

# Profile



**Craig Beresford** has had a very successful career in the high-pressure world of property and he's done it by recognising the value of getting on with people and enjoying their company. Jackie Whitelaw went to meet the friendly man who is managing director of structures for Waterman and chief operating officer of its property business.

When Waterman's managing director of structures and chief operating officer (COO) of property, Craig Beresford, talks through his career, it is a tapestry of life's lessons soaked up and then used when they are most needed.

These include building friendships and relationships in business, and using the benefits of socialising to maintain those all-important business networks; also, having walked away from one life-changing opportunity in his early years, he is a big advocate of saying 'yes' to everything that life offers.

Beresford had just been to a party when he was interviewed for *The Structural Engineer* – Make's new office opening. It is fair to say he is a fully paid-up member of the 'Construction 1000', the group of people who are invited and go to most events, see the value in them and, as a result, are visible as movers and shakers in the property sector.

"When students join us for work experience and say they want to become engineers, I can see they are strong at maths and have the analytical skills required, but the critical question is: 'are you good with people?' With the right skills you can be trained to do the calculations and, yes, you need to understand the engineering, but if you can't get on with people your success may be limited," Beresford says.

His enthusiasm for meeting people and enjoyment of their company has been a key part of his success at Waterman, where he is popular with staff and clients alike. His client list includes Land Securities, British Land, Stanhope/Mitsui, Almacantar, GPE, Chelsfield, Kier Property – you name them, they're there. Friendships, trust and commitment have combined and through the years have created a very satisfying career.

In the London property market, Beresford is one of the leaders in the field; and at Waterman he is on the PLC board through his brief as COO for property and responsibility for Waterman Structures, which is a 230-strong, £20M pivotal part of the consultancy's business.

But it didn't always look like it was going to turn out like that.

## Early influences

"I lacked motivation and scraped through exams as a child, but I stuck it out and studied maths, physics and engineering drawing – the latter taught me a lot about visualisation. It was my maths teacher who suggested civil engineering as a career, as it's hands-on and practical."

His father had also been an engineer – in the automotive world – but it wasn't engineering that the young Craig learned from him.

"My father had a huge influence on how I have turned out," Beresford says. "He travelled all over the world in technical engineering sales and because of that transient life his private and business world became intertwined. Customers were always visiting us at home and they became friends. From the age of nine or 10 I was handing round the canapés, or rather the Jacob's crackers and cheddar (Beresford is



56 now so this was the 1960s). I have really fond memories of all that and it helped me be comfortable around all types of people."

Beresford went off to Kingston Polytechnic in London. "That was the ideal course for me, practical and timetabled so I knew where I should be and when; even so I nearly lost my way. Looking back I did not understand how what I was being taught would be relevant in practice."

What saved him was work experience in 1980 with testing house Sandberg, working on the A40 in Wales. "I turned up to find green fields and to be told the lab, which was a set of Portakabins, was coming 'tomorrow'. I had to organise it all. We had 18 technicians and worked light until dark, sometimes night shifts, and the craic was great.

"There were some tough men on site and the foremen were not so nice to us technicians. So we worked out that we could get a bit of our own back by making our concrete cubes float through adding polystyrene. I'll always remember the looks on the faces of the concrete guys as they saw those cubes bobbing about in the cube tank. But when they understood we'd had them, they chucked us in the tank, so that was not so good.

"The camaraderie totally changed my outlook and attitude to my course. I went back to Kingston reborn and I got my degree."

## Seizing opportunities

Sandberg offered him a full-time job, but Beresford was after new experiences; not so easy to find given the industry was in the middle of the 1981 recession. "I must have written about 120 letters and nothing. But then I applied for a post with the South African government; the department of forestry and water affairs. I went to an interview and was offered a job in Windhoek on the Namibian border, with citizenship and the startling (at the time) salary of £30 000.

"I asked the South African guys at Kingston what that was all about and they explained that, as I was under 24 and citizenship was part of the deal, I would be expected to do national service. There was a war going on at the time with Angola and I didn't want to kill anyone, let alone Angolans who I had never met. So I didn't go.

