

February 2011

## From the Chair



Kepston Limited, reaches its 95<sup>th</sup> year in 2011 and during its 95 years, the company has seen

many changes internally and also in the world at large.

Since the dark days of early 2009, Kepston has fought back with a succession of positive initiatives, which have culminated in a very bright future. The company has two sites, one at Aldridge and one at Wednesbury, both in the West Midlands. The Wednesbury site has developed into the UK's leading sub contract mesh belt furnace brazing & bright annealing company for both mild and stainless steel components. This has been achieved by acquisition as well as ongoing investment in the latest plant to ensure the highest quality at competitive prices. This is essential to ensure that our extensive customer base can compete on the world stage in the automotive sector. Hydrogen batch furnaces for the annealing of soft magnetic materials support this key activity.

The experience available at Wednesbury is often used to assist customers, at the design stage, and all activities are controlled under the ISO 9001 : 2008 accreditation. The bright annealing of mild and stainless steel components completes the picture at the Wednesbury site. The current six mesh belt furnaces and seven batch furnaces ensure a fast turn round, with further plant planned in the near future. The Aldridge site majors in precision grinding, milling and turning operations & over the past two to three years, £750,000 has been invested in new equipment. The traditional jig grinding section has benefited from the addition of a CNC Hauser and a CNC G48 machine. This has extended the size of components we can process as well as maintaining the very tight tolerances achievable, in a temperature controlled environment. The universal grinding section has also benefited from the addition of a CNC Kellenberger

machine, which has extended the range of our capacity with the benefit of consistent repeatability of components. This section may well require further investment in 2011 to satisfy the increase in demand.

The latest additions have been a CNC Hardinge / Bridgeport VMC XR1000 and a GS51A Turning Centre. These will enable us to offer a broader range of processes to our existing customers as well as a number of new potentials currently being worked on. These additions will enable us to reduce lead times as more of the process is under our control. The main markets we operate in include aerospace, defence, motor sport (including formula 1) and general precision engineering. All our customers have high demands in terms of tolerances, quality and fast turnaround. The recent investments coupled with our AS EN 9100 approval and SC21 culture will help us meet customer expectations.

These recent achievements are to be supplemented by a building extension in 2011 to enable the Aldridge site to continue its development into the future. We would welcome any new enquiries for the services we provide. For brazing and annealing please contact Alan McCracken 0121 567 3216. For precision grinding and machining please contact Andy Oakley 01922 743133. It is a very exciting time for all of us at Kepston and we would like you to be part of our ongoing development.

**Brent Millage M.D.**

## Sales

Thankfully, 2010 was a major improvement on 2009 but that has been the case for most companies as 2009 was a very tough year.

In our last newsletter, I said that as a team, we were stronger than at any time in our company's history & on reflection, how true that statement was. It is fair to say that the drain of volume UK Manufacturing away from these shores shows little sign of abatement & we ourselves have seen some significant business go during the last 18 months. In addition, significant opportunities are not as abundant as they used to be but when they do appear, we have the team to grasp them with both hands. To this end, I would like to thank all my colleagues for their tremendous input & support which makes my life a little easier than it could be.

As we know, our main adversary Bodycote (Bright Brazing) pulled out of the meshbelt brazing and annealing markets early in 2009. I would like to thank their customers for coming over to Kepston & I can say with confidence that any initial fears that they may have had disappeared after their first order with us. Without exception, all have been delighted with our quality & service & the speed at which we acquired their specific job requirements is a testament to all at Kepston.

We have continued to invest in plant & equipment & our most recent installation allows us to bright anneal mild steel, copper & brass in lengths of up to 6 metres. Also, there has been no let up in our planned maintenance budget meaning the plant is in excellent condition & always available to meet our customers demands.

**Continued :**



## Sales : Continued

A number of my colleagues have well over 20 years service with Kepston & for me personally, it is 30 years. For this reason, it would be easy for me to take for granted what we do well but I shouldn't. We have seen many changes in the industry & market as a whole but rather than fight it, we have welcomed it as our view has always been that the strongest will always survive. I said we would come out of the last recession stronger than when we went into it & I believe this to be the case. I am confident that with the team of people that we have, we will continue to go from strength to strength & be here to meet the demands of our customers for years to come.

**Alan McCracken : Sales Manager**

## Quality



I would like to thank everyone again for their involvement and continued support in helping us to achieve a very good

quality record over the past 12mths.

I would like to personally thank Tony Smith who has worked very hard on the Continuous Improvement Programmes at Wednesbury, which we and our customers have seen the benefits from in both WIP and Quality. As part of our SC21 Programme, we are also now monitoring our on time delivery (OTIF) and Supplier on time delivery (SOTIF) as well as our Internal and external concerns, (NRFT). All are now above targets set for 2010, so we will now review and raise the bar again to try and improve even further. Our Aldridge site has also seen vast improvements, a very special thanks to Andy Oakley, Chris Iles and the team at Aldridge. Their quality procedures have now been accredited to AS EN 9100 Aerospace accreditation. Also as part of the SC21 programme, OTIF, SOTIF & NRFT are all being monitored and reviewed on the Aldridge site. This quality award is a major step forward in our quest for World class performance on both the Aldridge and Wednesbury sites.

**Alan Overton: Quality Manager**



## Continuous Improvement



As this is my first input into the Kepston flyer, may I take the opportunity to thank everybody for helping me settle into Kepston, it really has become a

‘home from home’ for me.

