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## Welcome

Welcome to the *Landmark Post*! If you are unfamiliar with us, Landmark Systems Ltd is an IT company specialising in management accounting and property software with a high percentage of rural clients. Either as a new reader or as an existing client we hope that you will enjoy the enclosed articles, profiles and tips. If some copy strikes the 'right note' do contact us or look for more details on the website [www.landmarksystems.co.uk](http://www.landmarksystems.co.uk).

## Is one bottle of wine much like any other? No, and neither are accounts systems...

*James Newington and John Clarke have been managing fruit farms in Kent for years. In 2006 the opportunity to set up in partnership and form their own business was an opportunity not to be missed. James tells us here about their business and the role Landmark has had to play.*

### James, tell us about the business you have created?

"Harry Wooldridge and his family have farmed Beech Farm for several generations but with Harry approaching retirement age some new blood was needed to move the farm forward.

"We have therefore created a partnership between Harry, John and myself growing fruit near Mereworth in Kent. The farm comprises approximately 150 acres

where we grow strawberries, raspberries and apples, all for supermarket customers. All the soft fruit is picked and packed on site.

"Approximately 1,400 bins of apples are picked with all the packing and the majority of storage being off site. Our business is hugely labour intensive with a large turnover."

### With a capital intensive new business, how did you plan your business start up and recording systems?

"For our business plan we created lots of spreadsheets projecting forward for four years. We prepared gross margins on different growing systems, as there are so many ways to grow strawberries with hugely varying costs per kilo. We talked about accounting systems with our accountants and selected Sage, partly on their recommendation and partly due to cost. The extra £1,000 for Landmark KEY Accounts seemed a lot of money but in retrospect this was false economy and we have now purchased KEY Accounts."

### Why did you move from Sage to KEY Accounts?

"In a new business with a fairly high level of borrowing it is imperative to be on top of the figures. We therefore decided that I would do the book-keeping. I found Sage incredibly difficult to use. I am sure it is a great product if you are an accountant but even though I am computer literate and relatively familiar with accounts I struggled with the rigidity of the program. When I made a mistake it was really hard to correct it."

### What difference has KEY made to the business?

"The output of KEY Accounts has given us confidence as a young business to make decisions. We can see where our income is month-on-month, we can update our projections and



John Clarke and James Newington at Beech Farm.





# QUICKER THAN A RENT TABLE – DIRECT DEBIT STREAMLINES RENT COLLECTION



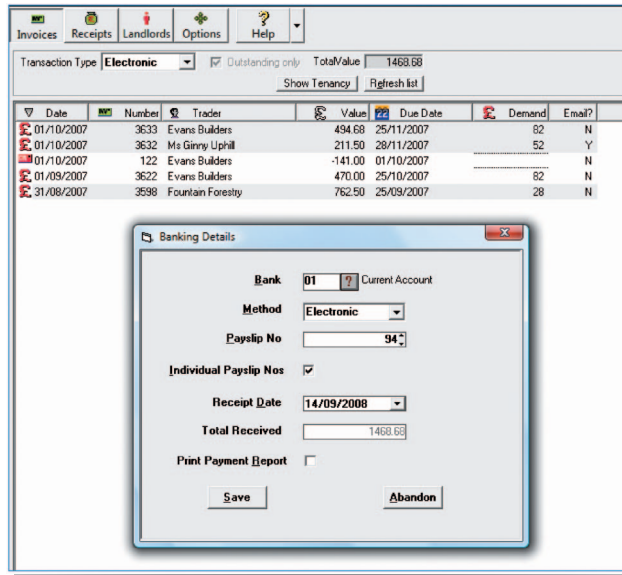
Rent collection in the 21st century is a far cry from the days of the rent table, with alphabetical drawers in the circumference of a fine piece of furniture. One such table stands at the foot of the stairs at Holker Hall in Cumbria where tenants were taken out for a meal in recognition of the distances involved in the physical delivery of the cash!

