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COVERING BEESTON, CHILWELL,
ATTENBOROUGH, TON and BRAMCOTE

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Local telecoms company tops the nation's export list *by the Editor*

TO local people reading one of the country's foremost national Sunday newspapers on May 8, the description of a local "bespoke electronic contract manufacturing specialist" may not have been instantly recognisable. The company had achieved national recognition as it came from nowhere to top the polls as Britain's fastest growing privately owned company in export sales.

The company, SMS Electronics, was listed as No 1 in the Sunday Times HSBC International Track 100 league table on May 8, 2011. Growth in international sales had increased by 418 percent over the past two years – and it is based on what was once the Ericssons/Plessey telecoms manufacturing site in Beeston Rylands. A number of SMS employees have worked on the same site, now part of the Beeston Business Park, for almost 40 years.

SMS Electronics came about as the result of a management buy-out (MBO) when Siemens, the German manufacturing conglomerate, decided to rationalise the company and reduce the number of manufacturing bases it operated around the world.

Its local manufacturing base, Siemens Manufacturing Services,

was based on the historic Ericssons/Plessey/GPT/Siemens/Marconi site at Beeston.

Managing director Mike Harby, who ran the Beeston operation, was faced with finding a multi-national contract manufacturer willing to add the business to its portfolio – or closing the factory.

When he discovered that the big contract manufacturers weren't interested in buying the small Beeston base, he suggested the MBO option to his team: Chris Hunt, Bob Bridges, John Wyles and Mark Goldby.

This would be a huge investment risk – statistics show that 50 percent of MBOs fail in the first year.

Six long months of talks with banks and investment advisors followed. Mike Harby's team ultimately bought the business for themselves in 2002 for an undisclosed sum. Each of the directors took a 20 percent stake.

Bob Bridges, Supply Chain Director, explained: "As we discussed the risk we would be taking if we went down the MBO route, keeping our people in employment was foremost in our minds.

"From a local perspective, we

had a dedicated workforce at our fingertips that was highly skilled in working with high-tech products. They were dedicated to the company and the support they provided us with during the tough period whilst talks continued was nothing short of phenomenal.

"As a result, we decided to go ahead with the MBO and concentrate our efforts on the contract manufacture of high-tech products that needed the attention of highly-skilled staff."

One of the key areas for SMS Electronics is its flexibility to manufacture innovative and complex products. This highly specialised capability has proved critical to the company's success.

However, the rise to an increase in export sales of 418 percent hasn't produced a straight-line graph.

Whilst the company has benefited hugely from circumstances surrounding the increase in demand for video-conferencing products, the recession still hit hard and overseas sales accounted for just three percent of turnover in 2008. Employees agreed to take a pay cut that year to help the company's finances.

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'Morally corrupt' comes in different shapes and forms

PAUL Berrington, owner of the 'Good as New 2' second hand goods shop on High Road, Chilwell, was sentenced to prison at Derby Crown Court after it emerged that he had groomed and sexually abused an 11 year-old customer.

This is the same shop owner that was the subject of protestations by parents and local residents a few years back. Parents and local residents thought Mr Berrington was morally irresponsible to display replica knives and guns in the shop window where they could attract schoolchildren passing by on their way to school. Parents wanted Berrington to adopt a more responsible attitude and move the weapons to the back of the shop. They signed petitions and lobbied the MP.

The knives remain at the front of the Chilwell shop window.

Paul Berrington is in prison, having been tried and sentenced for sexual offences.

On May 9, Berrington, aged 56, was sent to jail for 10 years after Derby Crown Court was told about a "sickening catalogue of abuse."

The court heard how Berrington had admitted to his social worker in the 1990s that he was attracted

by the vulnerability of young girls, deliberately monitoring and targeting one of them, and that her age was irrelevant to him.

He began grooming a young girl who had first gone into the shop at the age of eight, identifying her as an 'ideal target' and began sexually abusing her when she was 11. He molested another girl of a similar age.

In court, the prosecutor said that Berrington had made a sexually explicit tape, which he destroyed when the police began to question him. The girl went on to become a prostitute and to take drugs, with Berrington later paying her for sex.

The court also heard how Berrington had been convicted in 1989 of a sexual offence relating to two other young girls.

Berrington, of Sandiacre, was found guilty on 11 counts of indecent assault and one charge of making an indecent video. The offences were committed in the 1990s.

As part of his sentence, Berrington, who also owns 'Good as New' in Long Eaton, was placed on the sex offenders' register for life.



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