"It was one of those forks in the road in life. I've always wondered how things would have turned out if I'd gone, and in hindsight I wish I'd been brave enough. Since then I've taken every opportunity offered me."

The first of those turned out to be, courtesy of the Jobcentre, bricklaying with a charity run by the Sons of Divine Providence. "My first day was like something out of a film. I turned up at the mausoleum of a church and banged on the big wooden door, which creaked open to reveal a man in white robes."

The work was rewarding, doing up homes for disabled children, but on a residential construction site next door Beresford bumped into an old college friend. He introduced him to the Kerryred labour agency and Beresford's working life took off.

"The agency was run by a great guy called Dean Khan, who really understood how to motivate and hang on to people. I learned a lot from him. Once a month we'd have sandwiches and drinks for 150 freelancers at the Paviours Arms in Westminster. He offered me a partnership in the business, but I was more interested in design and construction than acting as a recruitment consultant."

In 1983 Beresford was sent to work with steel fabricator SW Farmer at Victoria Plaza, which was being built above Victoria Station in London, working long hours but for good money – much of which he spent on top-notch meals with his wife-to-be. "Work hard and have fun, that's always been my mantra."

Farmer offered him a chance to charter through its design office, so he left the agency and went full time with the fabricator. Grateful though he was, the design office work was limited and it was soon time to look for something new.

## Waterman

"I asked around and was told Waterman was the best in the structures business, so I applied, had an interview with Andrew Thompson and was asked when I wanted to start. 'We are into steel,' he said. I had to

## Career highlights



### Thames Court, Upper Thames Street, London, Markborough Properties

An interesting structural project where the structural steel frame was partially hung from the roof to provide a column-free space on the first floor.

Previous experiences encouraged our

team to have the confidence to explore and achieve the architectural expression in the internal hung structure and yet deliver an otherwise relatively simple solution.

### London Bridge City, St Martins Property Corporation, 1984–87

Where I began at Waterman as a graduate engineer and met some amazing people in fantastic circumstances that changed me completely. Worked on phase two with a whole host of architects and experts in construction. Private meetings with Philip Johnson an unforgettable experience. A wonderful insight into design and construction for a young engineer.



PAUL GRUNDY

### 1 and 2 New Ludgate, London, Land Securities

Two office buildings on one site with several below-ground constraints, as well as height limits determined by the views of St Paul's Cathedral. One building worked better as a concrete

frame and the other as a steel frame. A rare opportunity to show how the two solutions can work to maximise value given particular constraints.

### Europier, Heathrow Airport, 1990

Working for BAA and with the Richard Rogers Partnership. An award-winning project which emphasised the desire to deliver precision and high-quality detailing. The integrity and aesthetic quality of the architectural and structural design were very satisfying but hard at the time. I believe the project set a new benchmark for future projects at Heathrow.



FLETCHER PREST ARCHITECTS

### One Angel Court, London

This project is for the reconstruction of the 1970s landmark office tower in the City of London. The works, which are under construction, form a substantial structural challenge involving the retention of the central core of a

25-storey tower, while simultaneously creating new floor plates that significantly increase the net area. This larger footprint adds further value by changing the structural system to enable the old 2600mm floor-to-ceiling heights to be increased to 2750mm, thereby bringing the building up to today's market specification.

tell him I hadn't even designed a beam at that stage, but he said, 'don't worry, you'll get it!'"

And he did. Beresford plays down his engineering skills, but in his 31 years at Waterman he's worked on some challenging projects with illustrious people, many of whom have helped further his career, which he recognises with gratitude.

"At the start I was working with Jim Mathys and Arthur Austin and an early project was London Bridge City phase one – Hay's Galleria to you and me nowadays. I looked after the steel frame and had a hand in the glass atrium on the Cottons Centre.

