

The Gazette

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Delivering the news and campaigning for the Fylde coast since 1873

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SPICE GIRL

From Pakoras to the Palace
for our MBE curry queen

By KATIE UPTON
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From cooking homemade bhajis to running a multi-million pound company - Blackpool businesswoman Laila Remtulla's achievements were today honoured by the Queen.

The owner and founder of Laila's Fine Foods Ltd - an inspiration to aspiring businesswomen everywhere - has been

awarded an MBE for services for food and drink in the New Year's Honours List.

The entrepreneur started out selling home cooked bhajis to a deli after moving to the Fylde coast in the 1970s.

Laila now employs hundreds of people and her company, based in Bispham, is forecasted to turnover £18m

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CURRY QUEEN Laila Remtulla has been awarded an MBE for creating a multi-million pound business after cooking bhajis and samosas at home

New start for Alexia

Tough toddler Alexia Rose Crane has something extra special to celebrate this New Year - 12 months since she survived a heart attack. Now she's looking forward to a busy 2015.

SEE PAGE 3

Cold hearted thief hunted

Police have launched a hunt for a thief who targeted two pensioners in a series of shameful raids at homes in Blackpool. Can you help bring him to justice?

SEE PAGE 7

Lee wants to buy big

Manager Lee Clark says he'll be banging on Blackpool chairman Karl Oyston's door for transfer window cash to add to his struggling squad. Having made nine short-term signings last month, the Pool manager now wants to lay stronger foundations.

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Queen's honour for cooking star Laila

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Mrs Remtulla said: "I'm truly honoured and humbled by my accolade. It's unbelievable."

"This country is full of opportunity and I'm so grateful to be part of this great nation."

"This shows that hard work pays off."

Mrs Remtulla and husband Nazir moved from Tanzania to the UK in 1976, and 28 years ago she set about cooking up creations for her family in the kitchen of their new Lytham home.

After buying some "disappointing" bhajis and samosas from a nearby delicatessen Mrs Remtulla took in her own recipes and persuaded the owner to stock those instead.

She said: "My children were at school and the business began as something to keep me occupied."

But cooking has always been in her blood – her father and grandfather were both chefs and two of her brothers are also chefs.

For 10 years the cooking business was juggled with family life, then in 1999 Nazir joined the business and within months it had secured its first national contract.

The manufacturer of ready to heat and eat meals has since gone from strength to strength, winning awards across the board.

It has contracts with

Asda, Morrisons, Lidl and Iceland.

The business now occupies a 43,000 square foot factory in Bispham and produces around 60,000 to 70,000 portions of food a day.

It also supplies food charitably for local sports group, Fylde Sharks Disability Swimming Club.

Today, as well as employing all five family members, the company also employs more than 300 Fylde workers – up from less than 100 just five years ago.

And it is the hard work and dedication of all staff that has helped Mrs Remtulla to come so far, she said.

She added: "I can't say enough about my colleagues who have helped to build this. We've had opportunities to move production elsewhere but we've stuck to Blackpool because we have staff here who we couldn't have done all this without."

Mrs Remtulla's recipe for success, she added, mixes strong working relationships, including bringing daughters Zera, Rishma, Natasha into the business, with sticking to her principles on the best cooking methods.

She added: "We've gone through ups and downs, you have to have the strength and stick to your beliefs of cooking methods."

"It's a rollercoaster when you start out. I never expected that this is what would happen – I just believed in good food."

Jim 'blown away' by award of MBE

By KATIE UPTON
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The man who helped set Fleetwood Town Football Club on an amazing journey into the Football League has been awarded an MBE in the Queen's New Year's Honours list, announced today.

Club president Jim Betmead – who reformed the football club in 1997 and has worked closely on its community links – has been rewarded for services to sport and the community in Fleetwood.

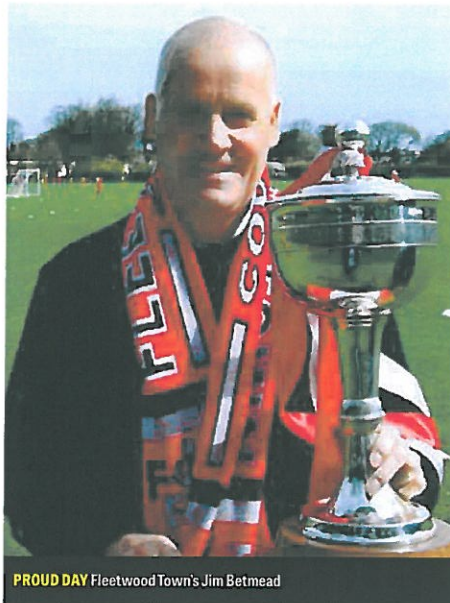
Jim told The Gazette: "It's amazing. Never in my wildest dreams did I think something like this would happen, or even that Fleetwood would be in the Football League."

"I'm extremely proud and shocked. It's blown me away."

Over the last 17 years Town have risen from lower leagues to qualifying for League One at the end of last season – a "phoenix from the flames" story for the Fylde coast, after the club folded back in the 1980s.

Jim added: "This is a great accolade for me, my family and all the hard work of everyone, especially chairman Andy Pile, at Fleetwood Town."

The hard work of television personality Esther Rantzen has also been celebrated. She is set to get a CBE for services



PROUD DAY Fleetwood Town's Jim Betmead

to older people through Silver Line and children through ChildLine.

Silverline is a Kirkham-based helpline for elderly people which fielded 1,800 calls on Christmas Day and Boxing Day this year alone.

The centre celebrated its first anniversary on the Fylde coast in November, having

provided much needed comfort and company to isolated and lonely older people.

Esther said: "I'm thrilled this honour recognises the contribution made by ChildLine and The Silver Line, and I'm delighted the talented teams at both have also been recognised for their inspirational work and devotion to

the most vulnerable in our society."

The charity's chairman also praised Mrs Rantzen.

Prof Patrick Geoghegan said: "It is perfect timing for Esther to receive this honour as The Silver Line which is her inspiration is now a thriving national charity, helping the most lonely and isolated."

Paul Cummins and Tom Piper, the creators of the spectacular sea of poppies that engulfed the Tower of London this year, will receive MBEs

They are awarded in recognition of the immensely popular Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red, which saw 888,246 ceramic poppies progressively fill the moat at the Tower – one for each British or Colonial military death during the First World War.

Actors John Hurt, Kristin Scott Thomas and Emily Watson, comedian Meera Syal, novelist Ali Smith, Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy and designer Mary Quant also receive awards alongside a damehood for actor Joan Collins, OBEs for James Corden and Cilla star Sheridan Smith

From the world of sport, former athletes Steve Cram and Dame Mary Peters, and Hillsborough campaigners Margaret Aspinall and Trevor Hicks are among those recognised, along with 103-year-old marathon runner Fauja Singh.

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