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CHTA Secretariat

Items for inclusion in *Hotline* and enquiries about CHTA activities should be addressed to:

Contract Heat Treatment Association
c/o SEA, BJGF Federation,
Federation House, 10 Vyse Street,
Birmingham B18 6LT
Tel: 0121 329 2970 (or 0121 237 1123)
Fax: 0121 237 1124
E-mail: mail@chta.co.uk
Website: www.chta.co.uk

CHTA Secretary and *Hotline* Editor:
Alan J. Hick B.Sc., C. Eng., FIMMM

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**A fresh
approach to
recruitment**

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**Top ten heat
treatment
innovations?**

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The recruitment opportunity

CHTA Publicity Subcommittee Chairman
Simeon Collins
(Wallwork Heat Treatment) considers a fresh approach to recruitment into our sector.



In *Hotline*, we regularly discuss and, in some cases, bemoan recruitment problems, the quality of training available and the link between academia and the needs of our industry. Only recently, it has been down to a few persistent members to put sufficient pressure on a higher-education facility to run a specialist course that we require as an industry.

Of course, the latter (focusing on metallurgical technicians) is a benefit to all CHTA members, particularly if it becomes more widely available geographically. But what about the engineers, heat treatment managers and metallurgists of tomorrow?

It seems that it has never been harder to find the required skills in a candidate starting out on an engineering career. Those entering the employment market straight from university, with the core degrees, seem to get snapped up by the bigger organisations. As these qualifications are few and far between, the pool that remains is just not sufficient to sustain our future needs.

Has this not been a long-term dilemma and, if so, is it not time for us to take a different approach to find the correct candidates for our businesses?

Recruiting our greatest asset

Looking back over some past editions of this newsletter, an article in *Hotline* 69 (1997), written by an old colleague and former CHTA Chairman Ian Brown, supports the belief that we have been in this position for some considerable time. Discussing "Recruiting our greatest asset", Ian clearly states that "action is required to counter the shortage of technologists" and even goes on to suggest that "the likelihood of discovering anyone who understands how sophisticated and technologically complex our industry has become is remote".

I am sure that CHTA members share this view and are aware of the difficulty in finding such personnel, whether graduates or apprentices. So what can we do to alleviate this pressure of personnel-sourcing on our businesses?

Well, first we still have the apprentice route which a lot of members have

employed for many years. This is not without its problems and is still subject to finding the appropriate candidates at a very early stage, when the way they will mature over the years is hard to predict.

Secondly, we have in-house training and utilisation of the specialist courses available. This at least gives organisations time to evaluate the potential for learning within their current staff, but still does not fully address the need for a high-calibre workforce. In a service industry such as ours, it's the right mix of skills and knowledge that ultimately drives success.

Another route

So how can we tap into these potential high-calibre candidates, especially when competition for university places is at an all-time high and we are yet to see the true result of the government's new charging scheme that is due next year?

Well maybe this is the opportunity that we need; perhaps the government could be doing us a favour with these high charges for courses.

It is inevitable that the thought of leaving university with a potential £27,000 debt before starting work is leading a change in how some students plan their careers. It is this change that should allow us, as an industry, to tap into a potentially rich personnel market. In other words, it's our chance to attract the high-calibre student earlier with the opportunity to gain a degree at the cost of the company rather than at his/her expense. Obviously we would need to tie in such investment for a period of time, both contractually and in career progression. This approach also allows business to "try before you buy", with maybe a 6 to 12-month in-house training schedule to gauge the calibre of the student.

In one case that I have experienced, the local training college has a number of students who have spent the last two years on full-time NVQs in engineering, ready to move to the next level. The college has allowed us to interview the students and to work with them over a two-week period in order to gauge their aptitude for engineering and heat treatment. Rather than the clinically-clean IT or desk-based office environments, they are exposed to the hands-on "get-stuck-in" sector.

Even after two weeks, we have seen how some students are hit by the reality of the industry, but we can also detect how some are up for the challenge and, with the right guidance and training, could fit our future needs.

This is one example of how recruitment for

this type of technical staff has changed since Ian Brown's article was published. It could also be a model that can be expanded upon. Perhaps, rather than the local college, we now move to the sixth form colleges and again try to intercept the students with great potential who are not too keen on huge debt, but willing to progress through another more hands-on approach.

