

Behind the scenes at Stoke Rochford Hall

In the November issue of Lincolnshire Life, we visited Stoke Rochford Hall which had undergone a £12 million restoration project following a devastating fire. It had taken three years to restore the building to its former glory as one of the county's most lovely country houses.

For the last thirty years, the hall has been run as a business, catering for teacher training conferences and events and also commercial conferences, residential courses, weddings, functions and balls.

Now Sarah Winstanley returns to the hall to take a look at the people behind the scenes at this successful business.

Words and photographs: Sarah Winstanley



PETER ROBINSON, DIRECTOR



As Director of Stoke Rochford Hall, Peter (65) has been involved in the business since its inception and is in overall control. He said: "The managers are in operational posts and my principal role is to make sure they are carrying out their responsibilities and then report to the board of management and the directors. We try to provide our

managers with a spirit of enterprise so that they meet their targets. We are involved in setting the objectives of the business and produce four weekly financial reports for the board. Our day to day objectives are to make the business a success. Before the fire, 2004 was our best trading year ever and now the restoration work on the hall is complete, we want to ensure we build the business back up to that level again."

JACKIE ROBINSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR



Jackie (57) has also been with the company since the beginning. She said: "I have a closer liaison role with the heads of department than Peter and a lot more interaction at an operational level. A lot of my work is involved in finances, such as ensuring budgets are being adhered to and making important

financial decisions. As directors, Peter and I ensure regulatory issues, such as health and safety, employment law and insurance warranties, are dealt with. I have to liaise with lots of departments to ensure this is carried out. I like working in a hospitality environment. This is not a nine to five, Monday to Friday job; it's more of a vocation and you have to be totally dedicated to it."



**NIKKI GRIFFIN,
DIRECTORS' PRIVATE OFFICE MANAGER**



Nikki (42) has worked at the hall for seventeen years and is one of the senior managers, working closely with the directors. She said: "I started working at the hall in the sales department and have moved around various departments since then so I have a good broad knowledge of the business. Now I'm a bit like a general manager because

I'm involved in decision making and trouble shooting on a day to day basis. If any of the managers need a quick decision they come to me. I'm the line manager to the senior staff and get involved in hiring staff in the more senior roles. I'm also the PA to the directors and attend all the board meetings. Before Ali arrived, I was also involved in marketing the hall.

ALI BAILEY, MARKETING MANAGER



Ali (43) has worked at the hall since July 2008. She said: "My role is to market the business that we have here to our conference, business, wedding and banqueting clients. I come from a graphic design background so I design and produce the literature for brochures in-house. For larger brochures, I'll liaise with design companies and print houses. I also

organise all the advertising, primarily with the local press for our banqueting business and the specialist magazines for conference and meeting work. The website also falls within my remit and I do a lot of website advertising to link our website with others. I also do all the public relations work. I'm involved in organising a number of events, working alongside the directors' private office manager, Nikki, to market the hall to our clients.

SUZI ROBINSON, SENIOR CONFERENCE AND RESERVATIONS ASSISTANT



Suzi (25) is now in her ninth year at the hall and has worked as a waitress in the restaurant, behind the bar, on reception and now in the conference and reservations office with three other staff.

She said: "We take the initial enquiries for conferences, weddings and functions and then produce the details for our staff to follow to

ensure the events meet the clients' needs. We also plot which bedrooms people will be staying in during the events. No two weddings or conferences are the same and we liaise with the client right up to check-in to ensure everything goes to plan. Each season is busy for different reasons – in the summer it's weddings, whereas a lot of conferencing is held in spring and autumn, and winter is busy with Christmas parties."

MIKE LOVERIDGE, HEAD CHEF

Mike (42) has worked at the hall for the last ten years and supervises nine staff. He said: "I'm in charge of the overall running of the kitchen day to day, doing all the ordering, menu writing and costings. Our food is traditional English fare and with breakfast, lunch and dinner, it's probably 350 covers a day. We specialise in bulk volume catering for the clients on courses and attending events here and only cater for the public on Sunday dinners. We use fresh herbs and autumn and summer fruits from the gardens here and source produce from local suppliers whenever we can."



WENDY SEYMOUR, RESTAURANT AND FUNCTION SUPERVISOR



Wendy (42) has worked at the hall for fifteen years and supervises thirty staff. She said: "My job is to supervise the staff in the restaurant and at functions, making sure the area is set up properly, serving customers and turning the area round for the next meal whether that's breakfast, lunch or dinner.

There's always something going on and we have a lot of weddings, Sunday lunches, summer or charity balls and parties to cater for. A lot of our clients are regulars who come back time and time again and feel like family now. This is a beautiful place to work and a bit like my second home."

BRIAN JOHNSTONE, ASSISTANT FACILITIES MANAGER

Brian (61) has been at Stoke Rochford Hall for the last seven years and is one of four staff in the maintenance section. He said: "Whenever there's a problem in the hall,

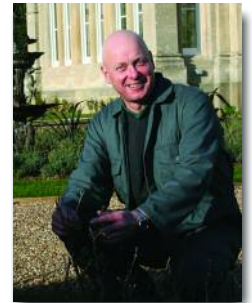
we are the first to be called. From jammed windows, water leaks, taps that won't turn and toilets that won't flush, we do it all. We change up to fifty lightbulbs a week and use tower scaffolding to reach light fittings high up in the ceiling. My boss, John Hartwell, comes from a building background and he assesses each situation. We'll tackle just about anything but if it's going to take more than a day, we get contractors in because we are so busy. I like the job because every day is different – you come to work to do a certain job and always end up getting side tracked!"



CLIVE ROBINSON, HEAD GARDENER

Clive (53) is one of the longest serving members of staff, having started work as a gardener at the hall in 1978. He supervises two other gardeners who maintain the ten acres of gardens and sports pitches in the grounds of the hall.

Clive said: "This is a very scenic place to work. During the summer, it is a big job just to keep on top of the general maintenance of the gardens, like grass cutting and edging out, as well as planting trees. We're kept busy all the time and make a special effort on Fridays ready for the weekend weddings. By autumn, the leaves have to be swept and the hedges and topiary cut and in the winter months, we have more time for restoration work. We grow our own bedding plants in the greenhouses which is quite unusual for a large hall and last year we started a small herb garden which supplies the kitchen. It's been very successful and chef often comes up from the restaurant to cut fresh parsley and other herbs."



IRENE FIELD, HEAD HOUSEKEEPER



Irene has worked at Stoke Rochford Hall for twenty-two years, first as a maid before working her way up to her current role. She supervises ten housekeeping staff and three in the hall's in-house laundry. She said: "My job is to keep the hall clean and tidy, including the bedrooms, function and teaching rooms and all

the communal areas like the corridors and toilets. There are ninety-one bedrooms and once the customers have left in the morning, we go in and get them ready for the next people coming in. We strip and make the beds, clean the bathrooms, re-stock the complimentary supplies like the tea and coffee and check the wardrobes and drawers to ensure they haven't left anything. All the dirty linen is sent to the laundry and I keep an eye on that to make sure it's running smoothly as well. Sometimes when there are special events, like the pre-Christmas weekend for NUT clients, we put a complimentary bottle of champagne and sherry in every room too."