary chocolate. All very good. Ever the 'Hotel Inspector' I was however, a tad annoyed that two of the drawers on the chest of drawers were without their handles.

Two weeks later, at check in, "Would Sir & Madam like their complimentary tea or coffee in their room or in the sun room?" "That's a nice touch" I say, "We think so sir", "A new innovation?" I enquire," Oh no sir this is a standard inclusion for our premier room clients." Not two weeks ago, I think to myself. Whilst that thought is drifting out of my head, "Would you like our turndown service?" Where was that question two weeks ago? And...you guessed it - two weeks on, and the handles are still missing! We expect to return again soon and I am going to take two handles with me to fit, it will take me 5 minutes tops, but fit them I will!

On both occasions we had very difficult nights with the way the bed was made. Larger than average beds, with average sheets and blankets, meant that we either had to scoot down the bed to obtain full cover, or sleep on a diagonal. When this was raised at reception and a simple solution of a king sized duvet suggested, we were told that despite the fact that a large number of guests staying throughout the hotel had made the same suggestion; the owners are traditionalists and will not have duvets in the hotel. Full stop. How nice to be able to ignore what the majority of your customers want, ignorance or arrogance?

Well dear reader, by the time you get to read this we may know who is running the country, but sure as eggs are eggs, there is one hotel that will, by then, have a full compliment of draw handles!

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