Here we may even be able to offer those potential students more than just an alternative to the normal degree route, but also well-defined career paths within our organisations. It is the combination of learning and future opportunities that will attract and retain the required candidates.

Maximising recruitment effort

I realise that this may all seem very simplistic, but I am under no illusion of how time-consuming and costly the whole process can be. Investment in these types of systems takes many years to return and needs to be managed constantly. However I am a realist; this is just one of many approaches we must put in place to maximise our exposure to the recruitment of staff.

Apprenticeships, in-house training and learning, graduate recruitment and even promotion of our businesses, as leading-edge technologies in aerospace, medical and motorsport (to name but a few), to attract like-minded people into our sector, are required.

At Wallwork, we have engaged heavily with local schools to help promote engineering. We also have a STEM* ambassador who visits schools to support the cause. In fact, our ambassador is one of our graduates who has attended Bradford College on a BEng metallurgy and materials day-release course and is therefore in a good position to discuss and interact with the particular age groups.

There are also some threads on what the government can do to help sectors like ours improve candidate levels. However, I feel there is too much uncertainty in government, across all parties, to determine if they have a clear plan to assist engineering as a whole. So how we "paddle our own canoes" will dictate what success we have in the future as businesses and as a sector.

*Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

11-13 October 2011

**UNDERSTANDING
HEAT TREATMENT**

Full details of this latest Wolfson course at: www.sea.org.uk/whctc

Top ten heat treat advances?

Hotline Editor **Alan J. Hick** comments.

Now semi-retired, I am fortunate to have time to enjoy regular perusal of *The Monty*, the monthly newsletter compiled from the heat treating news frequently updated at www.themonty.com.

Put together by dynamic Canada-based Gord Montgomery, this paragraph-averse but informative e-publication is naturally dominated by North American items, but is increasingly featuring input from the wider global heat treatment community.

I was particularly intrigued to read Gord's June 27th invitation for readers to nominate the ten best heat treatment innovations:

"We all know that the heat treating industry is a staid, conservative, mature industry where little changes. Heck, when you get right down to it, the basic style of a batch IQ furnace is little changed over the past 50 years. However, even in this industry, new ideas come along from time to time which end up becoming the accepted norm. So, with this basic premise, what are 10 technological changes that have made the most difference to the industry over the years?"

With my background in tracking heat treatment advances closely for over 30 years, as Editor of Wolfson's *Heat Treatment of Metals* journal, I was tempted to contribute. Partly to establish that one of the major developments originated in the UK in the late 1960s, I nominated the oxygen probe, now the vital component at the heart of most of today's sophisticated computerised systems regulating controlled-atmosphere furnaces worldwide.

I was not alone. *The Monty* received "hundreds" of suggestions of "innovations that changed the industry" before revealing the top ten on August 5th:

- (1) Batch IQ (sealed-quench) furnaces;
- (2) Vacuum furnaces;
- (3) Dewpointers;
- (4) Oxygen probes;

- (5) Carbon composite furnace fixturing;
- (6) Solid-state inverters (in induction heating);
- (8) Gas nitriding;
- (9) Vacuum (low-pressure) carburising;
- (10) Quick-change induction coils.

With no time frame imposed, the advances receiving most votes emanate from almost a century ago (gas nitriding) up to much more recently.



The sealed-quench furnace topped *The Monty's* poll.

What's missing from the list? Challenged to come up with a top ten, I'm sure we'd all opt for some different preferences, depending on age, experience and the heat treatment disciplines within which we operate.

Whilst concurring with some of *The Monty's* poll result, my personal view is that there are other worthy contenders within fields such as "newer" treatments (e.g. ferritic nitrocarburising, originally introduced over 50 years ago), options to traditional generated furnace atmospheres, alternative quenching media, and computer modelling of heat treatment processes. Outside the contract heat treatment arena, a major innovation adopted recently by steelmakers worldwide is the use of pure hydrogen atmospheres for more efficient annealing of very large batches of semi-finished product.

What important innovations would *Hotline* readers nominate? **Your suggestions please to mail@chta.co.uk.**

Booming CHTA Benchmarking Club

With a record response to May's survey, CHTA's Benchmarking Club is going from strength to strength.

