

## Roofers on a high

ROOF drainage specialist Fullflow has successfully completed the installation of a combined gravity and syphonic roof drainage system on the new Everest Community College in Basingstoke.

The Sheffield firm was approached by Hampshire County Council to design, manufacture and install a system that would overcome challenges posed by the complex roof design and be capable of draining more than six inches of rainfall an hour from a roof that is about half the size of a football pitch.

Recent projects involving Fullflow include London Heathrow Airport's fifth terminal, St Pancras Station, the new National Museum of Liverpool and Barajas Airport in Madrid which is one of the largest European construction projects of this decade.

## Keeping water out

GOVERNMENT has been accused of failing to learn the lessons of last year's floods, by Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire Chamber of Commerce.

The Chamber says it is concerned about high level claims that defences against surface water flood risk are "unclear and chaotic", with local authorities, water companies and the Government still unsure of how to co-operate when it comes to dealing with flooding.

Chamber chief executive George Cowcher said: "Some of our businesses have only recently got back on their feet this year. We need local strategies, especially in the highest risk areas, that involve business and draw from the lessons learnt last summer. And the system must be simpler - there are too many bodies with different responsibilities for flood control."

## All spick and span

POWERMINSTER Gleeson Services has launched a new estates management service in Sheffield for property developers, property managers, landlords, tenants and owners.

The service includes cleaning communal areas, planned maintenance, including maintenance of grounds and lifts, redecoration, financial management and emergency response.

## Hall's £2m new look

WHITLEY Hall Hotel has been officially reopened by the High Sheriff of South Yorkshire, Giles Bloomer, following a £2 million refurbishment.

The hall itself dates back to the Elizabethan era and it is claimed that Mary Queen of Scots once stayed there.

Following the refurbishment, the hotel has increased the number of bedrooms from 20 to 33 and doubled the size of its conference facilities.

# 'Biggest blacksmith' still forging ahead

Company that traces its roots back 225 years expanding rapidly with new machinery and more workers

By Robert Rae

NOT a year goes by without new expansion at Sheffield-based Independent Forgings and Alloys. The Wadsley Bridge company, which lays claim to being the world's biggest blacksmith and can trace its history back 225 years, has grown rapidly since it was created through a £2 million management buy-in less than seven years ago.

Back then, the former Doncasters plc open-die forging division had just 30 employees - with an average age of 51 - and only one piece of working kit, a 1,500 tonne press.

Today it employs 126 people - with an average age of 43 - at its Victoria Forge, off Penistone Road, and in addition to that press boasts a GFM rotary forge, one and seven-tonne forging hammers, 10 and 60-tonne ring rolling machines, expanded heat treatment facilities and upgraded stocking, testing and marking facilities.

Less than two years ago IFA launched a new business, IFATech, which employs 14 people in Ecclesfield, producing machined components, welded tooling and extruded products.

Only last year IFA became the first UK company to install a new forge for a quarter of a century - and it had to fight back after being flooded to a depth of five feet in some places.

Now IFA is investing in two massive new furnaces capable of heating up to 50 tonnes of steel at a time, compared with the 15-tonne capacity of existing furnaces. It is expanding its No 2 Forge and installing what is believed to be the biggest single-axis ring mill in the UK.

The new investment in furnaces has been spurred by the demand for longer bars with bigger diameters from IFA's hire work customers - an ever-growing area of business which was once wrongly written off by industry pundits.

Adding the 330-tonne, purpose-built ring mill, with a dedicated furnace, to the 60-tonne and 10-tonne mills will double the diameter of the rings IFA can produce.

It will also boost the tonnage of smaller rings the company makes.

Installing the furnaces and ring mill means a major re-organisation at the firm, moving some massive pieces of kit to create an ideal production flow.

But IFA is taking that in its stride, having ignored conventional wisdom and developed its own maintenance and plant-building capacity.

The company reckons refurbishing old equipment or buying new and installing itself has cut the amount it has had to spend by a half.

What's more, moving maintenance in-house has enabled it to achieve 96 to 99 per cent plant availability - and that is vital to be able to offer the fast turnaround and guaranteed service that hire work customers are seeking.

## Flexibility the key to getting product right

A COMBINATION of flexibility and supportive financiers has underpinned the success of Independent Forgings and Alloys.

"We are a small management team and we can decide our own fate," says Martin Burnham, who has worked for British, US and German companies in the specialist metals and forging industries stretching back over 30 years.

"If we try something and we don't like it, we are not averse to changing the decision or the direction or modifying the project.

"We have had very supportive banks - Barclays and GE

have done very well for us - and we have worked very closely with Grant Thornton and Yorkshire Fund Managers.

"Yorkshire Forward has been very supportive and the South Yorkshire Investment Fund have helped us. Funding has been very effective in keeping the momentum going and allowing us to explore opportunities."

Mr Burnham also puts part of the success down to choosing the right funders by looking for people who were genuinely interested in the business itself as well as what he and his colleagues had to say about their plans.

## PROFILE Business

### Company:

Independent Forgings and Alloys

### Address:

Penistone Road, Wadsley Bridge, Sheffield



▲ Moving the metal: Driver Mark Woodhouse manoeuvres a huge hot piece of metal with towards the 1500-tonne open-die press with a giant machine

Pictures by Barry Richardson



▲ On the move: White-hot metal is moved at a safe distance by one operator



▲ Easy does it: A huge piece of metal is carefully positioned on to the press



▲ Ring culture: 'We can decide our own fate,' says IFA chief Martin Burnham

## £2m lost sales, but recovery from floods

FLOODING could have cost Independent Forgings and Alloys up to £2 million in lost sales.

But what has been worrying company chief Martin Burnham is that the detritus the floods brought with them has reduced the depth of the Don from eight feet to eight inches where it passes the company's plant.

Mr Burnham is full of praise for the way the company's workforce pulled together to get the company up and running,

plus the response from its insurers.

"We were inundated with water coming down Liversey Street and the access road to the factory

"It was highly unexpected and we cannot figure out how it happened," he says.

The depth of the water ranged from two to five feet, yet the company managed to rebuild and recalibrate its furnaces within a couple of days, by which time its hammers were up and running again.

The company's 1,500-tonne press was back in action after two weeks, but it was six weeks before IFA's GFM rotary forge was producing again - and the company did take the opportunity to upgrade some of its facilities.

"Our insurers have been excellent. When the insurance came up for renewal it was only two per cent above the previous year's premium - but we did save them a lot of money by using our own labour," says Mr Burnham.



▲ Skilled manpower: Two men operating the ring drop-hammer forge at IFA