

INTERVIEWING THE INDUSTRY

FRANK BOTHWELL: THOMAS FRANKS

by Carla McKenzie
May 2020



With the hospitality industry being one of the major sectors affected by the coronavirus outbreak and subsequent UK lockdown, Carla has taken some time to reflect with one of the major players in the contract catering world, Frank Bothwell of Thomas Franks.

CM: When was Thomas Franks founded?

FB: After many years in the contract catering industry and hotel world, I took the brave decision to form my own catering firm in 2004.

*Pictured:
Frank Bothwell,
Founder of Thomas Franks*



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CM: *Can you tell us a little more about your company and what you do?*

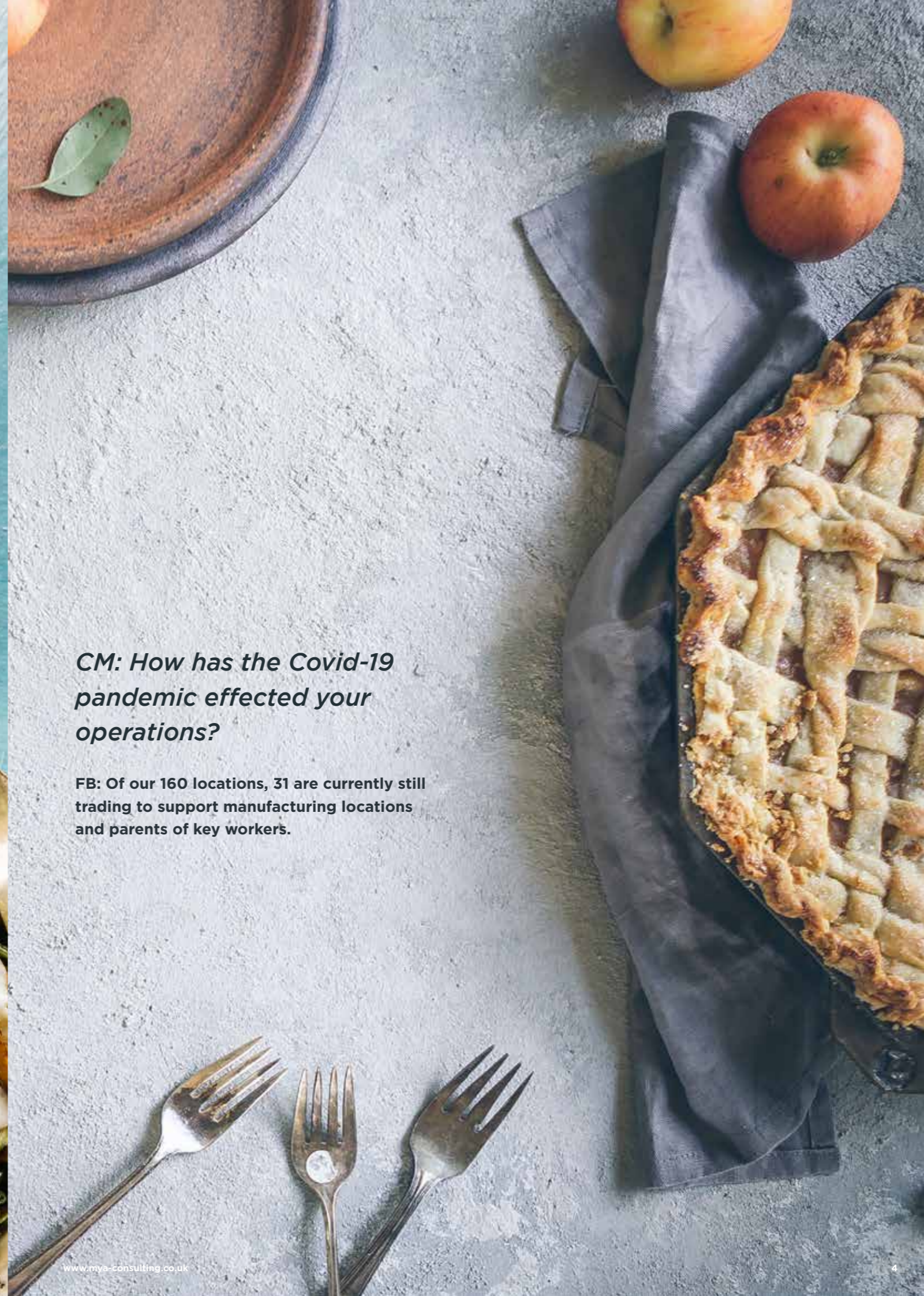
FB: Inspired by the concept of feeding the mind, my vision was to provide a high standard of freshly cooked, delicious food, sourced from local and regional suppliers, cooked by well-trained, craft-skilled chefs – a bespoke offer to match the aspirations of our clients. However, it was and is a relationship-driven business model.

Thomas Franks was founded in 2004 to focus on head offices, colleges and independent schools. Shiplake College was the first school to entrust us with their pupil catering. Client referrals have brought steady growth and we now cater for 160 clients in the UK, Ireland, Portugal and Malta including Barings (London), Loretto School (Edinburgh) and St Edmund's College, Cambridge.