Forward thinking Fowler Fortescue (FF), business and property consultants in Wiltshire, approached Landmark in 2004 to discuss how to integrate their KEY Property software with BACS-friendly direct debit (DD) software to collect rents.

Using accredited DD software to facilitate rent collection rather than the usual standing order system is something that Simon Fowler and Anthony Fortescue began to trial six years ago and in Simon's words: "We pinched the model from a totally different business – in fact it was the dental industry!"

It took FF a matter of months to transfer about 90 per cent of the tenants on a large estate to direct debit on a bureau basis but it became obvious that because of the size of the demands and the need for accuracy they should bring the system in-house.

Talking through the flexibility and linking issues with Landmark, they set about choosing some DD software from the myriad available. Simon explains: "The real challenge was getting through all the problems posed by the change to collection by direct debit and then going back to first principles to create the most efficient method possible to cater



for a growing rental portfolio.

"The DD software chosen, KEY accounts, BACS and the bank now work together seamlessly providing what seems to be the most efficient system possible, meaning that hundreds of demands can be processed, paid, reviewed and reconciled by one person at the touch of a button – well maybe three buttons! Whereas previously this would have taken days, not to mention the endless chasing of tiresome small debtors.

"This latest innovation is timely in that all rents can be collected on the first of each month and all rent reviews take place for example on one estate on the 1st August. When everyone pays on this basis there is no reconciling, it is all reconciled across the software. One person can do the whole demand and processing task within a matter of minutes – a job that in the past would have required several book keepers on-site.

"Putting it simply, we have trimmed the book keeping time for rental processes to a fraction. Twenty-five per cent of our retained estates have moved across to direct debit rental collection and we are now looking to roll it out across all of our estates and to assist others who may be interested.

"It is an important tool in taking property management forward and streamlining estate business for the future. Furthermore our combined efficiency with our clients will give us and them an edge in the market."

*If you want to discuss the potential of direct debit on your estate contact Nigel Parsons or Simon Fowler (snf@fowlerfortescue.co.uk)*

## Is an accounts system just like any other accounts system...? Contd

instantly know our creditor position. In our business we spend approximately £165,000 on soft fruit packaging alone, another £520,000 on picking labour, and that's before we've sold any fruit, so business control to us is paramount. In a nutshell, KEY has provided us with accurate figures which we never achieved whilst using Sage."

### What about the hassle of changing system?

"Obviously we were concerned that we may be wasting more time and money but re-setting and getting the system running smoothly was much simpler than we had expected. The help we received from Landmark to set up the system was effective and professional. It is worth dealing with a small company as they understand our business, and we have great confidence in James Lutener, our local

man. When we call the support lines they know who we are, understand what we are talking about and give us an answer to a question without being patronising."

### James, what about this view that one accounts package is just like another and, like fine wine, it just depends on how much you want to spend?

"Well, I'm more of an expert on fruit than I am on wine and I certainly know more about accounts packages than I did a couple of years ago! I have learnt the lesson that it is worth paying for what you want and need. If we had wanted just to keep the accountant happy and calculate our VAT Sage would have been fine, but it was never going to produce us management information and we should have spotted that earlier.

Sage is very adaptable if you know exactly what you are doing but for a small business without accounting expertise there is a danger of either not making it

work or having to spend extra money employing professionals.

"Certainly in agriculture it is a must to have good cash flow reporting and we need analysis of quantities and value of fruit sold."

### So what is next in your business?

"Well, we couldn't have had two more different and difficult years from a climatic viewpoint in which to start our fruit growing business. We've made some huge changes in the business – we've increased output from 150 tonnes to approximately 250 tonnes of strawberries and from 15 tonnes to 50 tonnes of raspberries. This has happened through intensified cropping, buying better plants, different management routines and extended picking seasons, so the answer is that we probably need a year of consolidation and some more time to spend planning and projecting forward on our accounts system."