Established in 2002, the Benchmarking Club enables CHTA members to compare performance on the basis of replies to a questionnaire circulated half-yearly. Reformatted in 2006, the questionnaire requests data, for the previous twelve months, on the following key measures:

- Annual turnover/employee;
- Turnover growth, % annually;
- Average debtor days;
- Wages as % turnover;
- Energy costs as % turnover;
- Maintenance cost as % turnover (excluding and including own labour).

Collated by a CHTA Secretariat pledging strictest confidentiality, the results of the survey, summarised without identifying individual respondents, are reported to participating members only.

May's record support for the Benchmarking Club confirms its usefulness as an additional management tool. Member's yet to participate are encouraged to do so in order to strengthen the exercise even further. The next questionnaire will be e-circulated in November.

CHTA Vice-Chairman Richard Burslem, instigator of the Benchmarking Club, comments:

Members of CHTA's Management Committee, all heat treaters themselves, spent some considerable time designing the questions for the Benchmarking Club. The two main principles were that the information gathered must be useful to the respondents and that the data required to answer the questions should be readily available.

Completing the survey over time enables you to build up a history of performance indicators for your own business. The published results provide some thought-provoking information:

- Why is there such a difference in the time taken by customers to pay their bills? Are you one of the heat treaters struggling to be paid?
- Is your turnover growing or shrinking at a similar rate to your competitors?
- Could you be as energy-efficient as the best company in the survey or are you lagging behind?

Completing the survey should take less than 15 minutes and, remember, only the participants see the final results summary. Companies are *not* identified and anonymity is guaranteed.

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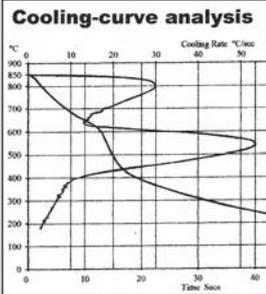
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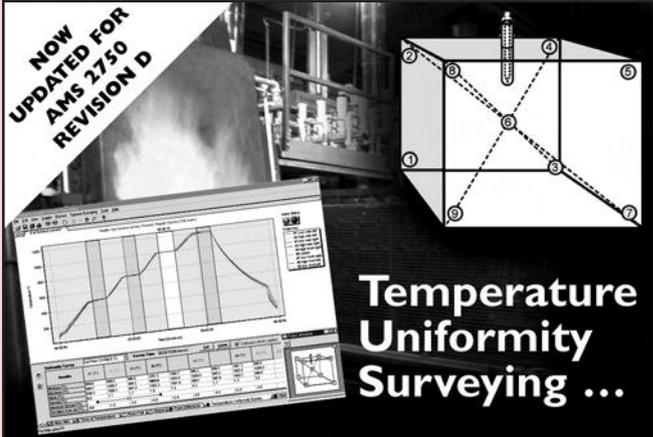
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As worldwide thermal processing specialists, Bodycote plays a vital role in the aerospace supply chain. At the 49th International Paris Air Show in June, the company announced the signing of a 10-year renewal contract with Rolls-Royce to provide thermal processing services in the UK.

The new contract involves direct support for Rolls-Royce from Bodycote's on-site facility, located within the boundaries of the Rolls-Royce Precision Casting plant in Derby, and five additional UK locations. Bodycote will provide Rolls-Royce with heat treatment, hot isostatic pressing, thermal spray coatings and metal joining, including brazing and electron beam welding.



The agreement also provides the framework for Rolls-Royce and Bodycote to extend their partnership in other parts of the world, including North America and Asia. Based on its range of services, global footprint and ongoing expansions, Bodycote is well-positioned to meet the needs of manufacturers seeking long-term agreements as they globalise their supply chains and simultaneously reduce their number of suppliers. This also allows them to maximise their return on investment from their global operations.

Rolls-Royce signed its first key supplier agreement with Bodycote in the early 1980s. In the late 1990s, Bodycote became the first subcontractor to establish operations within the boundaries of any Rolls-Royce facility, and remains so to this day.

With more than 170 accredited facilities in 27 countries, Bodycote is the world's largest provider of thermal processing services.

