

Asphalt's family firm

Privately owned Foster Yeoman is an unsung innovator in the asphalt sector, taking the lead in many areas and providing customers with an "asphalt supermarket".

Innovation and forward thinking have formed the bedrock of success for Foster Yeoman, well known as one of Europe's largest aggregate companies. The 75 year old family owned and managed firm makes little fanfare about its achievements, but has changed the face of UK aggregates.



Principal reasons for this claim are Foster Yeoman's ambitious development of a super quarry at Glensanda in Scotland in the 1980s and the company's earlier foresight in establishing rail links between its Somerset quarry and its customers.

Despite this high profile in the aggregates industry, Foster Yeoman is little known as a player in the asphalt market beyond a content customer base. Yet some 40% of its £100M turnover is asphalt derived and the company has consistently been at the forefront of introducing new asphalt products.

Foster Yeoman's strategy of lateral thinking and innovation have gained for it a healthy market share in the south, where it claims to be one of the biggest asphalt suppliers in the region, from

depots at Crawley, Botley, Northfleet, Purfleet, Snodland and Theale.

Sales Director Chris Phillips says: "We have established a healthy business which now produces 1.5Mt of asphalt a year which is the culmination of our strategic growth plan initiated in the 1960s. We can provide any asphalt products from our plants and see ourselves as an asphalt hypermarket.

"This one stop shop enables customers to order asphalt from a central point at Marston House, our historic headquarters," Phillips says. "Customers don't have to spend ages ringing around the plants to find out what is available where. They simply let us know what they need, where they need it and when, and we deliver."

Customers are treated courteously, their requests carried out efficiently and well. "As a family firm, we consciously try to project a friendly, easy to use atmosphere when people deal with us. Our reputation is very high among our clients as a result," Phillips says.

A friendly approach has not prevented Foster Yeoman from operating in a shrewd and highly



Crawley is Foster Yeoman's ideal of what an urban asphalt plant should be

business orientated manner. The company began operations at Dulcote quarry near Wells, Somerset, in the early 1920s and by 1970 it was well on the way to being one of Europe's biggest producers of aggregates.

Although it modernised its only asphalt plant at Dulcote in 1957, it was the following decade that Foster Yeoman really began turning its attention to asphalt, building up this side of the business in anticipation of expansion of the country's infrastructure.

The company by this time already had a tradition of making best use of rail as a means of transport — stand by any railway line and before long, it seems a



Establishing their own rail links was a major innovation by Foster Yeoman



Foster Yeoman's own ships carry aggregates from Glensanda

Foster Yeoman train of aggregate trucks will rumble by. It has been this way since 1923.

Forster Yeoman foresaw the benefit of building satellite asphalt plants perhaps in urban areas, near where the demand for asphalt was greatest. And very early on, long before most other companies involved in the industry, Foster Yeoman developed a heightened sense of the need to minimise the environmental impact of asphalt manufacture.

This is not only conscientious practice but good business. The ability to control and monitor emissions effectively, to build unobtrusive structures and keep noise and disruption to a minimum would mean that a Foster Yeoman coating plant in an urban area would be deemed a good neighbour, able to acquire planning consent in the first instance and maintain good local relations in the longer term.

"We were the first in Europe to build a fully enclosed plant, in 1971," Phillips says. This was at Botley and was the first plant to be registered under the Factories Act as opposed to the Mines & Quarries Act, simply because it was enclosed. Botley can accurately be described as the first asphalt factory.

"As we grew in size and developed new plants, we acquired

bigger and more efficient machinery for high daily outputs, taking care to house this in an appropriate manner."

In the early 1980s, for instance, a Standard Haven Continuous Drum Mix plant was purchased and installed at Theale, near Reading. This was capable of mixing macadam at 450t/h and of mixing asphalts at 250t/h. The site also had hot material storage capacity of 850t — the entire facility being fully enclosed, contained in what was at the time the biggest single span building in the UK.

Foster Yeoman's first individual "asphalt supermarket" was established at Purfleet where a Genco Bitumen Continuous Drum Mix plant was installed capable of mixing 400t/h and with 13 hot storage bins to hold in excess of 2300t. The site was equipped with three weighbridges, the longest of their kind at that time.

"Purfleet was the first of our asphalt plants that allowed us to use recycled materials where contracts allow," Phillips says. "We can put up to 30% recycled asphalt into new mixes."

Purfleet is strategically sited, close to the M25. Phillips says the company supplied a significant proportion of the asphalt used for the orbital route's construction. Recently, the M25 has been sup-

plied with porous asphalt for resurfacing.

Another significant company site is located at Crawley, West Sussex, a development which represents the ultimate in urban friendly asphalt plants. Here, all practicable measures have been taken to minimise dust, noise and intrusion on the local environment.

Crawley comprises an Ammann AS 2000 semi continuous asphalt plant capable of mixing at 150 tonnes per hour with 600 tonnes of storage.

"The market place is different in the late 1990s from that which existed in the 1980s with less government spending on new roads, and more money spent on maintenance, repairs and utilities," Phillips says. "Crawley, in particular, is targeted at the needs of the new market."

Crawley is capable of supplying large daily outputs. However, Foster Yeoman has chosen to be ultra responsive in meeting the needs of the ex-works trade and those of local users.

Crawley was the first asphalt plant to achieve accreditation from BSI against the new industry QA scheme. We also recently won a QPA safety award which we believe recognises the level of care we strive for, in all our operations," Phillips says.