# Belvoir Castle – a new user of KEY software

The Belvoir Estate will buzz with anticipation as the well-oiled machine that is The CLA Game Fair cranks into action for the 51st time. The Duke and Duchess of Rutland will host The Game Fair on 24-26 July 2009, which will no doubt break all visitor records for the world's largest country sports and outdoor pursuits event.

The 15,000 acre Belvoir Estate, situated between Melton Mowbray and Grantham, is managed centrally from the estate office by chief executive Donald Lambert and experienced agent Tim Stansby with a team including financial controller, Sandra Moran, and property manager, Margaret Trigg.

Donald Lambert's 2007 appointment to a new role was a catalyst for a complete review of management and financial systems. Following accountant and client recommendations Landmark was asked to show the team how four sets of accounts, running on traditional DOS and Sage systems in different locations, could be integrated to give control of the whole business.

Nigel Parsons, Managing Director of Landmark Systems, was involved at the outset: "Belvoir is a large estate and we had to find the answer to providing good summary reporting on eight separate business units without losing the facility to drill down into cost analysis on individual enterprises.

"The key features required were accuracy, speed, analysis and control as this was an estate which was sharpening up its act by allowing greater access to shared information by a commercial management team," he says.

KEY Advanced and KEY Property were ordered at the end of January 2008 with Sandra Moran joining Donald Lambert from the commercial sector to project manage the installation, with the aim of 'going live' by April. "My challenge was to bring it all together, to create a workable coding structure, to combine the four sets of accounts and to create a budget for the new financial year. Donald and the Trustees had to have regular reporting on the whole business to make meaningful decisions."

Sandra has worked closely on-site with Landmark's training consultant Mark Wheeler, drawing on the experience of Mary Collis, Director of training, when necessary. "I am very pleased with the management reporting, particularly the depth of analysis which we can achieve through multiple analysis codes.

"We were running a duplicate sales pipeline spreadsheet alongside Landmark for events but we are gradually getting rid of this as we tidy up all the old style of information onto the new software."

As well as continuing to refine the input and output of information for cash and trend management by Donald, Sandra is making information available for Tim, Mary Mackinley (Castle opening) and working closely with Margaret on the property side.

Margaret has noticed a dramatic change with regard to access to information on all the let property and estate tenancies. She says: "We used to operate accounts and property on a totally separate basis. There is a big improvement on how I do my job – I can open up the accounts system to check a figure whilst I am talking to a tenant. Before I had to ask a book keeper every time I wanted a piece of information." Margaret and colleague Angie Hinch are gradually replacing manual filing systems, attaching photographs and copies of correspondence electronically to properties on the KEY Property software.

Donald Lambert has created a more commercial management style at Belvoir and is not disappointed with the achievement of Landmark. "I believe that we have 90% success and I would like to continue refining the system with Landmark to achieve 95%," Donald explains: "I use my logistics background to iron out things like inventory waste. I have applied supply chain management, such as putting pre-set parameters into a system so that suppliers cannot overcharge or double charge for items. I should be able to tell the bank to the penny how much money needs to be released on any one day."

Significant savings have been made at Belvoir through efficiency in areas such as stock levels, payment terms and conditions, and electronic banking. At the end of a day Donald aims to be able to tell the Duke

and Duchess exactly what financial contribution has been made by the business at Belvoir, and as the system beds in and historical information is added, he will use trend management skills to predict patterns and activities in each of the business units. "We are still learning about the system every day but if something is wrong we can spot it quickly and make an early adjustment – this makes a difference to the overall success of a business."

