

the Gazette

JULY 2026 | ISSUE 112

FOR PENSIONERS OF IMPERIAL TOBACCO

GEOFF'S LIFELONG LOVE OF THE GAME

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well-earned
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Six month results show the Group is delivering on performance and transformation.

ON TRACK AT END OF HALF YEAR

IMPERIAL BRANDS has made a positive start to implementing its 2030 strategy. Its half year results for the six months ended 31 March 2026 demonstrate that the company has delivered consistent operational and financial performance as well as making progress on its transformation.

"We continue to be confident"

In combustibles, robust pricing has continued to deliver low single-digit growth and market share is growing in all three next generation products categories (heated tobacco, vapour and oral). As a result, reported revenue is up 0.8% and the interim dividend per share has increased by 4.0%.

Chief Executive Lukas Paravicini said:



"Looking ahead to the second half, while tensions in the Middle East have led to a more uncertain macroeconomic environment, we continue to be confident of delivering a step-up in adjusted

operating profit growth, in line with our full year guidance."

Read the full statement at:

imperialbrandspc.com/investor-hub/half-year-results-2026

Tobacco and Vapes Act explained

A new law has been implemented banning the sale of tobacco or vape products to anyone born after 1 January 2009 in the UK.

The wide-ranging legislation, first tabled in 2023 under the previous government, passed on 29 April, becoming the Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026.

So what does it mean?

- From January 2027, anyone born on or after 1 January 2009 will never legally be able to buy tobacco in the UK. The legal age will increase every year,



permanently excluding this generation from tobacco sales.

- The generational ban applies to all forms of tobacco products, including cigarettes, heated tobacco, herbal smoking products and cigarette papers.
- The manufacturing and sale of snus, a tobacco based oral nicotine product, will be prohibited in the UK.
- Ministers can introduce future rules covering product standards, packaging, display, licensing and smoke- and vape-free environments through secondary legislation.
- New fines, retailer licensing, product registration requirements and stronger penalties for illicit products will be introduced, alongside expanded Trading Standards powers.

While the law has been passed, change will not happen overnight. Most of the new requirements will follow consultation and the Government will publish an implementation roadmap and guidance soon. A phased approach to implementation of much of the future regulation means that even prioritised measures will not be implemented until September 2027 at the earliest.

New blu Max 6000 range

Imperial Brands has launched blu Max 6000 in the UK. The new, refillable and rechargeable vape features an innovative dual power mode which allows consumers to increase or decrease the flavour intensity at the touch of a button.



Dave Lee retires as Financial Controller of the Pension Fund after nearly 50 years with Imperial.

NEW FACE JOINS THE PENSIONS TEAM

DAVE LEE has retired after nearly 50 years with the company, the last 22 of which have been spent as Financial Controller in the Pension Fund Office team.

He has handed the reins to Richard Harris, who will now be responsible for preparing the annual report and accounts, managing the year end audit, financial risk management, accounting for Fund investment activities and managing cashflow to ensure that funds are available to pay the monthly pensions.

"My mother told me that my destiny was set from birth as I was born in the John Player ward at Nottingham City Hospital!" said Dave, who joined John Player & Sons as a Trainee Cost Accountant in September 1977, working for George Ward.

This role included day release to study at Nottingham Trent Polytechnic and, after he qualified as an ACCA Accountant, Imperial centralised its Head Offices at the Hartcliffe site in Bristol and Dave was invited to apply for an accounting role.

Taken over

Here he reported on the Group's subsidiary companies which, at that time, were predominately UK-based but included Imperial Tobacco International Limited and a sawmill and tea/tobacco chest manufacturer in Malawi.

In 1986 Imperial was taken over by Hanson PLC and much streamlining followed over the next 10 years before the company floated on the UK Stock Exchange as Imperial Group PLC. During this time Dave prepared accounts for Imperial Tobacco Finance Ltd, which held Group debt and financial assets.

In 2004, he took a 12 month secondment as Financial Controller for the Pension Fund, replacing John Nelson-Smith, who took a similar secondment as Investor Relations Manager. Dave remained in this role until his retirement in May 2026.

"It is the people I have worked with that has made life extremely pleasurable during my



Richard Harris has taken over from Dave Lee on the Pension Fund team

48 and a half years at Imperial," said Dave.

"The time has flown by and experiencing different accounting roles has kept the work interesting. I am now looking forward to doing all the jobs around the house that have been 'parked' over the last 10 years and continuing going to many music concerts and watching the sport I enjoy."

Complex schemes

Richard Harris joins the Pension Fund Office from pensions consultancy firm Quantum Advisory, where he spent seven years specialising in complex schemes, working alongside external auditors.

"While not as impressive as Dave's tenure, I have specialised in pensions for close to a decade and hope to continue his legacy by providing dependable advice, to allow the Trustees to continue making informed, member-focused decisions," said Richard, who lives in Newport and also previously worked for global accountancy firm RSM.

Head of UK Pensions Robert Egginton added: "Dave has had a remarkable career with the company and we will all miss his humour and friendship as he enters into his well-deserved retirement. Richard is a very capable replacement and is fast becoming an integral member of the team." 

It's easy to keep in touch

Finding out useful information about the Pension Fund or keeping in touch with the Pensions Office has never been easier via the Fund's website at myimperialpension.com

News about the Fund, how to spot a pensions scam or how to report a death can all be found on the website. It is also home to a library of documents such as annual reports, actuarial valuations and back issues of the Gazette.

The quickest and easiest way to reach a member of the Pensions Office team is by email or telephone. However, if your bank or address details have changed, we will need the new information provided in writing, accompanied by your signature so we can ensure the alteration is genuine and that no mistakes are made.

We are also encouraging members to opt-in to receive generic communication electronically. This will allow us to provide you with information in a fast, convenient and environmentally friendly way.

This would only relate to standard pension news updates and Trustee communications such as the Gazette, Pension Fund Report and bulk Fund mailings: you would continue to receive all personal correspondence such as pension payslips and pension increase letters by post.

