

VERTIKAL DAYS ELECTRICIAN TO WOLFFKRAN TECHNICIAN

Six years ago, 19 year old trainee electrician Imogen Jade Gilligan joined her dad - electrician Neil Gilligan - at Vertikal Days and watched the skyline of cranes and platforms take shape as the build-up progressed. That event ultimately led to a career in an industry she had never previously considered. Today, she's testing and maintaining those same cranes as a Wolffkran workshop technician and the only woman to work operationally in the yard at the company's main facility in Sheffield, where she plays her part in looking after its fleet of 220 cranes.

Now 25, Gilligan joined Wolffkran at the end of January after completing her full electrician qualifications in October last year. Her route into the lifting industry began through family connections with her dad who has been handling the electrical work at Vertikal Days since the very first show at Haydock in 2007.

"Before Vertikal Days, I had no idea whatsoever about the lifting industry, it certainly wasn't something I thought I'd ever work in, but I remember being so fascinated watching the tower cranes being erected on site before the show began," says Gilligan.

The career shift from electrician to crane technician came following a conversation with Wolffkran's training manager Jonathan Parker during her first show at Donington Park Circuit in 2020. She is now one of three technicians working in the yard in Sheffield with five more mobile service technicians maintaining Wolff cranes across the country.

"Working as a workshop electrician is perfect for me," she says. "If I didn't go to Vertikal Days I would definitely not be doing what I am now, it really gave me an insight into the industry and the opportunities within it, and in a few years I hope to become a mobile electrical service technician."

Jonathan Parker - who has been with Wolffkran since 2004 and has spent the past 10 years as training manager - added: "Imogen showed a real



Imogen and Neil Gilligan at Vertikal Days

curiosity in our cranes and that's how it all began, she was really engaged and interested, and we wanted to harness that enthusiasm to see where it led. The fact she was already doing an electrical qualification was also a real benefit, and then to show an interest in our cranes was great, the two fit very well together, so it was a no brainer."

Working as the only female workshop technician has been a positive experience for Gilligan, she says: "Wolffkran treat me as an equal, and even though I'm the only woman in the yard, they don't put me on a pedestal."

"The industry - as a young person and I think particularly for women - is not as daunting as you would think. It's easy as a woman to think it would be harder to work in this kind of environment but in my experience, people find it more commendable that a woman is on site, I felt for a while that I had to try and prove myself by being better than the men, but I've realised that I don't."

To encourage young professionals into the industry, Wolffkran has been running apprenticeships - primarily for tower crane operators - since 2004 which are now known as



Imogen during her Working at Heights course

lifting technician apprenticeships. "It's imperative that we constantly inspire the younger generation to consider careers within this amazing industry. Working as a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Ambassador, I also visit high schools which is the first introduction for some to the many occupations available to both male and females within construction. I'm a father of three daughters who have been brought up to believe they can achieve anything. My advice for any females considering a role with cranes would be, don't think about what other people would think, follow your dreams and ambitions. There are no barriers in this modern world, we just need people to believe that," said Parker.

Gilligan's commitment to helping out at Vertikal Days remained strong enough that she negotiated continued involvement as part of her employment terms with Wolffkran. "Everyone that knows me at Vertikal Days knows how much I love it and that was one of my deals with Wolffkran before I began working with them, that I must be allowed to time off to work Vertikal Days," she says. "Vertikal Days is genuinely my favourite time of the year, the team is so tight knit, and we have a lot of fun." ■



Imogen with Jonathan Parker at the Wolff site in Sheffield



Undertaking Wolff's Crane Rescue course