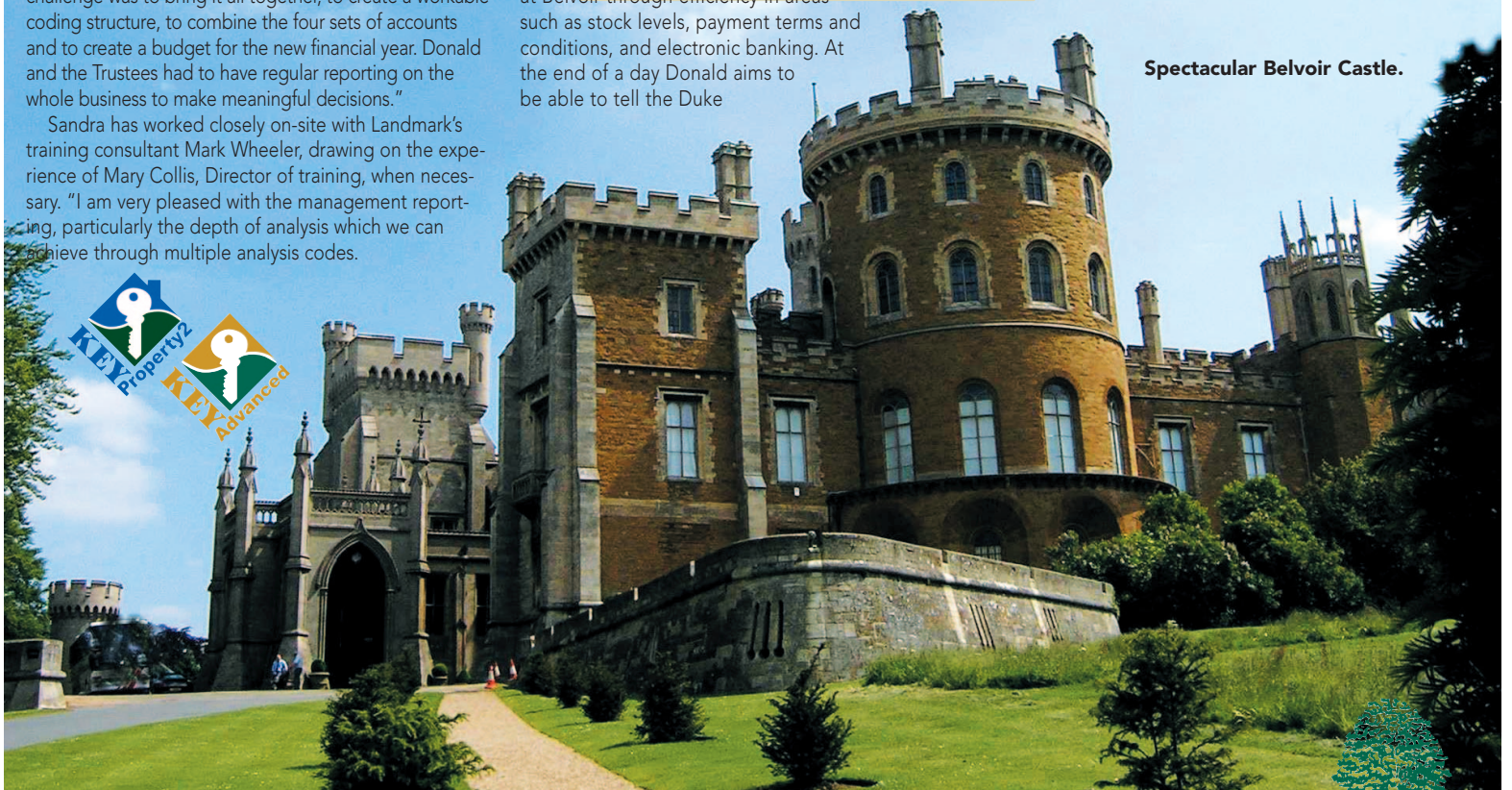
Tim Stansby is also enjoying the easy access to figures and on-demand reporting. "You need to be on the ball to run a business these days and your information is only as good as the data that you put in," he comments.

For further information and a diary of forthcoming events at Belvoir please visit [www.belvoircastle.com](http://www.belvoircastle.com)

Visit the Landmark Systems stand at The 51st Game Fair, Belvoir, on 24-26 July, 2009.



Spectacular Belvoir Castle.