CM: *How has the Covid-19 pandemic effected your operations?*

FB: Of our 160 locations, 31 are currently still trading to support manufacturing locations and parents of key workers.



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CM: *Your organisation has received really positive publicity for its charitable work over the past couple of months; what have been the highlights?*

FB: TF Feeding Communities has made a positive impact to not only supporting the vulnerable and frontline NHS nurses, it has allowed us to keep our fresh food supply chains open by forming the 'feeding communities', nationwide and with many European food aid programmes. To date, we have supplied, free of charge via charitable funding, over 50,000 meals and food parcels to people in food poverty in the UK, Ireland, Portugal and Malta. We have also supplied freshly made meals to front-line workers at 15 hospitals across the country including The Nightingale, London, The Royal Berkshire in Reading and Barnsley Hospital in Yorkshire. The below link provides you with the highlights video: https://twitter.com/Thomas_Franks_/status/1258782504506572807

CM: *What lessons do you think that the contract catering sector needs to learn from the Covid-19 crisis?*

FB: Embracing good ethics during this crisis, has shown an increased kindness and humility. There has to be a legacy from this. Or at least critical trade-offs in business, to build on this compassion.

CM: *What impact do you think Covid-19 will have on future trading across the education and industry sectors?*

FB: We have remodelled our business on a phased return to work to project 6,12 and 18 months to get to peak trading – but it won't be easy and it won't be like it was for a while. We are debt-free and have sufficient reserves, funding and free cash-flow to withstand the impact of Covid-19, as long as trading re-occurs soon. Our teams and all current clients are now protected, with revised and affordable financial models.



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CM: How have your team coped with the challenges of being furloughed?

FB: We had to furlough the majority of the staff at the start of Covid-19, but we waited for as long as it took to seek the valued and welcome government intervention. Many have very generously volunteered their time to assist with our charitable work; IN FACT OVER 150. Our HR team are in constant contact and regular communication is sent out on a variety of support guides from keeping fit, recipe ideas and mental wellbeing. Please see below some quotes from our volunteer teams.

Thomas Franks have given me so many opportunities. Thomas Franks Feeding Communities has given me the opportunity to give back.

- Gavin Tarbox (Development Chef)

Everyday I work alongside driven, passionate, successful people... but in these less fortunate times it's clear they genuinely care about those they work with and the community in which they live. Chef's hats off to you all!

- Thomas Cuthbert (Regional Development Chef)

To be able to be involved with the Thomas Franks Feeding Communities project is what Thomas Franks is all about "being involved". As an independent caterer using local suppliers, we are able to act immediately when required, supporting local suppliers and feeding a whole community. This gives myself and my team a feeling of belonging, making us feel proud to be key workers on behalf of Thomas Franks.

- Dean Collins (Catering Manager, Rendcomb College)

Back at the beginning of the coronavirus and before the lockdown, I had been thinking about how to help the community as a whole. We started looking after the key workers at Dulwich Prep London, and at the time of the lockdown, this opportunity arose. We are now preparing and delivering 1,500 meals per day, benefiting vulnerable children. I work with a great team of volunteers, and when the time comes and we are over it, the question will be "What have you done during the coronavirus?" I know what I have done. I have supported the vulnerable, and set a great example to my children.

- Giles Burton (Dulwich Prep)

It's amazing to be a small part of a huge team effort in coming together to help those who need a helping hand. I'm proud to be part of such a forward-thinking and diverse company that, for now, is all about helping communities and doing what we do best; food and teamwork.

- Chris Lee (Executive Chef Manager, Sibford School)

Working within the Thomas Franks Feeding Communities has given me a real sense of purpose, perspective and pride. The work that our NHS do should be celebrated and rewarded. It makes me incredibly proud to help with the Feeding Communities project and be able to use my skills and craft in the support of our frontline workers.

- Kevin Steele (Executive Chef Manager, Gymshark)

CM: Has managing an organisation through the crisis changed your approach?

FB: It has reconfirmed our core founding principles - we listen, learn, innovate and will grow our business with care.



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CM: What strategies are you developing to manage your organisation out of Covid-19?

FB: A cross-departmental return-to-work task force has been set up to plan for social distancing, training, signage and communications. Each plan will then be adjusted to respond to each existing and new client's needs.

CM: What are you looking forward to in the coming months?

FB: A haircut, getting back to Europe to see my teams (and a sneaky dive)!!



AUTHOR BIO

Carla McKenzie has led MYA for the past 26 years in some of the most challenging industry environments. She is renowned for her vision and industry expertise across all sectors; hotels, arts venues, education, healthcare, events, travel, leisure and retail.

When not at work, Carla puts her energy into supporting various charities, in a very personal way.

In 2015 Carla completed a ground-breaking adventure, when at the age of 50 she embarked on a journey to ride from John O'Groats to Lands End, mostly on unsurfaced roads, while raising money for British military charities: jogler.wordpress.com.

In September 2018, Carla undertook a pioneering journey, riding from London to Paris on green roads by electric motorcycle. The journey highlighted the importance of preserving the planet and raised substantial sums for Kent, Surrey, Sussex Air Ambulance and the Joan Seeley Memorial Trust.

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