

# Export Experiences - Alun Christopher



*Alun Christopher*

I joined Crabtree as their export manager in 1980 working for Derek Beck who was the company's export manager but had recently been promoted to the position of sales director responsible for both export and UK sales.

Here are just a few of my many personal recollections of being on the road and in the air for the company.....

Crabtree, was no different to any other British manufacturer, when the question was asked, " what do those individuals do in the export department?". The response was, "their office is at the end of the corridor, they travel around the world at the company's expense, giving the products away!!"

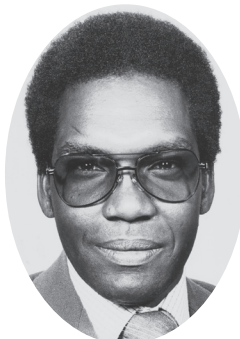
The administrative tools of an export department have changed significantly over the past decades. Only just over thirty years ago, communication with the outside world was through either a telex message, clicking away, a broadcast message, or, though an international phone call which needed to be booked via the operator well in advance. Today, we have electronic emails, the internet, and phone calls through international direct dialling, "welcome changes".

Crabtree, has not only been known for premium quality products, it has been fortunate in having experienced internal and external members within its export operations. As export sales manager, the saying "any captain of a team, is only as good as the supporting team players" certainly applies. Two of those players from the "engine room" of sales, were Mike Zeinkovicz, (from Wolverhampton), Merlyn Norville, (from Barbados ), and from administration, Karen Taylor, who still is heading up the administration team.

Historically over the years, Crabtree became a well known brand, in markets that had a commonwealth connection, in Africa, the Middle East and South East Asia. British standards became the norm for electrical installations, and both the public and private sectors, accepted that Crabtree wiring accessories and circuit protection were to be written into project specification. This development led to the need of appointing locally based stocking distributors.

The product groups taken to market by the export sales team, were from standard production output, no products were made specifically for an export market, quote from the operations director in the mid 1980's, "if the products are sold in Cardiff or Carlisle, they are good enough for Cairo or Calcutta".

Again, Crabtree over the years have appointed loyal distributors in their major markets, and many of them are still trading partners with Crabtree today. Two of the longest serving distributors Crabtree have are in Kuwait, through Dakheel Aljasser,



*Merlyn Norville*



*Mike Zeinkovicz*



*Karen Taylor*

and B.M.T.C. in the United Arab Emirates. Both of these establishments are similar in their market approach, they both have sales engineers taking responsibility for specification projects, and sales teams looking after the trading sector.

Today, the Middle East is over subscribed with hotel accommodation, not the case if you only go back 25 years. I remember on one Middle East trip in 1982, I had to stay one day longer in Kuwait to finalise a business deal, therefore not able to take up my hotel reservation in Dubai. When I eventually arrived in Dubai 36 hours late, my room had been cancelled, to be told, “our hotel is overbooked by 50 %, you have arrived late, the best we can do is to offer you a room share, with 5 other businessmen!!“. Limited supply and huge demand, meant I shared with, two Americans, an Italian, a German, a Russian and myself “The Welshman“. To avoid speculation, along with three of them, I slept on the floor with what the hotel called “a mattress“?.

During the decades of the 80’s and 90’s, Crabtree quite rightly, had a reputation for producing products of a high quality. Within the Middle East region, we were always asked, “made in Englaize“, which translated means “Made in England“, which was a major sales plus.

The same two decades, saw significant growth in the infrastructure, and with wealth at their disposal, the majority of projects had metal plate accessories specified. Export accounted for 90 % of Capital metal plate sales.

Highly polished chrome (HPC), was a popular finish, especially in Kuwait. In Kuwait, the installation practice was to position sockets, three feet from ground level, therefore, HPC grew as a popular finish allowing the Kuwaiti nationals to use them as mirrors, as they adjusted their head wear, whilst sitting down.

Prior to the first gulf war in 1990, Crabtree was a major supplier to Iraq, procured by the state buying organisation, Iraqi Trading. Crabtree supplied Capital moulded accessories and C50 mcb’s and distribution boards, with annual contracts valued in millions of pounds. To achieve the opportunity to supply the state buying organisation, was a laborious drawn out procedure, but when you reflect back, we had an enjoyable time. Firstly, we would await a “telex broadcast message“, always sent in July of every year, outlining volumes and product description. In turn we would calculate the transportation loading, by pallets, for despatch by truck, overland via Turkey to Baghdad with our quotation returned also by telex by the end of August. We would await our invitation to exhibit in the British pavilion, at the “Baghdad International Trade Fair“ in November each year.

At this point, Mike Zeinkovicz and I would go to Baghdad, and as the trade fair was a 15 day public event, both Mike and I were confronted by school kids daily, “Mister, any catalogues and merchandising to give away?“ During that 15 days, we would be called to a sales meeting at the state buying office, in front of a government committee, to discuss both technical and commercial issues outlined in our quotation, this would last around two hours. Every year the chairman of the committee would wind up the meeting with, “thank you for attending our trade fair, we will send a telex to Crabtree if you are successful with your tender“.