"At some stage it was realised that the atrium glass was up but the flag poles that decorate the river walkway hadn't been installed and there was no way they could be manhandled in round the tight corners. The option was to helicopter them in, but no one was sure if the glass would stand up to the pressures from the downdraught from the helicopter. The solution was to put me on a barge on the Thames and hover a helicopter over my head to see how it felt. I thought it was a wind up, but no, pretty soon I was stood on the barge almost being blown into the river. Looking back I am sure Jim and Arthur knew the downdraught was fine, it was just a test – of me!"

Next came one of the seminal moments of Beresford's career. He and the team moved on to phase two, designed by eminent architect Philip Johnson, who was based in New York. "The design team had to go to New York once a month, by BA Business Class and be put up in the Waldorf Astoria.

"But wonderful though that was, the really tremendous experience for me as a young man was that I was encouraged to speak my mind in the meetings – I was told something I said might trigger an interesting thought process.

"That's when Waterman really got to me. As a company it has always encouraged people to take the initiative, and there is always support, people rally round to help you. I was in a very fortunate place, I realised."

Beresford became an associate director of the business when Waterman floated in 1988.

But then the late 1980s recession stopped London Bridge City phase two (which was never built) and that's when a couple of Beresford's earlier experiences came in very useful.

"I went into the office and we had 14 people on the job and no other work. So, like with all those job applications, I wrote to any company I could think of which might need engineers. And I rang them all up. One of the people I spoke to said something very interesting. 'Why,' he said, 'would I give you work in a recession when I have a very good relationship with a guy at another consultancy – he's my mate?'"

"So I said to myself – that's what it's all about; developing business friends. Just like my father did. I spent a long time developing friendships after that. I wanted to be the person that when you rang, they said 'oh great' and not 'oh no.'"

And the strategy worked. Beresford never asked anyone for work, but it started to come in from new sources to those already appropriated by the Waterman partners. That work generation saw him promoted to the board in 2003.

Things have changed a lot at the company since then. It's become a PLC, the old partnership structure, which had still shaped the business since its 1988 float and resulted in three managing directors for structures, has been re-organised, leaving Beresford in charge of that part of the business.

"I hope my team would say that I don't keep things to myself and I

### Career lessons

“ I feel I have had such a good 31 years at Waterman that I want to cultivate that same opportunity and experience for everyone at the company. The trust and loyalty that clients and consultants place in each other is crucial to success and the more you get caught up in this business, the more you realise you must not let anyone down.

Friendships are the key, trust is a by-product. Being able to design and having an imagination go without saying as major requirements, but personality, feeling and accountability count hugely. Developing personal commitment in our colleagues is vital.

Yes, we design brilliant structures and have invested over years and years in BIM. Yes, we have fantastic engineers and designers and, yes, we can do as much as any other engineer technically, so what differentiates us?

We place confidence in people and we have a culture that is supportive and encourages people to take responsibility rather than wait to be given it. I think we have an incredible team spirit and an amazing group of people across all disciplines.

As we grow, we have to work even harder to capture and pass on the Waterman culture. My greatest ambition at the moment is probably to make sure we develop this and enable others to realise how important this has been to our success. ”

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give them a lot of freedom and encouragement," Beresford says.

During the latest recession, the business realised technology was changing and invested heavily in BIM and 3D design. "Clients want economic, robust designs," Beresford says.

### Giving back

Having been at Waterman for 31 years, Beresford recognises the quality of the team, whose members all contribute to the company's success. While everyone in the business is an important part of this, Beresford has a strong interest in developing graduates.

The focus on graduates has allowed Beresford to, as he says, "put something back", by encouraging the mentoring of the graduates joining the firm.

"I like engineering, it has a role in society and it's a satisfying job. Most of what I do at Waterman is in commercial development, so I asked myself as an engineer in society, 'what have I put back?' Yes, I've done great work in the city, created wealth for the country, but it's about more than that.

"At some point in your life you are able to see this. I've had a lot of help from people who have cared about me. So working collaboratively is a good thing for me. If I can help young people become engineers and have the same rewarding experience that I have, I will be very happy."