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LITTLE did Gary Kenna know when he rode his BMX up the aisles of the Typhoo factory in Birmingham that one day he would have a tea **company** of his own.

Fast forward a few decades and Only Natural Products is one of the fastest-growing beverage businesses in the UK, turning out 120 **million** tea bags a year and exporting them as far as Australia, the USA and Japan.

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Gary works with specialist tea buyers to source the ingredients for his **company's** Higher Living, Dr Stuart's and Kromland Farm brands, all of which are blended to his own recipes and packaged by state-of-the-art machines in Quedgeley.

The Birmingham-born father-of-four, who came to Gloucester as a 10-year-old when his father got a job with the city's Brooke Bond factory, says tea was always in the background as he grew up.

"Both my dad and mum worked in the tea industry," says Gary. "When I was a nipper I remember riding my BMX along the aisles of the Typhoo factory in Birmingham, where my dad was the factory manager."

Gary trained as an engineer after leaving Chosen Hill School and went to work for Brooke Bond, Twinings and Dowty's, before getting involved with tea packaging.

His move into owning a tea **company** came 15 years ago when he joined forces with Keith Garden to **buy** the Dr Stuart **brand**, which offers a range of herbal blends to aid various body functions and promote wellbeing.

Since then Only Natural Products has gone from strength to strength, with the pair developing their Higher Living range offering organic teas and Kromland Farm collection of rooibos infusions.

The operation moved to its Quedgeley base just over three years ago after Gary and Keith invested more than £1.5 **million** into the latest tea packaging equipment.

"We started the **business** at the time when herbal teas were just starting to come through in the UK," explains Gary.

"Since then, the market has seen a tremendous growth, largely because people are now more interested in what they're putting into their bodies, while traditional 'black' teas have been in decline.

"We called our **company** Only Natural Products because right from the start we banned any kinds of artificial flavourings.

"The teas we source are of a quality that's good enough for medicinal use. "I think people are more trusting of small niche companies, like ours, than the bigger companies."

At the heart of Only Natural Products' operation are its tea bags and bio-degradable teepees, made in line with the latest technologies.

"The strings for our teabags are sewn in rather than stapled, as aluminium is hardly what you'd want in a health product," explains Gary. "Our teepees are made from corn starch so that they break down over time."

"We now use them for 17 of our products. "Our customers are health conscious and environmentally conscious, which is why these sorts of things are important. "We use cardboard boxes that's FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) -certified and recycle all our cardboard and polythene."

We have reduced our packaging by tamper-sealing our boxes rather than using cellophane wrappers."

Only Natural Products' teas are primarily **sold** in Holland and Barrett and Whole Foods Market in the UK, as well as being sent all over the world.

"Some 65 per cent of what we manufacture is exported, with 20 per cent going to Australia, which is our biggest market. In total we export to 57 countries," says Gary.

The irony that South Africa is another big customer is not lost on him, however. "We import single estate rooibos tea grown at Kromland Farm, flavour and package it and then export it back to South Africa," he explains.

"At one time we **sold** green tea in **China** too. "At the moment our focus is on America.

"I think that anything that's premium, British and quirky goes down well abroad. We've long had a reputation for good tea in the UK."

Gary is also working with Waterwells **Business** Park-based Pulsin' to create new tea-flavoured Beond bars.

Only Natural Products has been raising its profile locally, sponsoring the tea tent at the recent Gloucester Quays Food Festival and entering the Taste of Gloucestershire Food and Farming Awards.

"In the beginning our turnover from the Dr Stuart's range was about £200,000 a year; we're now up to £5.7 **million** and last year our growth was about 150 per cent, which is fantastic considering we're a small team," says Gary.

"We're incredibly proud of what we have achieved. At the same time we're an ethical **company** and giving back is important to us."Bottlegreen is sponsoring this year's Best Eating Out Establishment award Since 1989 Bottlegreen Drinks Co.

has been creating and producing Britain's favourite natural soft drinks in its Cotswold mill, using a bespoke filtration process and original recipes unique only to them.

Bottlegreen has always believed in creating the finest and most natural soft drinks possible and blending wonderfully sublime flavours into the most exquisite drinks is their one driving passion.

Combining a unique process and equipment, which is similar to that used in **wine** making, and with the use of fresh Cotswold spring water, Bottlegreen has been able to create a wide range of perfectly-balanced and refreshing soft drinks for over 25 years. Bottlegreen is undoubtedly most famous for its elderflower products, but also produces a range of delicious cordials, tonics and sparkling pressés in a variety of flavours including strawberry, lime and spiced berry.

Throughout Bottlegreen's growth in products and flavours it has continued to be market leaders in terms of style and taste.

All Bottlegreen products have all been carefully created using only the finest, natural ingredients and are free from artificial colours, sweeteners and flavourings.

Bottlegreen still uses its original recipe and uses a consistent dilution ratio across its wide range of cordials to ensure the perfect taste every time.

Enter the awards at <http://www.digitalthisis.co.uk/gloucestershire/taste/>. The closing date is August 15.

SUE BRADLEY discovers how a Quedgeley-based tea **company** has been brewing up a storm Gary Kenna from Only Natural Products

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