Bill Brogan, Catering and Conference Manager, St John's College, Cambridge, recalls his inspirational day with Nigel Haworth in deepest Lancashire

A day of INSPIRATION

TRAINING

One of the many rural scenes of Lancashire

Nearly 30 hospitality staff from the University Hospitality Sector descended on deepest Lancashire, to meet one of the country's most highly rated and popular chefs – Nigel Haworth.

It was a day sponsored by the TUCO Learning and Development Group.

We all met at Ewood Park, home of Blackburn Rovers Football Club, at 09.45. Some had driven there that morning and were very happy to receive the hot tea and coffee in the luxury suite surroundings, looking down onto the Rovers pitch.

Nigel gave a very informal, interesting speech on his career and how he has developed his business – Northcote Manor, the pubs and catering at the football club.

The football club is a challenging business and Nigel and his team provide the catering for conferences, private dining and Christmas events at Ewood Park, as well as match days.

After Nigel's inspiring talk, Peter Ashcroft give us a talk on local produce, focusing on cauliflowers. We learnt a lot and one of the most interesting points was that it is a summer vegetable which most people did not know.

This was followed by a talk by Dan Austin, who spoke about Lakeland Farmers who produce lamb and beef for some Lakeland hotels and Nigel's venues. He elaborated on the quality and care that goes into looking after the animals.

After the talks, we went on a tour of the catering operation at Ewood Park. At this stage we were joined by Craig Bancroft, Nigel's business partner, who runs the front of house operations and is a legend on wine knowledge.

The public areas are in very good condition and the kitchens, although quite small, are very well organised. On match days, they produce meals to the highest standard corporate parties including lunch is upwards of £250.00 per ticket, per match.

It was a great tour and everyone was fascinated looking out onto the empty terraces. From here it was a convoy of cars up to the "Clog and Billycock" in Pleasington Village, Nigel's latest Gastro Pub. It really is in the middle of nowhere, although surrounded by some wealthy homeowners. It is very busy and the surrounding countryside is beautiful.

It is very stylish and big inside, but very nicely fitted. The pictures on the walls of local food heroes are very welcoming to see. The staff, both in the kitchens and front of house, were very smart and very on the ball. We had a glass of wine and then we sat down for lunch with plenty of choice on the menu, which for a group of nearly 30 was amazing.

The views from the pub across the Pennines is splendid, and in the snow it is beautiful.

We then left for Northcote Manor at Langho, the Michelin-Starred restaurant and luxury country hotel. Nigel, Craig, Lisa (the Head Chef) who will be on "Great British Menu", the Head Gardener and Head Housekeeper gave us an in-depth tour of the kitchen, which will be refurbished in 2011, and the restaurant, which is being refurbished this year.

The standards are amazingly high, and everyone took time to explain the running of the operation (it has had a Michelin Star for 14 years).

It was a great day, well supported by TUCO including Richard McGloin, the TUCO Chairman.

Special thanks to Nigel, Craig and their staff for a very special day. UC