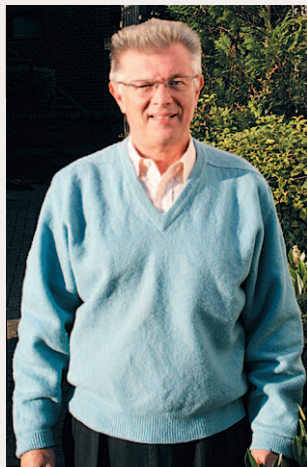


## Winter workshops

We are running group training courses for KEY Accounts users this autumn. For KEY Property users we will be holding workshops during January and February.

The feedback from these sessions is always positive and we are under pressure to run them more often. They are an excellent way to learn a little more about your software, to increase your efficiency and confidence and hear how others accomplish the same tasks as you do.

Venues and dates are on our website. All delegates will receive a free memory stick and if that doesn't tempt you there are always a few chocolate sweets flying around too!



*Many Landmark clients will be familiar with Bill Redpath's voice on software support but what about the man at the other end of your telephone?*

## I'd rather be on the water!

### IN PROFILE – BILL REDPATH

Bill has been a telephone support analyst for Landmark since September 2003. Previously, he had been a business analyst for one of the largest stationery suppliers in the UK, working in a team providing internal IT support on an UNIX operating system.

Bill freely admits that it was not easy looking for a job in his 50s – the age discrimination was a de-moralising experience for someone with an active lifestyle and a wealth of IT experience. "I felt that I had a lot to give and I could commit to staying with a company for a sensible length of time as, at this stage, I am not likely to re-locate or make a career move," he says.

Bill enjoys the interaction that he has with Landmark clients and his logical, calm approach is appreciated by many. But in the hurly burly of business there is little time to talk about his life outside Landmark.

He lives in the pretty village of Cranleigh, Surrey and has two adult children. Bill keeps fit by playing badminton and he is a member of the Celia Cross Greyhound Rescue Trust. But Bill has a great affinity with water and he is a life member of the Wey and Arun Canal Trust, which aims to restore the Wey and Arun Canal back to navigation. When it is restored, there will be an inland waterway link from London, via the rivers Wey and Arun, to as far as Littlehampton on the Sussex coast.

What is the appeal? "I love canals and we have a fantastic group of volunteers with whom I work on various projects on Sundays," Bill says. "For example, I have worked on four lock restorations, replaced a 'C' class road bridge, built an aqueduct and currently we are well on the way to completing the biggest project to date, which is effectively creating a tunnel for the canal under a 'B' class road in Loxwood."

So if you want to meet Bill at a weekend you know where to find him – he will be by the water dreaming of which boat he will buy for his retirement!

## Landmark staff are on track

This year's Landmark social outing was a trip to the go-karting centre at Albourne in Sussex. The continual showers of rain were no deterrent to some very competitive rounds and it was interesting to note that the cool personalities shown amongst our training and support staff often became considerably more competitive when behind the wheel!

A quick change out of boiler suits and helmets meant that we could 'race' to Brighton for a quick trip to the pier followed by a celebration dinner.



## Why waste time paying suppliers...?

Having speeded up the process of calculating the VAT return, reconciling the bank and preparing the management accounts are you still spending a lot of time paying suppliers? **Not paying suppliers is unfortunately not an option, but streamlining how you pay certainly is.**

Payment via electronic banking is becoming increasingly common and a module is available for Key Accounts and Advanced which will provide a file to import in to all the major banks BACS electronic systems. The security is still maintained by the bank and the transaction charges are below half the cost of processing cheques in most cases.

For those not in favour of electronic/internet banking, or who require a physical cheque to be produced for signature why not print your own? We can supply pre-printed cheques with a remittance advice



attached on single sheets which are simply fed through a laser or inkjet printer. Logos, colours and designs can be arranged to suit you and a professional image is displayed. The cost of pre-printed cheques/remittances starts from 24p each which can save on cost and time when regularly producing cheque runs of 25 or more at any time. **Contact the Pulborough office (01798 877100) for more details.**



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