Award for SEA



CHTA congratulations to our colleagues at the Surface Engineering Association, recent winner of the Trade Association Forum Sector Representation Award for its lobbying with regard to the implications of REACH (Registration Evaluation and Authorisation of Chemicals).

The SEA has long been concerned that the introduction of the REACH regulation has the potential to cause serious disruption to members' businesses and the whole manufacturing supply chain in the EU.

SEA chief executive Dave Elliott says: "Our campaign has demonstrated that even a small trade association can have a voice at a European level and influence the implementation of legislation." Our picture shows Dave receiving the award with Diana Blair, SEA's Member Services Manager.

STATESIDE STATS

NORTH AMERICAN HALF-YEAR SALES UP 24.6%

CHTA counterparts participating in the Metal Treating Institute's Monthly Sales Statistics Program reported year-to-date heat-treating sales to June 2011 of \$483.2million, a gain of 24.6% from the \$387.8million recorded for the January-June period of 2010. June billings amounted to \$86.2million, an increase of 21.6% compared with June 2010's \$70.8million.

The latest returns indicate July sales of \$75.4million, a gain of 12.9% over July last year when billings amounted to \$66.8million.

Diary

October 4 2011
INTRODUCTION TO HEAT TREATMENT
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October 11 2011
METALLURGY FOR ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS
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UNDERSTANDING HEAT TREATMENT
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76th repeat of Wolfson Heat Treatment Centre's course. Details from Derek Close: tel: 0121 237 1122; e-mail: derek.close@sea.org.uk; www.sea.org.uk/whtc

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Cincinnati, Ohio, USA
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November 8-9 2011
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November 9-10 2011
ADVANCED ENGINEERING UK 2011
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www.advancedengineeringuk.com/

November 10 2011
CHTA MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE*
Birmingham, England

November 10 2011
BIFCA Technical Series: FURNACE MODELLING
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November 22-23 2011
EUROPEAN ALUMINIUM CONGRESS 2011
Düsseldorf, Germany www.aluminium-congress.com

December 13-14 2011
METALLURGY FOR NON-METALLURGISTS
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Deadline for booking ads in December's Hotline 126:

November 14th

For further details, contact Hotline Editor Alan J. Hick

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Heat Treatments (Northampton) Ltd

HTN Director Phil Brothers outlines the history of a long-time CHTA member.

In 1967, bearing-manufacturer Ransome Hoffmann & Pollard took the unexpected decision to close its heat treatment facilities in Northampton to outside customers. Client Ferrocent, a small local engineering company reliant upon thermal processing of some products, hastily decided to form its own heat treatment company. Seeking the help of RHP's heat treatment shop foreman Frank Brothers, the foundations of our present company began in what was, quite literally, a "small tin shed", containing three salt baths, attached to the side of the Ferrocent factory.

For obvious reasons, Ferrocent was not the ideal name for a heat treatment company; so it became known as Northampton Heat Treatments. It steadily progressed and, in the late 1970s, was able to move to the current site, relying heavily on cyanide hardening.

In the mid-1980s, following the demise of British Steel at Corby, who supplied it with a significant amount of work, Ferrocent was sold and subsequently broken up into individual companies. This proved to be a positive move for Northampton Heat Treatments who now had some financial support and was able to purchase its first sealed-quench furnace.

The next few years saw the installation of further sealed-quench furnaces as the company found itself growing rapidly. In 1991, the then owner was approached with a proposal for a management buyout. After much negotiation, this was concluded successfully and a slight change in name, to Heat Treatments (Northampton) Ltd (HTN), identified a new beginning.

The next decade saw HTN continue to grow at an alarming rate. With a resultant need for more furnaces to fulfil its ever-increasing workload, an approach was made to purchase the business of Riddings Heat Treatment at Coventry. This gave HTN a much stronger base from which to expand its interests into the Midlands market, one of its main aims. The Northampton factory was extended, more furnaces installed and, eventually, Riddings was relocated and absorbed onto the Northampton site.