To opt-in and have access to the latest Fund news on your mobile phone, tablet or computer, please email the Pensions Office with 'opt-in to electronic communications' in the subject line.

 pension.enquiries@uk.imptob.com  0117 953 0000

 Imperial Tobacco Pension Fund, PO Box 3242, Winterstoke Road, Bristol BS3 9GY

 myimperialpension.com

SPOTLIGHT ON GMP EQUALISATION



Pension schemes are required by law to address historical inequalities for men and women linked to Guaranteed Minimum Pensions (GMP). To help explain what this means for members, **Robert Egginton**, Head of UK Pensions, answers some of the most common questions about the GMP equalisation process and its impact on pension benefits.

To start, it's never a bad time to remind members about being scam aware. If you are approached by a claims management company, who will likely charge a fee, please contact the Pension Fund Office. Every member has been written to about GMP Equalisation and what it means for them.

What is GMP?

GMP stands for Guaranteed Minimum Pension, which relates to a period between 6 April 1978 and 5 April 1997, when pension schemes could be contracted out of the earnings related part of the State Pension.

If you were an employee member of the Fund during this time, part of your pension may include GMP benefits.

Because the Fund was contracted out, you and your employer paid lower National Insurance contributions, with the requirement that the Fund would provide pension benefits broadly equivalent to those you would otherwise have earned at the time through the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS).

What is GMP equalisation?

The GMP calculation is set out in legislation and is different for men and women, which can lead to unequal overall pensions for members. Furthermore, GMP is payable from 60 for women and 65 for men.

GMP equalisation is the work all UK Defined Benefit (DB) pension funds like ours have to do to address any inequalities arising from GMPs built up between 17 May 1990 and 5 April 1997 for men and women.

Since 17 May 1990, following a European Court of Justice ruling, it has



Robert
Egginton

been a legal requirement to calculate pension benefits equally and the Fund made changes to address this.

At that time it was unclear if this requirement applied to GMPs but, in 2018, the UK High Court ruled that benefit equality did apply to GMPs.

What is GMP conversion?

GMP conversion is the method of implementing GMP equalisation that the Trustee of the Fund has chosen to deal with any inequalities.

It allows the Trustee, with the consent of the Company, to make a one-off adjustment to benefits, replacing GMP with other non-GMP benefits in the Fund while removing any gender-based inequalities arising as a result of GMP built up between 1990 and 1997.

However, before these proposed changes are made, the Trustee is required to consult with affected members and this process is underway.

“GMP equalisation will not reduce your pension income, but you could see an increase.”

Are all Fund members affected?

No. GMP equalisation only affects members who built up GMP (or notional GMP) between 17 May 1990 and 5 April 1997.

When will I know if I am impacted?

The Trustee is dealing with GMP equalisation in phases due to the number of members impacted and the complexity of the equalisation and conversion calculations. The Trustee has written to all members to explain whether they are likely to be affected and, if so, which phase of the project they will be included in.

The Trustee will write to members again once the consultation process for phase 1 has been completed and the Trustee has considered responses received. It is anticipated that this will be no earlier than November 2026. Work on the later phases will begin in 2027.

What if I have more questions about GMP equalisation and conversion?

The Pensions Office has set up a dedicated helpline and email address to answer any questions or concerns from members:

☎ 0117 933 7298

✉ gmpenquiries@impbrands.com

JPS Lotus 79 voted most beautiful F1 car

The John Player Special brand is making headlines in Formula 1 news again – five decades after it first sponsored a team in the global motor sport.

The Lotus 79, which was also known as Black Beauty, was recently voted the most beautiful F1 car of all time by BBC Sport users. It topped a poll of 13 contenders, beating the likes of the Ferrari 641 and McLaren MP4/4 to claim the title.

Revolutionary 'ground-effect'

The car carried driver Mario Andretti and Team Lotus to the 1978 F1 World Championship and is considered one of the most successful and influential Lotus F1 cars in the team's history. Its

revolutionary 'ground-effect', first introduced on the Lotus 78, was perfected with the addition of long narrow skirts that created a seal between the car and track, and transformed F1 car design.

From 1972 to 1979, Team Lotus cars sported the iconic black and gold livery of John Player Special – the company's bestselling cigarette brand at the time – and became one of the most recognisable colour schemes in motorsport history.

Imperial's partnership with Lotus was the first commercial sponsorship in the sport. It began in 1968 when Lotus founder Colin Chapman entered into a sponsorship deal that saw the team's cars carrying the red, white and gold of its Player's Gold Leaf brand.



Mario Andretti sealing the 1978 F1 World Championship in his JPS-branded Lotus 79 at the Dutch Grand Prix, beating his team mate Ronnie Peterson into second place

©Sutton Motorsports/ZUMA Press Stock Photo – Alamy

NOTICEBOARD

Diary dates

- ◆ This year marks 40 years since the closure of the former Imperial Group PLC Head Office. The annual reunion will take place at Knowle Golf Club, Bristol, on Thursday 15 October and anyone with photographs or memorabilia they would like to share is encouraged to bring them along on the day or send to organiser Mike Paige ahead of the event. Mike will send out invitations with further details nearer the time.
- ◆ The Player's Garage and Motor Vehicle Repair reunion will take place on Monday 7 December from 2.30pm at the Bell Inn, Nottingham. Contact Phil Bradley for more information. New faces always welcome.
- ◆ The Player's Christmas reunion, the second get together of the year, will be held on Wednesday 9 December from 3.30pm at The Stage pub, Wollaton Street, Nottingham NG1 5FE. Contact Dave Clay.

IMPAC is a pensioners' organisation which has been supporting Imperial Pension Fund members for over 30 years.

Website: www.impac.org.uk

IMPAC members' helpline:
email: impacmembers@outlook.com or write to IMPAC, PO Box 10486, Oxton, Southwell NG24 9NL

