

A new name in fruit storage and refrigeration

John Guest reports

One of John Haffenden's earliest memories is of helping his father Ken load fruit stores with bushel boxes of apples. It's a memory that now stretches back over 50 years and, after talking to the managing director of Freshcold about the best way to store top fruit, it's clear that he has been improving his knowledge ever since. "My dad worked for Norman Hunt and Sons, managing The Oaks Farm in Brenchley, and I used to love helping him. I'm not sure exactly how old I was at the time, but he died when I was 12, so it was a fair while back."

Losing his father at such a young age has clearly influenced John Haffenden's drive to achieve success. One of his favourite possessions is the magnificent cup presented to Ken Haffenden for winning the Paddock Wood Orchard Spraying Competition in 1960. John was fascinated by fruit and the challenge of keeping it at its best, and has become an expert in controlled atmosphere (CA) storage.

His fascination was matched by a desire to learn as much as he could about the subject and develop the skills that would allow him to turn an interest into a career, even if it meant staying poor for a year or two longer than his contemporaries. "I left school at 16 and took a job as an apprentice electrician," he recalled. "As soon as I qualified I started a second apprenticeship, this time as a refrigeration engineer, focusing on control panels and electrical systems. I was 19 and my mates all thought I was mad to take on another apprenticeship rather than earning real money."

His mates, of course, were wrong. After nine years of learning his trade with a specialist fruit storage company, John left at the age of 28 to set up his own business - Farm Refrigeration Ltd. Before long it was a well-established company with an enviable client list, and John's reputation was assured. Farm Refrigeration operated for 28 years until it was crippled by debt, but John wasn't one to let this stand in his way. Now back as Freshcold, he continues to deliver solutions to growers and packers and to come up with innovative ways of solving problems.



The Paddock Wood Orchard Spraying Competition trophy won by John's father, Ken Haffenden in 1960.



John Haffenden, managing director of Freshcold Ltd.



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Freshcold's focus is on helping companies find the best and most cost-effective way of keeping their fruit in top condition for longer – whether that's through designing or commissioning a whole new cold storage facility or simply providing advice. "It's great to be asked to take on a new turnkey project, and Freshcold has all the resources to do that, but sometimes growers just want a bit of guidance or advice on the best way to solve a specific problem or streamline a particular process," he said. "If a grower has a problem with a piece of equipment that no-one else has been able to solve, they just need to call and we'll be delighted to take on the challenge"

While John has clearly built up a reputation for solving problems that has seen his advice sought by many of the big names in fruit growing, he is equally keen to support smaller independent growers as they seek to reduce costs and improve their efficiency and profitability. "I have grown up with fruit and fruit growers, and I really enjoy working in this industry," he commented. "I enjoy the challenge of helping a local grower as much as I welcome the opportunity to design a bespoke project for one of the larger players in the industry."

Customers appreciate Freshcold's customer focus and attention to detail, as well as with the fact that the installation does what it needs to do. As Peter Chandler of Chandler & Dunn Ltd commented: "I was delighted with



Above and below: The refrigeration plant room at Chandler & Dunn Ltd.



the new refrigeration system installed by Freshcold. It did everything that I hoped it would and I have no hesitation in recommending John and his team."

John's background and skill-set also mean that he understands the systems he sells. As well as being able to recommend the best solution for any grower's requirements, FreshCold can modify systems or even design new pieces of equipment to meet a specific challenge or improve the way an installation works.

"Understanding how the technology works, what it does and how you can make it do the job more efficiently, means that we can talk to the grower about their particular circumstances and specify a system that does the job as cost-effectively as possible," he explained.

This knowledge allows FreshCold to support smaller

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John Haffenden's father Ken.

growers who are keen to keep older systems working as efficiently as possible and who don't have the resources to replace everything. "Some older stores just need a bit of 'TLC' to keep them working as efficiently as possible," he said. That approach is grounded in the fact that all Freshcold's systems are designed to deal with the needs of the grower involved. "We don't supply systems 'off the shelf', so we can just as easily use our experience to look after older stores as we can to design a completely new, state-of-the-art system." The aim is to get stores running as efficiently as possible, with a focus on cost-effectiveness, along with Freshcold's commitment to the environment and to creating systems that are as energy

efficient as possible, to reduce costs for the grower.

The company's most recent innovation is a chiller defrost system that saves energy and money by storing the heat created by the cooling process and then uses it to defrost the chillers when needed. "The coolers produce completely free heat and this system puts that heat to good use," said John. This system is included in the specification for work at Clock House Farm, at Coxheath near Maidstone, Kent, where Freshcold is replacing four 1950s cold stores with an efficient modern facility. Freshcold is carrying out the whole project, replacing the old brick stores with three 468-bin CA stores and one chilled air store for soft fruit and late-harvested apples, giving a total of 560 tonnes of efficient, low energy storage.

While John is never happier than when facing a challenge, he also has the skills, resources and expertise to deliver entire cold store complexes, from design through to project management and commissioning. "Freshcold can deliver a complete package to growers, dairy farmers and others with specialist refrigeration or CA requirements, but can also help growers to solve individual problems, update parts of their installation or modernise control systems," said John. "We aren't just about delivering an 'off-the-shelf' package. We want growers to talk to us about their needs so that we can work with them to come up with the right solution for their business, whether that's a small modification or something more fundamental." ◆