In December we would receive our “telex broadcast“, advising us of the value of our contract, which would run over nine monthly despatches.

Now the fun starts, it was not the producing and loading of the contract, it was the difficulties of truck transport, via Turkey. There was regular ambushing of trucks around

the borders between Iraq and Turkey during that time, and we lost a considerable amount of consignments before we successfully completed an annual contract.

During the supply term of an annual contract, it was the only time that our manufacturing colleagues at Lincoln Works were happy, at least we could in-put accurately into a manufacturing forecast!!

Another long standing memory that will remain with me, was the Nigerian customers who would visit us at Lincoln Works and who would have various currencies, carried in plastic carrier bags, wishing to purchase product. We would empty the bags on the desk, count from U.S. Dollars, French Francs, German Marks, British Pounds, and with the assistance of accounts department and the buyer, agreement would be reached, as to the final amount in sterling. Then the “haggling” would start, and without exception, the Nigerians would always say, “my brother, you are being unfair, please try to do better on that price!!”

In the late 1980's I recall we held a product launch in conjunction with our main distributor in Ghana. On the evening of the launch in Accra, I was pleasantly surprised to find that we had 182 signatures in the attendance book, and I said to our distributor, “well done for getting such a good turnout”. Then the smile was knocked off my face, when he replied, “as food produce has risen in price, most of the attendees are here for the buffet “ .

Crabtree were also complimented for their production of technical publications, on the wiring regulations, benefits of circuit protection against fuses, and international specification on motor control gear. These were made available to technical colleges in our export markets, those apprentices at the time, are today's engineers . Even today, Crabtree export customers ask for copies, which were known as, “the Crabtree green books “ .

In the 1980's, and up until today, certain export markets appointed independent pre-shipment inspection companies, on the principle that they could save on spend of foreign exchange. Their role was to check on 3 issues, Price – Quality – Quantity. The export administration team encountered delays and frustration in the early days as this requirement was implemented. Before a consignment could be packed, Crabtree had to call in an inspector to the warehouse, who checked for correct price, product compliance and quantity, and then a clean report of findings would be issued, and was included with the customer documentation. “ Well done the export admin team “

Crabtree have always been successful in servicing its export customers and was known for “products of premium quality“ riding the highs and lows of international trade. As export sales manager for many a year, it was great being part of a team that pulled together. Even when I travel overseas today, it gives me satisfaction when the name of “Crabtree“ is held in such high regard. When I see that Lincoln brown surface tumbler switch still in operation”, that for me is confirmation

At the grand old age of 60 in 2001 I retired from full time employment with the company. Today, as a contractor to Electrium, I represent the companies interests in BEAMA (British Electrical and Allied Manufacturer's Association) Anti-Counterfeiting Working Group and assisting the U.A.E working group in identifying the source of manufacture of counterfeit products in South East Asia. Counterfeiting which has been a real problem for many years, has had an adverse affect in our export markets, and as an association, our brief is to locate these rogue manufacturers and close them down.



## Crabtree around the world.....



### OUR MAN IN CYPRUS

Crabtree are pleased to announce the appointment of a new distributor for the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus and Turkey. Mr Yilmaz Nasiboglu, the proprietor of Nasiboglu Limited is daily signed distributor agreement with Alun Christopher, Export Sales Manager of Crabtree. The signing of the agreement took place on the Crabtree Stand at the Electrex '90 Exhibition at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, which was a fitting setting to reflect the importance Crabtree placed on the occasion.

Mr Christopher said "The appointment of a new distributor in these markets demonstrates Crabtree's intention through continuing worldwide market penetration to seize every opportunity which presents itself".



### SKY'S THE LIMIT - Abu Dhabi

The tallest building ever to be constructed in Abu Dhabi uses Capital metal plate wiring accessories and Capital ceiling accessories throughout.

The Baynunah Tower is a 42 storey complex of luxury residential and commercial property, which is due for completion in January 1995.

The first five floors of the Tower comprise a car park and prestigious shopping mall, whilst the remaining floors offer luxury accommodation in apartments and penthouses. Baynunah Tower will also feature a roof top swimming pool and leisure facilities.



Inspecting progress on site:  
Keith Smith-Marketing Manager, Crabtree;  
Jeff Frost-Project Manager, Drake & Scull  
and Alun Christopher-Export Sales Manager, Crabtree



Baynunah Tower

### New International Standards seminars in Abu Dhabi & Dubai

Around 300 specifiers, ministry engineers, contractors and sub-stockists attended seminars recently at Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

The seminar entitled "Do Changing International Standards mean Changing Products?" (see page 7 for more details) was lead by Crabtree's Marketing Manager, Keith Smith; together with Export Sales Manager, Alun Christopher who discussed "Crabtree: Past and Present".



Pictured before the seminar at the Meridien Hotel, Abu Dhabi are (from 3rd left) Essam Al-Mazroei, Marketing Director; Bhaskar Iyer, Sales Manager; and Rashid Al-Mazroei, Managing Director; all from BMTTC, Crabtree's agent for the United Arab Emirates