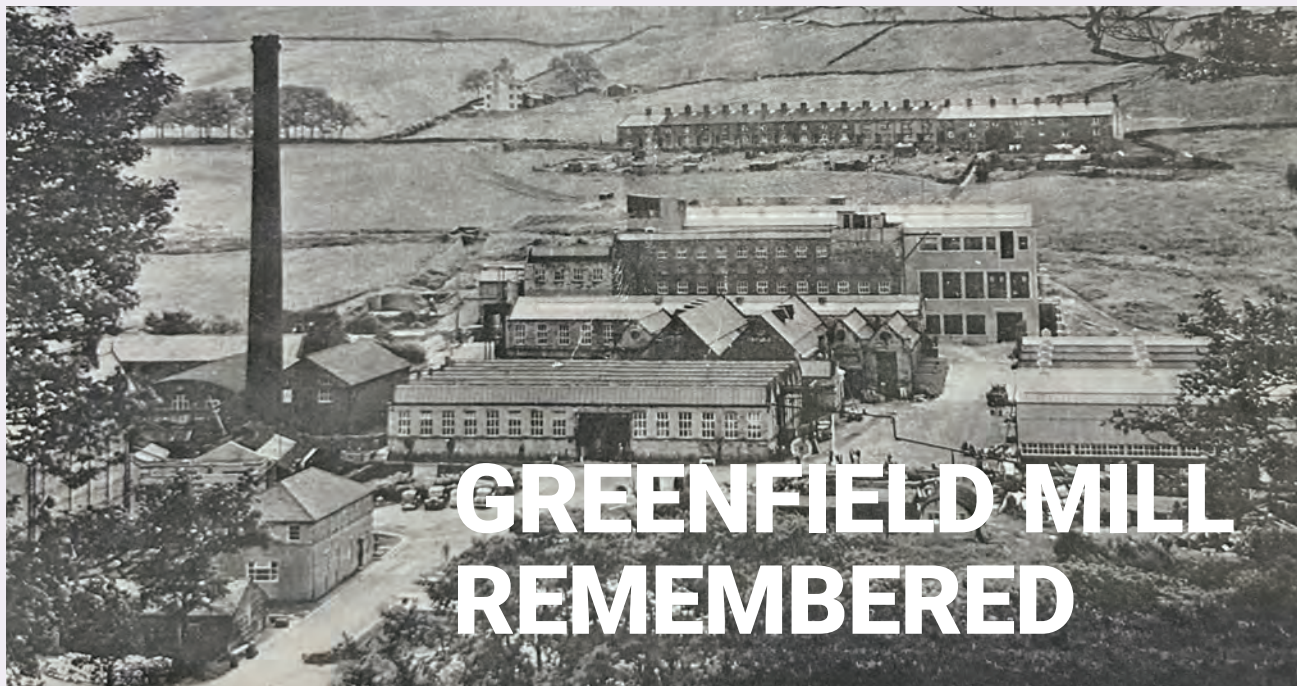
For membership queries
IMPAC membership agency (to update membership details only): email: impac@dmb.org.uk; phone: 01438 840247 or write to: IMPAC, c/o DMB, 18a Reynards Road, Welwyn, Herts AL6 9TP.

New members welcome
Any Imperial pensioner who would like to join IMPAC should contact the helpline by email at: impacmembers@outlook.com

Membership is free for the first 12 months.



In its heyday, Greenfield Paper Mill in Lancashire employed some 1,000 people producing cigarette paper, waxed paper for wrapping tobacco and all kinds of tissue.



IT IS 25 years since the closure of Robert Fletcher & Son's Greenfield Paper Mill in Oldham, Lancashire, which, at its peak, employed around 1,000 people.

The mill, which once produced wool, became a paper mill in 1921 when it was acquired by Robert Fletcher & Son to help meet domestic supply demands for cigarette paper, waxed paper for wrapping tobacco and tissues of all kinds. It provided employment for local people for 80 years until it ceased operations in July 2001.

Greenfield was the second site bought by Robert Fletcher & Son, which traces its origins to 1859, when it took over operations at Stoneclough Mill near Bolton and established itself as a leading manufacturer of tissues and fine Bible papers.

A gap in the market

Prior to 1914, France held a near-monopoly on the production of paper for cigarettes but the First World War created a gap in the market, which Fletcher's capitalised on.

Imperial placed its first contracts with Fletcher's that year, which led to the company expanding its production capabilities – including buying the Greenfield site.

Robert Fletcher & Son was bought by Imperial in 1935, becoming a wholly-owned subsidiary, and supplied all of the company's cigarette paper needs. By the late 1970s, annual production had reached 35,000 tonnes, serving overseas markets such as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Pakistan as well as Europe.

In 1986 the company was sold by

▲ The origins of Greenfield Paper Mill, which was owned by Imperial from 1935 until 1986, can be traced back to the late 1700s, when it operated as a woollen mill before becoming a paper mill in 1921

Imperial, ending over 100 years of production under the Fletcher & Sons brand. As demand for its products waned, Stoneclough Mill was closed in 2000 and the Greenfield site faced the same fate a year later.

The mill at Greenfield stood empty for more than two decades until demolition began in October 2023, and plans for redevelopment are now in place. **G**

Did you work for Robert Fletcher & Son? Do you have memories or stories to share? Please write to the editor (details on the back page).

Competitors brave the heat at society's golf day

Current and former Imperial employees and keen golfers braved temperatures of more than 30 degrees centigrade to take part in this year's Bristol Classic Golf Society golf day.

The annual event was held at the Oake Manor Golf Club near Taunton, Somerset, and saw Business Information Manager David Jones claim The Golf Challenge Cup with a score of 38 Stableford points, 2 under par. He was nine points ahead of Jon House, who is Head of Global Fiscal/Excise Strategy, in second place and former Investor Relations Manager John Nelson-Smith in third.

It was the 102nd time the 15-inch-high trophy has been presented, which is inscribed: *The Golf Challenge Cup was*



presented to the Staff of WD & HO Wills in May 1924 for Annual Competition.

The Bristol Classic Golf Society developed from the cup, offering an opportunity for former colleagues to keep in touch and enjoy some friendly competitive golf at its annual event which is held at different courses throughout the region.

This year's golf day was again organised by Pension Fund Financial Controller Dave Lee, who has been involved with the society for the last 22 years. Following Dave's retirement in May (see page 3), Jon House and Andries Smal, Senior Manager Leaf Sustainability, are keen to take over and more details will follow in a future issue of the Gazette.



DONATIONS AT REUNION IN LINDA'S MEMORY

THERE WAS another great turnout for the Player's summer reunion, with around 120 friends and

former colleagues attending the event to catch-up and reminisce about their days working for the company.

It was again organised by former engineering mechanic Dave Clay (inset) and was held at The Stage pub in Nottingham, which has been the regular venue for the summer and Christmas get-togethers for many years.



The pub always organises a free buffet, with donations collected for a chosen charity.

