

# Taylor & Sons boss: 'How single letter blunder ruined my business'

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Cardiff-based company Taylor & Sons Ltd was 'irreparably destroyed' by a Companies House blunder, judge ruled

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Businessman Philip Davison-Sebry has spoken out after a six-year battle that showed how Companies House wrecked his 134-year-old firm with a typo.

The government is set to make a **£9m payout after the blunder** by document examiner Philip Davies, who confused Neath's Taylor & Sons Ltd with Manchester's Taylor and Son Ltd and announced the engineering firm was being wound up.

## 'Your company is in liquidation!'

"On the day it happened I was rung by Corus, now Tata," Philip, 57, said.

It was February 20, 2009. He and his wife were celebrating her 50th birthday.

"They wanted a meeting the next day at 8am, Philip said.

"I explained I was 4,500 miles away in the Maldives."

On the other end of the phone a furious steel boss said: "What are you doing away at a time like this? Your company is in liquidation!"

Philip was stunned.

"You're joking," he told Corus.

"This is not a joking matter," the man said.

A document was read saying Taylor & Sons was being wound up by HMRC.

Philip told them that was "impossible."

## 'I felt I had been kicked in the b\*\*\*\*\*'

"If you're not in liquidation you soon will be," Corus told him.

"Bad news travels fast."

“I felt like I had been kicked in the b\*\*\*\*\*s,” Philip said.

“I felt physically sick. Back at the business the phones were ringing out, it was like Armageddon. Everyone wanted to be paid. People were queuing up for money. Equipment was being taken off site.”

**Companies House corrected the mistake** within three days.

“But they didn’t tell us they had sold the information to the credit reference agencies,” Philip said.

Until the blunder Philip’s firm had been trading with full order books. The bank had given increased facilities. It was budgeted to turn over £40m in 2009. It employed 250 people.

## **'I'm building my small business back up from scratch now'**

Desperate attempts were made to reassure customers and suppliers that there had been a mistake. But the business, established in 1875 and with 18th century roots, could not be saved.

Today Philip doesn’t care “very much” about Companies House. He has “no choice” but to deal with them.

“I’ve got a small business now which I am building back up from scratch,” Philip said.

“But this court case completely took over my life.”

He had feared he was going to have to sell his home. He hopes he won’t have to.

“This has cost us several hundred thousand pounds but I was not going to let it go,” Philip, who lives in St Fagans, said.

“When you start in this world with nothing and build something up you do not give up easily.”

It’s been a long six years.

## **'I was close to a nervous breakdown'**

“It was a long hard fought battle,” Philip said.

“Companies House did not want to admit they were wrong. Fortunately justice ruled in our favour.”

He insisted his business’ downfall was due to more than a clerical mistake.

“It was not just a typing error,” he said.

“They didn’t bother using their own systems that they had in place. They were completely ignored and they told the whole world we were in liquidation.”

His health was also affected.

“I was close to a nervous breakdown,” Philip said.

“I was terrible with the stress of it. I could see everything disintegrating before my eyes and it was not very pleasant.”

He was however grateful to have “a very good wife, a 35-year-old marriage and a very good family.”

“The worst bit was waking up having nightmares thinking it was not really happening,” Philip said.

“But it was. That took a while to get over.”

## **'I would not wish it on my worst enemy'**

He remained tight lipped about what he would say to bosses at Companies House.

“I think I will probably keep that to myself,” he said.

“I’ll never get back to where I was. I’m 58 this year. But I will build things back up so my sons will have something to take on.”

Most of Taylor & Sons employees found jobs elsewhere. Its competitors did “very nicely” from the firm’s demise.

It had a multimillion pound contract with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution to build three new stations. Business with Tata Steel was worth £400,000 a month.

“It was absolutely awful,” Philip said.

“I would not wish it on my worst enemy. Well, except the bloke who nicked my boat.”

Companies House could not be reached for comment.

But earlier this week a spokesman said: “Companies House has recently received the judgement in this case and is currently considering the implications at this time. Until these considerations are complete we remain unable to comment further.”