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Refrigeration Installation ❧

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and Service

Detailed planning and careful project management by Page Associates has allowed International Controlled Atmospheres Ltd. (ICA) to build an impressive new cold store and packing facility at the F G Pierce and Sons site at Orchard Place Farm, Wrotham Heath.

Page Associates ensured that the 25,000 sq ft building stayed within the development envelope of the existing farm buildings and yard in order to avoid contravening green belt regulations. Architects D C Hudson and Partners of Maidstone obtained planning permission for the scheme, which also benefited from the relationship that farmer William Pierce has built up with his neighbours over the years.

“No-one has ever objected to any of the plans we have submitted for new buildings here at Orchard Place Farm,” he commented. “I am sure that is because we make sure local people know what we want to do and why, we talk to anyone who might be affected and we make sure the buildings are planned as sensitively as possible.”

Another close relationship, this time between William and John Wills, the former chairman of Paddock Wood-based cold store specialists ICA, was also brought into focus at the opening of the building.

John’s widow, Heather, unveiled a plaque naming the new cold store The John Wills Building at its opening in March.

“I have known John for many years and he was part of the original discussions about a new building on this site,” explained William. “Although his sad death towards the end of last year meant he wasn’t here to see it completed, we felt it would be appropriate to name it after him and we were delighted that Heather agreed to unveil it, together with his son Andrew, who is managing director of ICA.

ICA have designed the new cold store

Project completed on time and on budget



around a state-of-the-art secondary refrigeration system using Hycool, an environmentally friendly product that offers huge benefits in terms of running costs and short pull-down times.

The refrigeration and control equipment was installed by specialists Storage Technology Solutions Ltd, while the steel-frame construction was erected by Scorpion Buildings Ltd.

“additional 60 people now employed on the site”

The team of contractors rose to the challenge posed by the decision not just to site the new building within the existing envelope but to link it to the original dispatch building, which has now been given an extra, fifth, loading bay.

“The slope of the site, the planning constraints around the new cold store and pack house and the need to link the roof of that building into the roof of the existing building presented quite a task when it came to marrying everything up, but the

team tackled it quickly and easily and the project was completed on time and on budget,” explained Duncan Pierce from project managers Page Associates.

Linking the new building to the existing one has allowed tenant Richard Hochfeld to move its grape packing line from Faversham into a purpose-designed environment and join the rest of the company’s operation at Orchard Place Farm.

With an additional 60 people now employed on the site, Duncan believes the development is good news for the local and South East economy, something that he is certain planners at Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council also recognised.

“Although the constraints around the green belt meant this site had to be carefully planned and took nine months of negotiation, the planners were always willing to work with us and they were far-sighted enough to recognise that if we could come up with a sympathetic design for the site it would be good for the economy,” said Duncan Pierce.

Joining the two buildings into one may be good for the Richard Hochfeld operation

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F G PIERCE AND SONS: New cold store and packing facility

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but it presented many challenges for Page Associates' on-site project manager Neil Farrance, who had to maintain a chilled environment for the existing operation while making openings and connections in the building and occasionally turning

all the power off, all within the confines of a working farm.

"It was certainly a challenge, not least because we had to maintain access to the loading bays and the rest of the site while working nearby, but we managed to keep the existing operation going smoothly

right up to the changeover, which took place over a single weekend at the start of the year," he said.

The building, which includes new offices for Richard Hochfeld as well as the single large cold store and modern packing facilities, replaced a smaller 6,000 sq ft cold

store as well as part of the yard. The new facility means that the grapes can be kept chilled from the refrigerated lorries in which they arrive right through to their final destination on supermarket shelves.

"We worked closely with the company to make sure we could give them the facility they needed, but we have also taken care to ensure that the building can be used for other purposes if necessary in the future," explained William Pierce, who farms 650 acres at Orchard Place Farm, growing both cereals and strawberries.

"By working with Page Associates, ICA, the rest of the team and our tenants we have maximised the use of the space on the site and created an excellent result from what was a difficult area," he said.

The new cold store helps Richard Hochfeld meet the stringent audit and quality control requirements demanded by the supermarkets the company is supplying, often running 18 hours a day to keep up with demand.

The building is the latest in a number of phases of development at Orchard Place Farm, where William has been keen to diversify into other areas, including small business units, while continuing to run a busy and productive farm.

The family has been working the land on the site since grandfather William moved to Offham in 1890, more than 120 years ago. He bought the farm in 1911 but it wasn't until 1958 that his son Frederick set the

Neil Farrance, Duncan Pierce and William Pierce



business up as F G Pierce and Sons. Those sons are William and his brother Richard, who is Duncan Pierce's father.

Page Associates have project managed various phases of development at Orchard Place Farm since 1996. One of the biggest issues each time is to make sure that building work doesn't impact on the farming that remains F G Pierce and Sons' core business.

As well as Page Associates, D C Hudson and Partners, BDR (Civil and Structural Engineering) Ltd, ICA, STS and Scorpion Buildings, the £1.5 million building involved the groundworks division of the GSE Group and the skills of PJ Electrical Ltd. Work began last June and was designed to be sustainable as well as good for business.

As well as using Hycool for the refrigeration system, the building is designed so that all the rainwater run off is stored and used for irrigating the farm's 80 acres of strawberries. The reservoir at Orchard Place Farm recycles one million gallons of water a year in this way.

Waste heat from the compressor units in the refrigeration system is used to provide hot water throughout the building in another 'green' initiative of which William is proud. The farm won the Resource Effi-



Andrew and Heather Wills

ciency award in the millennium year Environment Awards for Kent Business.

While working with the environment is important to him, it is clear that William is also proud of the way he works with people. "I have always believed in building good relationships with people and companies such as ICA, Page Associates and Richard Hochfeld and those relationships prove their worth when projects like this come together so smoothly," said William.

"Naming the building after John Wills was in its own way a tribute to the fact that our relationship went beyond a purely business link and I was proud that we were able to do that."

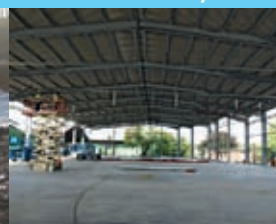


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We are pleased, as part of our continued involvement in the development of the food and farming industry in the South East, to have successfully delivered the new storage and packaging facility for F G Pierce and Sons Ltd.

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