The turn of the millennium saw a continuation of much the same needs, more investment, more work to fill spare

Market Movements

ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRE REPLIES RELATING TO 30 CHTA MEMBER SITES

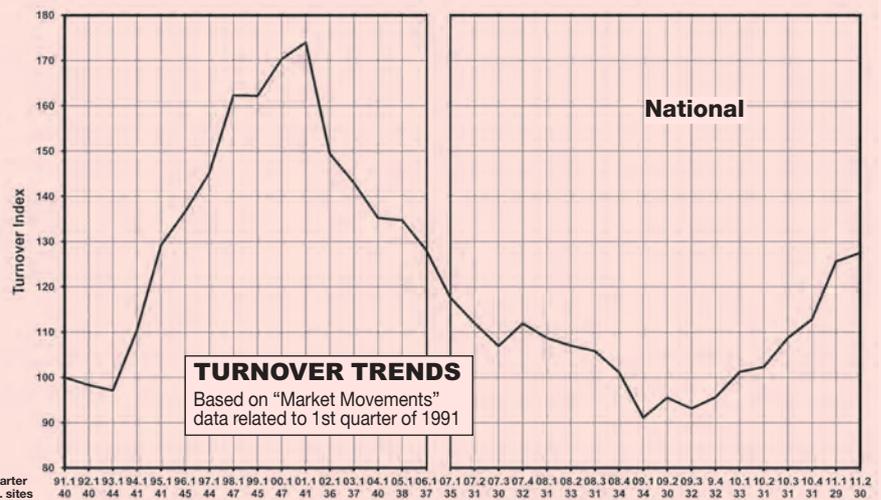
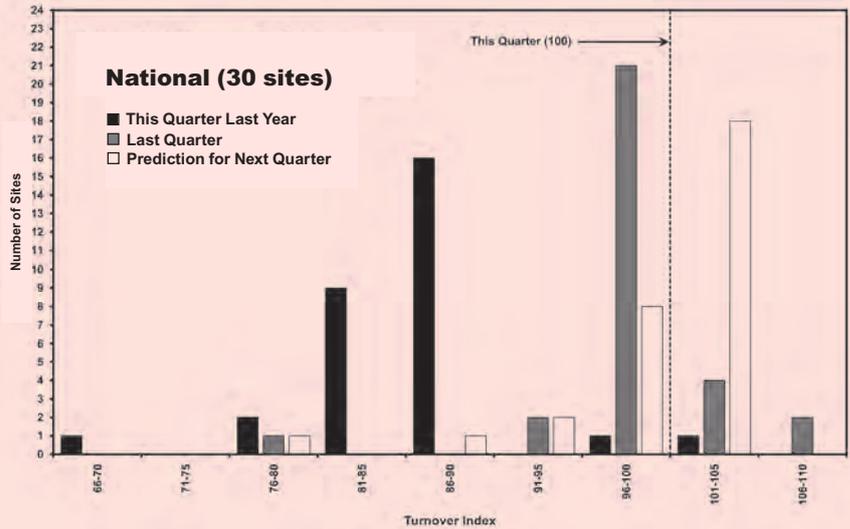
"THIS QUARTER" =

**1 APRIL –
30 JUNE 2011**

= TURNOVER INDEX 100

**OVERALL ANALYSIS
(30 SITES)**

	Mean index
This quarter last year	85.8
Last quarter	98.5
Predicted next quarter	100.0



capacity, tighter quality requirements, etc. During 2006, an opportunity arose to acquire Bowmic Heat Treatment, a long-established Leicestershire company. This was quite a turnaround for HTN; after many years of removing salt baths, it now found itself in the position of needing to install them to accommodate the *Tufftride* process that the business had now gained. The Bowmic acquisition also introduced HTN to Super Systems furnace controls. So impressed with this technology, HTN upgraded all of its sealed-quench furnaces to SSi systems, an investment continued plant-wide with the addition of data loggers. Combined with the recent

purchase of a range of new hardness testers, these innovations have put HTN in an excellent position in its quest to advance quality standards. The company is working presently towards seeking accreditation to TS 16949 / AIAG CQI-9, which it aims to be in a position to apply for early next year. The final piece of the jigsaw has been the significant investment in a new computer system that is being installed currently. This could well be of interest to other heat treaters as the specialised software will be the first installation of its kind in the UK*.

*Provisionally scheduled to be the subject of a future Hotline article.

**Please send items for December's
Hotline 126 to: mail@chta.co.uk
Deadline: November 21st**