

THE CLEAN TEAM

This month, The London Linen Group celebrated 75 years of providing linen and workwear hire and laundry services to hotel, restaurant and catering clients. Managing director Roger Oliver – grandson of the company's founder – considers its past and its future

Q What are the company's origins and how has it adapted to changing customer demands over the past 75 years?

The company was started in 1935 by my grandfather, Fred Oliver, who handed over to my parents. The company focused on providing a high-quality linen and workwear service at competitive prices. I joined in 1982 and built on these principles, listening to customers' developing requirements.

We have adapted to customer demands by developing three specialist divisions to meet the requirements of the restaurant, casual dining and contract catering sectors.

We have continually developed the market-leading London Linen Supply, which specialises in restaurant linen hire, investing in modern ironing and washing equipment that improve finishing quality.

In 1987, London Workwear Rental was developed to service the casual dining sector with a bespoke chefswear and uniform service and, in 2007, we identified the opportunity to service the contract catering market. To launch the Caterers Linen Supply, we invested more than £3m in developing the most environmentally-friendly laundry in the UK.

Q Who are your oldest customers?

The vast majority of our customers have been with us for a considerable amount of time and we have all developed a really good relationship with them. We were delighted to be joined at our 75th anniversary celebrations by Mr and Mrs Chris Corbin (the Wolseley) and Mr and Mrs Alvaro Maccioni (La Famiglia) who are both long-standing customers, the latter signing their first contract with my grandfather in 1959.

Q What changing trends have you seen over the years and what does the future hold for the look of the tabletop?

Our products have mirrored the changes in the restaurant market over the past 75 years. In the post-war years, the market was relatively small and included such high-end restaurants as the Ivy, Caprice and Sheekey's.

In the 1950s and 1960s, we supplied coloured linen to Italian restaurants such as Mario and



The classical look endures... Langan's Brasserie is one of the London Linen Group's long-term customers

Franco. Over the past 20 years, with the growth of fine dining, we have seen a move back towards white table linen and the pure linen we now offer, which we used to offer in the pre-war years.

The growth of the casual dining market since the 1980s has been a dominant feature met through our London Workwear division providing branded chefswear and uniforms.

We are now seeing more diversity returning to the linen market, with customers at the higher end requiring more bespoke linen and colours returning. The tone of the linen sets the style of the restaurant and we expect this to continue to be very important in the future.



More than £3.5m was invested in the new laundry

Q How important are green and sustainability issues to the group?

Hugely important. We are very proud to have the UK's most environmentally-friendly laundry and strive continuously to improve our environmental credentials across all three divisions.

A laundry service is fundamentally green as it recycles linen and garments. We provide this service in a sustainable way, installing equipment and procedures to ensure we are as eco-friendly as possible. This process also reduces our costs of energy, water, packaging and transportation – enabling us to be more competitively priced.

We constantly review technology changes to see what can be adopted to further improve our green credentials.

Q What spurred your growth from being a regional to a national player?

Our initial focus was within the M25. However, we wished to expand further and as our customers expanded outside this area we grew our geographical coverage with them. We also established a distribution centre in the North to support our now national coverage.



Q How do you see the company developing in the next 75 years?

Our three specialist divisions will continue to focus on servicing the restaurant, casual dining and contract catering sectors, building on the established principles of service and quality at competitive prices.

Each division will continue to work closely with customers to identify their needs and develop improved solutions to their requirements.

For example, sustainability-wise, we are trialling new eco-friendly garments. We will continue to install more energy-efficient machinery, develop more eco-friendly washing solutions and further minimise linen miles.

Managing director Roger Oliver (left) and Michael Hale, director of London Linen Supply

THE LONDON LINEN GROUP

Founded 1935, originally as London Linen Supply.

Brief history The company started as two small shops in Finsbury Park, London, hiring linen to a small guesthouse. It moved to larger premises in East Acton 18 months later and relocated to its current dedicated factory near Southall in 1990.

Structure The group now operates as three specialist linen, chefswear and uniform hire divisions focusing on the requirements of the restaurant, casual dining and contract catering sectors. Each has its own separate management and service teams.

Market coverage National – service and deliveries are handled by dedicated premises in west London and by a northern depot.

Employees 425

Head office 6-8 Jackson Way, Great Western Industrial Park, Windmill Lane, Southall, Middlesex UB2 4SF

London Linen Supply (1935)

Business Linen hire/laundry

services to the fine-dining restaurant sector (a wide variety of chefswear, table linen, kitchen cloths, workwear and garments).

Clients include Brasserie Blanc, Murano, the Wolseley, the Ivy, Gordon Ramsay, Jamie's Italian, and Le Café Anglais.

Tel 020 8574 5569

www.londonlinen.co.uk

London Workwear Rental (1987)

Business Bespoke workwear and uniform hire/laundry for the casual dining market.

Clients include Busaba Eathai, Carluccio's, EAT, Lemonia, and Pret A Manger

Tel 020 8574 0559

www.londonworkwear.co.uk

The Caterers Linen Supply (2007)

Business Linen hire/laundry service to the contract catering and events market.

Clients include ISS Eaton, Vacherin, Harbour & Jones, and Principal Catering.

Tel 020 8843 5810

www.catererslinen.co.uk