Smiling faces

This time £385 was raised for Blood Cancer UK in memory of Dave's wife, Linda, who died in December last year. The charity offers support and help to anyone affected by blood cancers such as leukaemia and lymphoma. "It was great to see so many smiling faces, even though some of our regulars were away on holiday," said Dave, who worked for

the company for 37 years from 1969 until 2006. "I would like to thank everyone who gave to the charity collection. With the other fundraising I have done this year, it brings the total raised for Blood Cancer UK to almost £2,300 in Linda's memory."

The Player's events are promoted through *Imperial Tobacco...Past and Present*, a private Facebook group that has over 2,100 members and was set up to allow former colleagues to keep in touch.

The group's Christmas reunion will be held on Wednesday 9 December from 3:30pm at the same venue. **G**



- 1** Andy Hart, Daryl Marsh, Mags O'Rourke, Dave Lowater, Yvonne Shanks, Kev Cresswell
- 2** Margaret Clark, Phil Dobson
- 3** David Shelton, Mick Eaton, Steve Sharpe
- 4** Alf Stanslaus, Denver Henriques, Jane Smithurst, Darryl Karim
- 5** Colleen Sufrini, Phil Dobson, Barry Garment, Graham Heelis
- 6** Phil Hickling, Graham Morley, Chris Elliot



Geoff Stanley managed to pursue his football passion alongside a long career with Imperial



IMPERIAL'S ULTIMATE TEAM PLAYER

When **Geoff Stanley** was plucked out of school and signed to Birmingham City Football Club at the age of 15, he never imagined that 20 years later he would be standing on the pitch at Wembley as a coach – or that he would somehow juggle his football career alongside more than 50 years of working with Imperial.

Born and raised in Wolverhampton in 1947, **Geoff Stanley's** first ambition was to make it as a professional footballer, a path that began when he was signed by Birmingham City Football Club.

DURING HIS three years with the club's youth team as an apprentice professional – now known as an academy player – Geoff played left back in matches against the youth sides of clubs such as Aston Villa, West Bromwich Albion and Nottingham Forest, as well as international clubs.

"The highlight of my early football career was when we travelled to Strasbourg, France, to play against Inter Milan's youth team, and I scored a goal when the game had gone to penalties," said Geoff, who lives in Worcester with his wife Kim.

When he turned 18, Geoff was released by the club and decided to pursue a career in semi-professional football, first signing with Hednesford Town FC in Cannock, where he earned £8 per week (around £140 today) plus match bonuses.

Encouraged to apply

Alongside pursuing his passion for the sport, he spent three years working as a van salesman to boost his income, before moving into a sales rep role with Greenshield Stamps for a further three.

A friend then encouraged him to apply for a role with John Player & Son's, and he was invited to attend an interview with Ron Tempest, Area Manager for the Midlands, who would later become his manager.

Geoff joined the company in July 1974 as a Merchandising Rep and, by this point, was juggling his growing career in sales with his semi-professional football career, training two nights a week and playing



▲ After a career spanning 50 years with the company, Geoff was presented with a trophy by his team to celebrate his long service and well-earned retirement. He received the award during a group meeting held last year in Knowle, West Midlands



▲ Geoff with a cartoon portraying his involvement with football and career with Imperial, which was presented to him on his 60th birthday

matches at the weekend.

But his commitment to football didn't affect his success at work as, three years later, he was promoted to Direct Accounts Rep, covering a wide area including the West Midlands, Worcestershire and Warwickshire.

West Midlands teams

"I really enjoyed developing good relationships with customers and going out on site visits," said Geoff. "I'm really big on loyalty, and it works both ways; the company looked after me and I worked hard in return."

Alongside his career with Imperial, Geoff continued his involvement with football, playing for a number of West Midlands based teams including Stourbridge FC, Tamworth FC and Dudley Town FC. He retired from playing in his early 30s and moved into coaching at Willenhall Town FC.

This led to another highlight of his sporting career which came in 1981 when Willenhall Town made it to the final of the FA Vase at Wembley Stadium, the national competition for non-league clubs.

"Sadly, we lost 3-2 after extra time to Whickham - a non-league team based in the north east - but even standing on the turf at Wembley as a coach was such a proud and memorable experience," said Geoff.

In 1984, one of Geoff's independent retail customers, Bobby Hope, who also

"...I'm grateful I was able to continue my involvement with football for so many years..."

played midfield for West Bromwich Albion, invited him to take part in an Albion All Stars charity match, which raised funds for local hospitals.

"I was a bit rusty, having not played football at that level for a number of years but it was a fantastic experience. Although, as a lifelong Wolverhampton

Wanderers supporter, it felt like a betrayal to play for the other side!" said Geoff, who enjoys attending Wolves games with his sons.

It was through Imperial that Geoff met his second wife, Kim, who worked in the sales office in Bristol between 1975 and 1989. Geoff regularly contacted the office, so they often spoke on the phone before eventually meeting in person at a work meeting and hitting it off. The couple married in 1992 and have three sons together; Jack, Joe and Harry, as well as a son, David, and daughter, Vicki, from Geoff's previous marriage.

Transferred

As the business restructured in the early 80s, Geoff transferred to WD & HO Wills and his role shifted away from independent retailers towards working with cash and carries and wholesalers across the Midlands.

His role also involved setting up promotional activity for new product

continued on next page

continued from page 9

launches and he arranged special rates for customers he had built strong relationships with over time.

"I'm still in touch with some of my former customers, including Jason Wouhra, owner of Lioncraft Wholesale, formerly East End Foods, who was awarded an OBE in 2017 for the work he has done on behalf of the industry," he said.

Geoff took voluntary redundancy in 2009, but after six weeks away from work, realised that he wasn't quite ready for retirement, so he got in touch with a former colleague in the National Accounts department to enquire about returning to work.

National client accounts

In May 2010 he rejoined the company in the Multiples Sector and, six months later, became a Business Development Executive (BDE), a role he held for the next 15 years.

As a BDE, he managed national client accounts such as Morrisons, Sainsbury's and One Stop, ensuring agreements between retailers and Imperial were carried out, and that the company's brands were well represented in stores. During his time in the role, he worked across a broad portfolio of brands and products ranging from pipe tobacco, cigarettes and Rizla, to next-generation products such as vapes and heated tobacco.

