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**Hobbs
House
Bakery**

THE RISE AND RISE OF B CORP AND THEIR BUSINESS

As a young man expected to join the family bakery business George Herbert (pictured below) did anything but, and only after university, travelling, and eight years in the 'project development' team at telecommunications giant Orange did he return.



With 100 years of heritage in the business, a father at the helm for decades, and two brothers who found celebrity for a spell as TV cooks (The Fabulous Baker Boys), it is easy for George to downplay his own role in the making of what has become a much-loved bakery.

But he has been back at the family business since 2011 now, and his impact has been significant.

It feels inevitable he would have returned to the fold at some point. He's the fifth generation to enter the business. Baking is in the Herbert family's blood. Taking the reins as managing director, with his father Trevor moving to chairman, is something he didn't do until 2017.



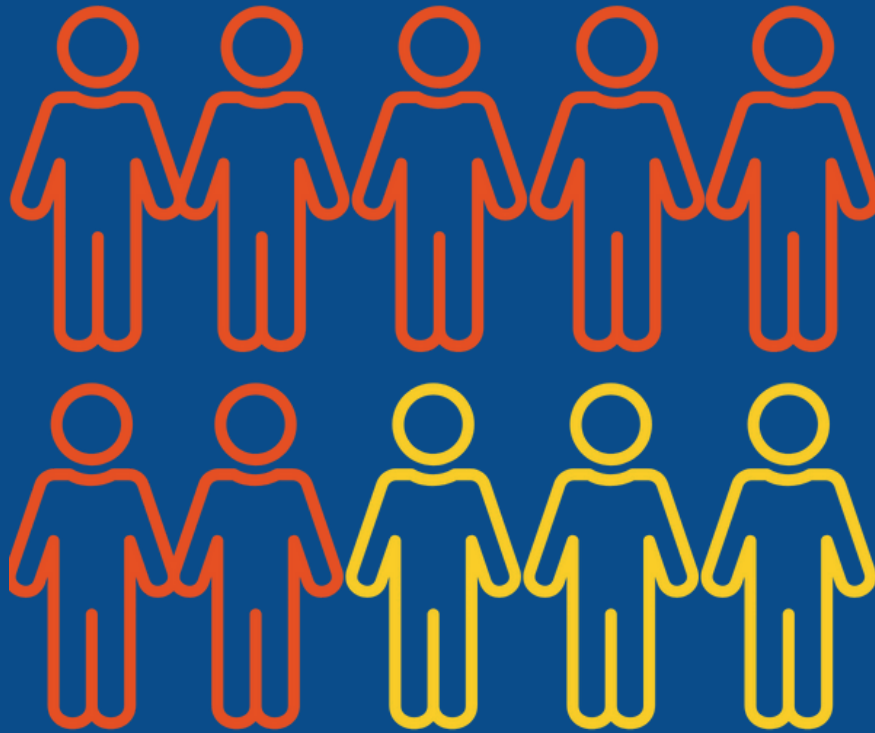
And it's an easy story to romanticise, although those who know family firms and the challenge of succession will appreciate that, as exhilarating as it all sounds, the sheer weight of responsibility, of expectation, and the politics can be significant.

What is apparent is that running a bakery is no longer about just delivering something tasty and on time - if it ever was thus. Hobbs' very products are under near forensic interrogation, an examination that stretches deep into its supply chain.

That's always come from the tightly controlled regulations of the food sector, but increasingly from a customer who demands transparency - especially when it comes to environmental impact, ethical considerations, staff welfare and community.



If you believe the stats, well over half of customers now make choices about food after considering its provenance (70 per cent if you believe RSPCA Assured).



When you begin to understand all this, and with the usual day-to-day business challenges landing on his plate too, you perhaps begin to understand why George didn't rush to run the family firm at first opportunity.

Nevertheless, he seems to be thoroughly enjoying the challenge and describes an ambitious, growing business made even more self-aware by the B Corp lens through which it sees the world. And he is a man on a very exciting personal journey too.

“I’m part of the fifth generation - and the sixth generation is coming along. But I don’t see myself as the father figure for the business, I see myself as more of a custodian.

“In the past the next generation always went on to open their own bakery, which became part of the group. The question always being ‘can the business support another family?’. But times change.

“I worked in the business from an early age, doing all the usual sorts of jobs you might do when you are still at school or college - and then I went off to university.

“I didn’t come back into the business. I travelled, did other jobs. I worked in project development for eight years for Orange (the mobile phone giant).

“So when I returned (in 2011), while I already knew the family business, I knew working in project development was very different to running a company.

“I feel I have to keep developing myself to help the business achieve what we think it needs to in order to thrive - now and in the future,” said George.



Over the last few years, George and the senior team have worked with Gloucestershire business QuoLux™, to develop themselves, their teams and the organisation. In 2016-2017, George completed their flagship LEAD™ programme, followed by Andy Wiseman (Operations Director); Henry Herbert (Sales Director) and Anna Herbert (Marketing Director) with George also joining their business planning programme, GOLD™.