Can I also further thank the respective teams for all their hard work over the last year or so in helping me fulfil my role in Continuous Improvement. We have seen some significant improvements in working practices and also throughput, while maintaining a high level of quality and service. This is no small feat and we will have to show as much dedication over the next 12 months if we are to maintain this achievement and use it as a solid platform for the upcoming projects in the new year.

Although I have been in this industry for 20 years, I have still been taught a new thing or two in the last two years. I feel very privileged to work alongside some vastly experienced and knowledgeable people and I know with their continued hard work and dedication, Kepston can continue to be the leader in the subcon mesh belt brazing and annealing market.

**Tony Smith: Continuous Improvement Manager**

## Maintenance

I would like to start with a big thank you to all of our fantastic production team for the work carried out maintaining and generally taking very good care of the various parts of equipment during the time since our last newsletter. Installation of Mahler C was a great success and was quickly up and running, with the added bonus of being interchangeable between Exo and Endo gases. We are currently looking at a second gas generator to give us additional back up when required and also the capability of running two furnaces on Exo gas. Mahler 18HB continues to run consistently and has proved since the last newsletter to be a valued and very reliable addition to the hydrogen section. Let's hope 2011 can be another good year for production, Arthur and myself will of course try our best to contribute to that success but we still need the good work carried out by the operatives to continue

on into the future.

Many improvements have also been achieved at our Aldridge site & with the hard work and dedication of everybody involved, the good work will continue for many years to come. All new additions to the plant list are up and running, many to be re-homed in a brand new extension to the site in the near future.

**Craig Riordan : Maintenance Manager**

## Production



Once again, Trevor & I would like to thank the members of the teams for their ongoing flexibility & excellent standards during the last 12 months - a big thank you from both of us.

The installation of another 18" Mahler furnace to increase our brazing & annealing capacity resulted in the re-organisation of the assembly shop. This has gone very well & has improved the flow of work.

Following the ending of the aluminium flame brazing contract (our customer relocated to Turkey) Adam, who did a sterling job in that section, moved over to the brazing section & has settled in very well.

We would like to welcome back both Terry & Mario, both of whom are previous employees. They join an exclusive (but growing) club of past employees who have rejoined - we must be doing something right!!!!!!

We have funding available for further training & courses are being looked into. We are about to start a new First Aid Course & anyone interested should contact Mandy.

Marek is looking to be a dad for the second time - good luck to him & his growing family.

**Continued :**



**Production : Continued**

For the first time in years, 2 new people joined the nightshift. A big thank you to Dhillon for training them to his usual high standards.

We would like to say a big thank you to Tony whose wealth of experience has been of enormous assistance to not only Trevor & I but to everyone on the shop floor.

Last year was certainly an improvement on 2009. We have an excellent team of people all round & I know we are capable of taking any opportunity that comes our way

**Mandy Essam & Trevor Griffin  
Production Managers**

2010 was a busy year for precision grind-

**Aldridge**

ing & sales in the second half showed a growth of 25% on the previous year. It was also a big year for investment. In June 2010, orders were placed for the purchase

of two new CNC machines. The subsequent commissioning and delivery was completed in October 2010.

In August 2010, a special welcome to Chris Iles. He has been appointed production manager & brings with him a vast amount of experience in precision engineering - we all wish him well in his new role.

The big achievement for 2010 was the BS AS9100 quality award - a big thank you to all the team at Aldridge & a special thank you to Alan Overton for driving the changes through.

Now for 2011 we must continue to grow to secure our future in precision manufacturing. 2011 will see new faces join the team & we will see the completion of the planned extension and hopefully will culminate in the team at Aldridge being awarded a SC21 bronze award.

**Andy Oakley: Commercial Manager**

**New Appointment**

A very warm Kepston welcome to Chris Iles. Chris has many years experience in the precision machining sector and has acquired many skills during that time.



Chris's role will be Production Manager. The task will be to improve the efficiencies and output at the Aldridge site. Chris will involve all the teams including Sales and Quality departments to enhance the benefits to all our customers old and new. This is an exciting addition and we look forward to Chris being a valued member of the Kepston team.

**Brent**

**UP AND COMING EVENTS**

Our very own Kepston Flyer will be competing in the Thunder Sport GB 11 Round National Championships. The Kepston Flyer will be competing in events throughout 2011 starting in March, going through to November.



The Feast of Lanterns event with over 350 Caravans will be held in August 2011. If interested, please contact Kay Baker at Kepston, Wednesbury

**Health & Safety**

Andy Eyre and Brian Griffiths have both attended a course in Risk Assessment—congratulations to them both. Andy Oakley and Liam Ralph have both completed their IOSH examinations and passed with flying colours - well done both of you. This reinforces Kepston's commitment to the important issue of Health & Safety in the workplace.



Refresher training for both 5C & 7W are ongoing and will be a part of our SC21 programme in the coming months on both sites. Mandy at Wednesbury requires further people to attend First Aid courses. Please speak to Mandy if interested.

**Alan Overton: Quality Manager.**



Kepston Ltd proudly sponsored the 60's pop group the OG's in aid of Children in Need. The event was held at the Springvale Sports and Social club in Bilston, West Midlands> The event was an astounding success raising over £2000 for the charity - well done to all at Kepston and their valued customers who supported the event. There will be more charity events throughout 2011 which Kepston will be more than happy to help raise funds for. If anyone is interested in attending any of the up and coming charity events, please contact Alan Overton