"The ways of working have changed

Geoff lives in Worcester with his wife Kim, who worked as a Supervisor in the Bristol Sales Office for 14 years

"I must have done something right because I survived 51 years with the company..."

quite drastically over the years," said Geoff. "Things like records of accounts were always handwritten with

a paper and pen; now it's all done using iPads.

"But I was always 100 per cent committed to the job and embraced the change as well as I could – I must have done something right because I survived 51 years with the company altogether!"

Geoff finally retired in July 2025, at the age of 78. Now almost a year in, he has been enjoying a slightly slower pace, catching up on jobs at home and in the garden and staying fit by walking, as well

as making plenty of time to watch football and cricket.

"I walk around five miles most days and I've been toying with the idea of joining a walking group. I want to make an effort to stay fit and healthy for as long as possible," he said. "I've also got five grandchildren, so babysitting duties keep me on my toes.

"I've had a long and rewarding career with Imperial, and I'm grateful I was able to continue my involvement with football for so many years alongside it." 

Geoff is keen to hear from any of his former colleagues and can be contacted by phone or email.



Man who met Sir Alex celebrates his hundredth

Ronald Oldfield, who worked for Imperial for almost 11 years, is celebrating his 100th birthday.

Ronnie was joined at the retirement home where he lives in Farnworth, Lancashire, by his nephew, John, great nephew and niece, David and Jenette, their families and friends to mark the occasion. He was also delighted to receive a congratulatory letter from His Majesty King Charles and Queen Camilla.

It has joined a certificate sent by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, marking the fact that Ronnie and his late wife, Dorothy's, 40th wedding anniversary coincided with the royal couple's 50th, in pride of place on his wall.

Imperial was the last of Ronnie's four employers and he enjoyed more than a decade with the company from 1967 until 1978.

He started in the then new building in Bolton on the conveyor belts transporting the tobacco to be processed as cigars and advanced to driving fork-lift and stacker trucks, which he much preferred.

Ronnie and Dorothy, who died in 2002, enjoyed cruising holidays; a particularly memorable one including meeting former footballer and manager Sir Alex Ferguson, who is best known for managing Manchester United from 1986 until 2013.

"Ronnie enjoyed saying that with Sir Alex's Scottish brogue and his broad Yorkshire accent, they hit it off famously!" said John. "After losing Dorothy he spent most of his time gardening, exercising and enjoying the communal atmosphere in the cul-de-sac in Mayfield Avenue, Farnworth. "However, a couple of years ago he realised he could no longer cope in his beloved family



▲ Ronnie Oldfield celebrating his 100th birthday with nephew, John

home, and moved to the Bungalow retirement home, where he has since enjoyed the deeply moving and affectionate care of the assistant manager and her wonderful staff."

Congratulations to the following Fund members who are also marking their 100th birthday:

- Roger Blake, who worked at Imperial Group Head Office for almost 40 years, from 1944 until 1983.
- Golden wonder pensioner Mary Evans, who worked for the company for 13 years from 1973 until 1986.

Glorious weather and walking for the Harry's

The Harry's enjoyed another memorable trip to Benidorm, with glorious weather allowing them to pursue their shared love of walking.

It was the 18th time the Player's walking group has visited the Spanish coastal resort, where they again stayed at the Hotel Calypso. "We were a little down on numbers this year due to illness, but those of us who did make it had a great time," said Dave Clay, who organises the four-day trip. He worked as an engineering mechanic at Player's for 37 years.

"As well as the beautiful weather and walks there was brilliant entertainment at night and we are already planning our return in early May 2027."



The group of nine Harry's looking the part on their short break in Benidorm

G LETTER

Alan owes it all to Gordon and John

◆ I was interested to read the article about Gordon Booty in the last issue of the Gazette, as Gordon was one of the reasons I started working at Player's in 1971.

Having left school with science A Levels, I was lucky enough to be offered a job in the Physical Testing Laboratory working for Roy Sales and also worked with the Instron tensile testing machine that Gordon referred to.

A year later I started working directly with Gordon in Product Development, developing cigarette and tipping papers. I continued this role until the company centralised and I transferred to Bristol, this

time in Cigar Development under John Bugler (photographed in the R&D photo, p.11 March 2026).

During this time, John and I often travelled to the Glasgow and Ipswich factories to work on product development and leaf supply. Then, in 1990, the new cigar factory was built in Bristol, and I soon became Cigar Divisions Leaf Manager, a job that took me all around the world.

I retired in 2003 and settled near Alicante, Spain with my wife June. I was so pleased to see both articles in the March issue of the Gazette, and to have the opportunity to thank Gordon and John, the two people without



Alan and June Wheatcroft

whom I wouldn't have had the rewarding and interesting career I did with Imperial Tobacco.

Alan Wheatcroft



Dan Tovey's grandfather, Eric, was a training supervisor

Tovey family links to Imperial in Bristol

◆ My family has a long history with Imperial Tobacco in Bristol and I am keen to know if any readers remember them.

My grandfather, Eric Tovey, was a clerk and training supervisor and retired in the early 1970s. His brother, my great-uncle, René, was also a clerk and his wife, my great-aunt, Doreen, was an executive assistant and statistical librarian.

Doreen, who died in 2008, was also an

author and became quite well known for her autobiographical stories of her life with René and their Siamese cats and other animals at their home in Rowberrow, North Somerset.

I would love to hear from anyone who knew them.

Dan Tovey



The Gazette team needs you! We are keen to hear about your hobbies, retirement activities and memories of life at Imperial. Please also keep us up to date with any Imperial get togethers and your special anniversaries and birthdays.

You can contact us by telephone, email or post at: ☎ 0117 428 8725 ✉ gazette@jamesreedpr.co.uk 📍 The Editor, James Reed PR, Archway Office, Barley Wood Stables, Long Lane, Wrington, BS40 5SA



▲ Phil Dobson holding the John Player Railway Club sign alongside former Engineer Paul Hodgson, whose wife, Barbara, painted the special headboard for the Shakespeare Express as well as others over the years including Weymouth Wanderer, Folkestone Flyer and Edinburgh Express.



▲ *Edinburgh Flyer*: While Paul Miller was on Princes Street in Edinburgh, he saw a piper and asked him if he would play them off from Waverley Station: "It was the perfect ending to a wonderful day trip" he said.

ALL ABOARD FOR THE PLAYER'S RAILWAY CLUB

THE PLAYER'S Railway Club was formed in 1985 by a group of like-minded rail enthusiasts that worked together at the Horizon factory in Nottingham.