“We are not the first generation to make that transition to leadership and I would like it to be a success.

“There is a question mark around that, which is ‘how can you prepare for the future?’. Personally, I feel I need to better myself to do that,” he said, explaining one of the attractions of the course is it allows students to work on their own businesses as part of the programme.

And that process of developing business skills that relate to the business is not just for himself and the senior team.

“My nephew has just finished his baking apprenticeship here. He did really, really well. The point is, if anyone is going to succeed so Hobbs succeeds, I have to make sure they get the right training.”

A big personal motivation, of course, is the very sobering thought that 160 staff are also depending on him leading Hobbs successfully. In George’s own words, they make the business what it is.



Whatever he may think of his own leadership skills, something is going very right on his watch in what is a challenging market.

“When I came into it, it (Hobbs House) was a £3 million turnover. Now it is £8 million. And we have ambitions to grow further.

“But at the same time it is not a business where you are always out there trying to get more business. You get business partners, and then you work to keep them. That’s the priority,” he said.



Keeping those customers, he explained, was about developing relationships. Of late, with the extra scale the company now has, that development has become about influencing how its partners operate too, how they make or grow their products and how that fits with the B Corp ideal that seems to sit so well with customers and look like a roadmap to sustainability.

Hobbs still has those small high street shop front bakeries - in Nailsworth, Chipping Sodbury, Tetbury, and Bristol - and the company has made a significant investment expanding its headquarters in Chipping Sodbury.



“We had reached capacity. It was my job to look at whether we stayed or whether we increased capacity. We’ve moved from a 20,000 square foot premises to a 30,000 square foot premises,” said George.

“So, we now have greater capacity, can produce with greater consistency, better equipment and we can grow.”

The new space even has a metal detector - just another of the rigorous checks its products are subjected to for the customers it supplies including Gloucester Services, Butcombe Brewery, Coffee #1 and The Boston Tea Party.

Hobbs House B Corp badge remains the biggest clue to the firm's conspicuous direction of travel. The mantra of the movement is 'people, planet, profit'.

And it is already some way down the B Corp road, having achieved the standard in 2019 (and gained accreditation in 2023), a move that started a whole line of dominoes falling, impacting everything the business does to this day.

The inspiration to look at B Corp first came from the LEAD™ programme, which saw George partner with the financial director of Pukka Herbs, one of the first B Corp companies in the UK. The insight into being a force for good chimed with the Hobbs House Bakery values and gave the firm a framework for strategic development.



Where B Corp has focused his mind in recent times is on the provenance of Hobbs ingredients - and the environmental impact down the line too. It is another journey of adventure and discovery tempered by realism of the demands of running a sustainable business.

Hobbs' growth has given it added influence and the millers and farmers it has forged relationships with have been willing to experiment with different crops and grains to seek to deliver not just great tastes, but an environmental gold standard - free of pesticides and herbicides.

Locally sourced, organic, planet-friendly grains is possible, it has discovered, even if the vagaries of the British weather are a challenge. But it has not given up.



“We have not yet been able to deliver that consistently, but it is very exciting,” said George, adding that the process has allowed it to produce some limited edition breads which customers have enjoyed. Which also bodes well.

Hobbs was already a long-standing customer of the hugely respected Shipton Mill, at Frampton on Severn which calls itself ‘the home of organic flour’.

But the message from B Lab - which awards the B Corp accreditation - that it gets to 'know its farmer', has led the bakery to discussions about soil quality and to the 'regenerative movement', which aims to transition our food supply toward goals related to human health, economic resilience, and environmental stewardship. Which sounds awfully like it aligns with B Corp.

That has led Hobbs to the door of Overbury Estate, near Tewkesbury, which follows the principles of regenerative agriculture, to Wildfarmed, which helped the bakery launch its first product using regenerative flour in 2023, to Castle Combe organic farmer John Prior and Matthews Mill for its regeneratively grown heritage wheat.



It has given everyone a taste of the future, while ironically taking Hobbs a step closer to the firm's very beginnings, when flour would have come from more local sources, organic by tradition - way back to 1920 when Thomas Herbert turned his blacksmith's workshop in Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, into a bakery and the story of Hobbs House all began.

From QuoLux™

We would like to thank Hobbs House Bakery for their continuing support and it has been a privilege to work with them since George joined our LEAD™ programme in 2016. Since then four other members of the senior leadership team have completed our LEAD™ and LEADight programmes and George is currently on our business planning programme, GOLD™.



Jo Draper, Stewart Barnes and Rachael Ramos, Directors of QuoLux™

We would also like to thank the author of this case study, Andrew Merrell, founder and lead journalist of the [Raikes Journal](#). QuoLux™ is very proud to be a founding partner of the Raikes Journal, a community interest company dedicated to building community through engaging, original journalism.

To read more about Hobbs House Bakery, please go to their website [here](#). To talk to one of the QuoLux™ team about how LEAD™ could help you and your organisation, please get in touch [here](#).