One of the founders was Engineer Phil Dobson, who worked for the company for almost 40 years, and became the Club's Treasurer in 1986 until it closed in 1995.

"Our first Chairman was Dave Jones, who was also an engineer," said Phil, who lives in Woodborough, on the outskirts of Nottingham, with his partner, Sue. "In fact, there were a lot of us engineers involved and on the committee, including former Horizon Powerhouse Engineer Paul Miller, who was a big driving force behind its success."

The first club trip was to Toton Traction Maintenance Depot (TMD) in Nottinghamshire, which was quite a coup as TMDs didn't regularly allow visitors. The committee also organised rail-related film showings, slide shows, photographic competitions and invited guest speakers to attend events held at the Imperial Athletic Club on Aspley Road.

In the summer of 1985 the club hired a small, two-carriage diesel train with around 200 seats to make the day trip to Chester from Nottingham, and a second, similar one followed shortly after to York.

"Both of these trips sold out almost instantly, so we hired a whole train with 400-500 seats for a day trip to Whitby," said Phil, who joined Player's company as a Mechanical Engineering Apprentice in 1965 before moving to the production department to work on the new generation cigarette machines in 1981. Two years

later he was promoted to Troubleshooter, a role he held until his retirement in 2004.

"Word got around and we didn't have any problem filling the trains with family, friends and even some local companies booked whole carriages for their employees."

Time consuming

Members of the Club's committee took it in turns to organise the trips as it was a very time consuming process: sorting out everything from setting the date and hiring the train, to selling the tickets, organising the seating plan and producing an information leaflet about the route.

In 1987 the club organised the first steam train to leave Nottingham Midlands station in more than two decades, with a day trip to London Marylebone. It often chose interesting routes, including those

usually reserved for freight, to appeal to rail enthusiasts.

During the course of a year the Club usually ran three day trips as well as events, which it later held at The Wheatsheaf pub at Bobbers Mill, Aspley.

"We were a not-for-profit organisation so as long as we were making enough money to cover the cost of hiring the train and booking the next one, all was good," said Phil.

"Trips to Portsmouth Navy Day, for example, always sold out but, unfortunately, a trip we had arranged on a steam train to Stratford didn't sell very well for some reason, and that was that."

Paul Miller added: "We started as a group of enthusiasts who wanted to share our love of railways and became really good friends. I have many happy memories of the trips we organised." 



The John Player Special header plate was attached to each train hired by the Club via the brackets on the front of trains that were originally used to hang lamps

Four of the oldest members of the Fund are remembered, including **James Gunn**, whose family held senior roles in Imperial for generations.

Four who reached their centenaries and contributed over 100 years' service

FOUR OF the Fund's oldest members have died, including **James Gunn** OBE, great-great grandson of WD & HO Wills co-founder Henry Overton Wills II, at the age of 100.

James was born in Bristol in 1925 and attended Durnford Prep School in Dorset and Radley College, Oxfordshire. He was due to be called up in 1943 so volunteered to join the Royal Artillery, completing two years' training before being commissioned in August 1945, shortly before the end of the Second World War.

Management Trainee

He spent two years as a PT and Sports Officer at the Indian Army Mountain Training Centre in Ambala, awaiting demobilisation, before spending seven terms at New College, Oxford, reading history and playing music. He married his first wife, Jill, in December 1949.

In 1950 the board at Imperial Tobacco, where both his father, Henry Sommerville Gunn, and grandfather, Henry Wills Gunn, had held senior roles, agreed to take one of Henry Sommerville's sons, sight unseen. As the youngest, James was chosen and assigned to Player's in Nottingham as a Management Trainee.

He joined the South Nottinghamshire Hussars Territorial Army (TA) a year later, becoming its Commanding Officer in 1962 and, four years later, was awarded the OBE

for outstanding military service.

In 1967 James was promoted to the rank of Colonel and appointed TA Colonel for Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire and subsequently Commandant of Nottinghamshire Army Cadet Force and Honorary Colonel of the South Nottinghamshire Hussars. He was Chairman of the Nottinghamshire Reserve Forces and Cadets Association and a member of the national Army Cadet Force Council.

James was also appointed Deputy Lieutenant of Nottinghamshire in 1979 and served as High Sheriff of Nottinghamshire in 1984/5.

During his 32-year career with Imperial, James worked his way up from Foreman through to roles in production, distribution and marketing, before becoming General Distribution Manager for Imperial Tobacco.

Last in a long line

In 1982 he married Rosemary and, the following year, took early retirement due to illness from which he recovered and became involved in the formation of IMPAC to help protect the interest of pensioners when Hanson took over the company in 1986.

James was the last in a long line of family members to work for the company and is survived by Rosemary, six children, 10 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.



▲ **James Gunn** OBE, great-great grandson of Henry Overton Wills II

John Player & Sons pensioners **Doreen Berridge** and **Margaret McDonald** have also died aged 103 and 102 respectively.

Doreen worked for the company in Nottingham for 40 years, joining the cigarette making department in No 1 Factory. She worked in a number of different locations before retiring in 1978 as head of a department in Research and Development.

Margaret joined the company in Stirling, Scotland, as a cleaner in 1966 and worked there until the site closed in 1982.

In recent years Margaret developed dementia and lived in a care home in Cornton, Stirling.

Cochrane Park

Joan Short, who worked at the Wills factory in Cochrane Park, Newcastle, has died aged 101. She worked in the admin offices from 1967 until her retirement in 1983 and lived just a few streets away from the site. Joan had two sons, David and Anthony, three grandchildren and three great grandchildren. ©



Doreen Berridge, left, **Joan Short**, right, and **Margaret McDonald**, far right, worked in Nottingham, Newcastle and Stirling respectively



Project Manager who raised funds for local causes close to his heart

MIKE DOWNING, Imperial pensioner, choir singer and charity fundraiser, has died, aged 79.

He was born in Derbyshire in 1946 and, as the son of an immigration officer, the family moved around the country several times. When Mike was nine, they relocated to Manchester, where he discovered his lifelong love for Manchester United, and later to Bristol where he attended Fairfield Grammar School.

Aged 18, Mike travelled to Kewanee, Illinois, on an America Field Service scholarship, where he spent a year studying at Weathersfield High School. He made lifelong friends during his time there and, in 2001, he organised a class reunion in the UK for 20 of his US classmates.

Project Manager

Mike's 20-year career with the company began in 1966 when he joined the Group Management Service department as a Computer Programmer, based at Imperial's Head Office in Bristol. He worked his way up to become a Project Manager before leaving the company in 1986 and

continuing his career with NatWest. Finally, he joined a management consultancy, retiring in 2012.

He met his wife, Mary, who also worked for Imperial for eight years in the Market Research Department, at a company football match. He proposed on the steps of the cricket pavilion at the Imperial Athletic Ground in south Bristol and the couple married in 1971.

The Elderly Brothers

Mike dedicated much of his time to fundraising for charities and local causes close to his heart. He completed the Three Peaks Challenge, walked 1,200 miles from Land's End to John O'Groats and, despite his fear of heights, braved a skydive to raise money for a local primary school.

He also loved to bring joy to people through music: he was a member of the Mendip Male Voice Choir for over 20 years and had the honour of performing at the Royal Albert Hall in London in aid of Cancer Research UK. In 2015, he and a friend formed a singing duo called the Elderly Brothers, performing songs from



Mike Downing with his wife, Mary

the 1950s and 60s at local events and nursing homes.

"Mike was one of the most positive people you could ever wish to meet," said Mary. "His enthusiasm and love for life was an example to us all."

"As a family we have lost one of the best, but his wish was that we continued to enjoy life to the full and, although we are devastated at his loss, we are determined to try to live up to his wish. He was so proud of his family, as we were of him."

Mike is survived by Mary, their children Nicola and Jonathan and four grandchildren.

Raconteur who helped organise the MVR reunion

FORMER PLAYER'S Garage Foreman David Lowe has died aged 85.

Dave grew up in Nottingham with his sister, Tricia, and was an active member of the Boy's Brigade.

On leaving school aged 15 he joined Player's, following in the footsteps of his father, Don, who worked as an engineer in the Nottingham factory. Dave started in despatch before moving to the docks and becoming a driver's mate until 1964, when he responded to an internal advertisement looking for someone to set up and manage a new depot in Northampton.

"Dave and I had been going out for some time at that point and he asked me to marry him when he got the job," said Norma. "He said he only got it because no one else applied but he ran the depot for 22 years and it was very successful, having several lorries and vans."

Dave and Norma married in October 1964 at St Margaret's Church in Aspley before moving to Northampton. Three years later their son, Richard, was born and, the year after, their daughter, Julie,



who sadly died of leukaemia when she was 18. Richard later went on to work at the Northampton depot for a time.

The family moved to Silverstone in 1972, just a mile from the racetrack, and enjoyed 14 happy years there.

One of Dave's hobbies was rally driving and the couple joined the Blackbird Auto Club. Dave drove a three-litre Ford Capri and was quite successful, winning a number of trophies. He later joined Silverstone Football Club as a referee and was also Chairman for a time.

In 1986 Dave left the Northampton

depot and moved back to Nottingham as a Foreman in the Traffic and Despatch Department at the Leenside garage until he retired in 1988. Here he worked with Phil Bradley and Les Revill, with whom he also organised the Player's Garage and Motor Vehicle Repair (MVR) reunion.

"I first met Dave at the Northampton depot a few years after he set it up," said Phil, who worked at the Leenside garage between 1964 and 1987.

"He was always a great guy to be around and I used to enjoy walking with him near where he and Norma lived in Huthwaite when I was staying at a local campsite in my motorhome. Dave was a great raconteur and always gave a speech at the Garage and MVR reunion with some joke or other included."

Later in life Dave took up jogging and he and Norma enjoyed holidaying abroad, particularly cruising.

Dave is survived by Norma, Richard, three grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Always immaculately dressed

IMPERIAL PENSIONER Keith Forsey, former Senior Payroll and Management Benefits Clerk and a well-known and active member of the Imperial Athletic Club, has died, aged 91.

Keith joined the company on his 18th birthday on 8 July 1952 and retired on the same day 32 years later, aged 50.

Management Private Office

During his time with the company Keith worked in the Management Private Office, which was the former confidential payroll office for management and directors, until it was merged with the Staff

Secretary's Department in 1982, under the management of former Pensions Manager, Mike Paige, who was Payroll Supervisor at the time.

"I remember Keith well," said Mike.

"He was always immaculately dressed, wearing a three-piece suit, and smoked a pipe. I also recall the white soft-top Austen Healey roadster he drove.

"He was a frequent visitor to the Imperial Athletic Club as a member of the tennis section and also participated in the inter-departmental skittles matches."

Keith lived in Knowle, Bristol, before moving into a care home in Stockwood.



Keith Forsey taking part in an inter-departmental skittles match in the late 1970s

The deaths are reported, as of 31 May 2026, of the following retired employees:

HEAD OFFICE AND ITL

David Blunt, 74;
Lynn Bowley, 92;
Michael Charles Downing, 79;
Rita Joan Duddridge, 94;
Keith Norman Forsey, 91;
James Mayo Alastair Gunn, 100;
Paul William Hazeltine, 76;
Brigitte Holland, 83;
Roger Ison, 79;
Kenneth Frederick Paul Nicholls, 81;
Lawrence John Poole, 63;
Robert Neil Stammers, 71.

WD & HO WILLS

Peter Ian Burrage, 78;
Kenneth Burrows, 88;
Elizabeth Mary Clark, 73;
Barrington Dibble, 91;
Gordon Edwards, 97;
Rose Ann DeFalco Farrell, 71;
James William Firth, 78;
Royston Kenneth Gadd, 91;
Robert Gallagher, 85;
Neil John Geeleher, 64;
William Taylor Halpin, 98;
Gerard William Harvey, 67;
Stephen Douglas Hills, 72;
Elizabeth Hughes, 87;
Peter George Jennings, 88;
Elizabeth Johnstone, 71;
Mavis Joyce Lewis, 91;
Robert Fletcher McCulloch, 71;
Margaret McGregor, 90;
Margaret Ann Murray McGuire, 72;
Elizabeth McKay, 85;
Catherine McTear, 71;
Brian Mercer, 89;
Albert Joseph Morley, 89;
Keith Nash, 91;

Sylvia Mary Owens, 88;
Christine Rowland, 91;
Joan Short, 101;
Barbara Joan Smart, 86;
James Symon, 83;
Janet Elizabeth Taylor, 67;
Joyce May Taylor, 91;
Alan Frederick Tucker, 98;
Carole Susan Vear, 83;
John Martin Vincent, 75;
Michael Anthony Vowles, 80;
Julie Watts, 68;
Jean Patricia White, 95;
Joan Audrey White, 99;
Royston George White, 91;
Doreen Valerie Woodley, 79;
Pauline Ann Yates, 84.

JOHN PLAYER & SONS

Patricia Ann Beeton, 82;
Doreen Berridge, 103;
Shirley Mary Bloomfield, 79;
Ronald Charles Cavanagh, 92;
Kevan Earnest Clayton, 77;
Frank William Cooke, 83;
Margaret Elsie Denley, 81;
Alexander Learmo Dick, 92;
Michael James Doughty, 88;
Sylvia Rosemary Flint, 88;
Patricia Gooding, 87;
David Kenneth Hook, 79;
Jean Doris Horlock, 86;
Raymond James, 90;
Patricia Jean King, 71;
Yvonne Winifred Langley, 71;
David John Lowe, 85;
Janet Lowery, 98;
Colin Ludlam, 75;
Margaret Hepburn McDonald, 102;
Mary Miller, 81;
Yvonne Mary Page, 93;
Catherine Hall Douglas Ritchie, 81;
Dennis Rogers, 97;
Ian James Russell, 59;

Hugh Thompson, 82;
Dorothy Violet Thorp, 92;
Margaret Thurlby, 87;
John Wallhead, 84;
Mable Maria Warner, 87;
David Leslie Way, 96;
Alan Wood, 82;
Raymond Wright, 79.

OGDEN'S

Joan Denny, 86;
Hilda Lange, 90;
Sarah Nelson, 90;
Zillah Price, 94;
Linda Pyper, 76;
John Charles Rogers, 88;
Michael Joseph Vaughan, 79;
Georgina Ann Wall, 85;
Robert David Watson, 85.

BONDS DELIVERY SERVICE

David Paul Bozzard, 73.

FINLAY & CO

Dennis Philip Weall, 98.

LOWFIELD DISTRIBUTION

Stanley Michael Sydney Coates, 84;
Samuel Eaglesham, 72;
Leslie James Ewart, 75;
Dennis Paton, 86;
John Rodgers, 84;
Alan John Willoughby, 80.

SINCLAIR COLLIS

Anthony Daniel, 91;
Paul Gibbons, 77;
Leslie Hayes, 73;
Harold Rodney O'Neill, 82;
John Reginald William Reed, 96;
Margaret Strawhorn, 91.

ST ANNE'S BOARD MILL

Cyril Henry Henson, 85;
Granville Prendergast, 90.

IMPERIAL FOODS LIMITED HEAD OFFICE

Peter John Leslie Barnes, 80;
Brian Edward Lowman, 81;
Brian Frank Pearce, 90;
Robert McDonald Alexander Ross, 75;
Joseph Malcolm Smalley, 94.

GOLDEN WONDER

John Michael Percival, 68;
Margaret Power, 99.

ROSS FOODS

Anthony Grenville Barnett, 87;
Martin Richard Gill, 81;
Dianne Hyde, 73;
Barry Kelly, 81;
Ian Leslie McCloud, 76;
Sylvia Marie Walker, 77.

SMEDLEY-HP FOODS

Richard John Berry, 85;
Granville Alfred Cook, 82;
Thomas Egan, 91;
Harold Kettley, 81;
Charles Edward Landen, 93;
Peter Ronald Skee, 94.

YOUNG'S SEAFOODS

James Ross Tait, 87.

We offer our sincere condolences to the family and friends of our former colleagues.

Please note that names appear under the company worked for at end of service, which is not necessarily where they spent the majority of their career.

For **Annette Gaw**, who joined Wills in Glasgow as a teenager in 1962, the factory on Alexandra Parade was her first experience of working life and one she'll never forget.



MEMORIES OF LIFE AT WILLS GLASGOW

AT ITS peak, Wills' Glasgow factory employed more than 3,500 people and produced 160 million cigarettes a week.

"I started in the stripping room when I was 15, working in the hand-stemming department where we would remove the central stems from the tobacco leaves by hand," said Annette, who lives in Rutherglen, Glasgow.

"The stems were sharp and your hands got sore very quickly; I would often have to go to the medical department to get surgical spirit put on them to help disinfect the cuts."

It was difficult and repetitive work so, when the opportunity to work on the cigarette machines came up, Annette

jumped at the chance and began producing Woodbines. Cigarette production at the site ended in 1983 and by 1990, the company had shifted all of its cigarette operations to the Nottingham factory. The factory in Glasgow focused solely on cigar manufacturing and Annette transferred to the cigar rolling department making Embassy President 25 Corona cigars.

Presented with a bride doll

Annette met her husband, James, when visiting her aunt in Calton. He worked at the Post Office as a delivery driver for 31 years. The couple married in 1967.

"It was tradition that, when you were getting married, the bride would be

presented with a bride doll," said Annette. "My friend Alice McLafferty, who worked alongside me on the cigarette making machines, made the dress for my doll and I had to untie it from a chair in the canteen in front of everyone."

"I kept the doll in the house for many years until I decided to take it to People's Museum in Glasgow."

Annette was made redundant in 1991, less than a year before the Alexandra Parade factory closed for good.

"When the company knew redundancies were coming, they sent us on CPR and medical training courses so we could gain important life skills and set us up for the future," said Annette.

"I went on to look after my mother-in-law but, due to the generous redundancy package and the great pension from Wills, I didn't have to get another paid job and have been able to enjoy my retirement."

"I will never forget my time at Wills: it was a great company to work for." **G**

1946: Building of Wills' Glasgow factory starts

1963: No. 14 factory (cigars) opens on the same site

1990: All production ceases

1996: Scenes from *Trainspotting* filmed inside the factory

2002: Building work begins

2026: Some of *City Park's* offices to be converted into 129 apartments

1953: No. 12 factory opens

1983: Cigarette production ends

1992: Site closes; the Art Deco building gains listed status

1999: Developers announce conversion of the site to offices

2006: *City Park* opens offering 300,000 sq ft of office space

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