

# Doing the right job is crucial, because we have no business without our clients

**Berry Asset Management's Jamie MacLeod talks to Simona Stankovska about the course of his career at Skandia, Investec and Scottish Widows**

**F**ollowing Jamie MacLeod's sudden departure in September 2009 from Skandia Investment Group (SIG), many wondered whether this was the last anyone would see of him in the fund management industry.

A year later however, Mr MacLeod resurfaced at the helm of Pall Mall-based wealth manager Berry Asset Management (Bam), buying a 20 per cent share in the business and giving founder Jamie Berry the chance to step back and take on a more client-facing role.

"I left SIG on very good terms and am still a big fan of the business," says Mr MacLeod, who founded the firm in 2002. "I joined Bam in 2010 because it's a fabulous business and I've always held Jamie Berry in the highest regard, from when we did some deals together in the 1990s."

Mr MacLeod, who has an MBA from De Montfort university and attended Harvard Business School's The General Manager Program, is renowned for growing businesses and building up young brands – having reached managing director at Scottish Widows Investment Management by the age of 29 and then going on to launch SIG with just £700m of seed capital.

Only 16 months into his role at Bam, he has used his own entrepreneurial skills as well as those honed from his time at Scottish Widows, Investec and Skandia to implement big changes at the firm.

"The past year has been about building out the management team, relocating to new premises and defining our client proposition," he says, adding that the next will be about "taking it all to the introducer market".

Mr MacLeod's primary objectives, however, are to provide exceptional client service and enhance the firm's partnership with its major shareholder, 160-year-old Swiss private bank Bordier and Cie, of which he is a board member.

He says that as we enter a "new normal" environment, full of uncertainty and increased regulation, client service will become even more important.

"We've got the big tectonic movements of the RDR, a change in regulation and client expectations. Overlaying all of that, we've got the eurozone crisis, global economic and political issues.... quite a cauldron of issues for private investors," he says.

"The drive right now is to navigate these markets on behalf of our clients and do the very best we can do for people who trust us with their money. That's the most important thing," he adds.

Mr MacLeod emphasises that in order to achieve this, communication will be key. In August 2010, when the FTSE 100 dropped to 4,900, Bam decided to get in touch with its investors to reassure them in what he describes as "the harshest" times.

"Our message at that time, and remains, a positive one on a relative basis. There was all of this chaos going on, and our positions of almost zero European equities, long-indexed bonds, long gold and fully committed equity positions (albeit in very defensive equities), reassured clients.

"Our clients thought and reacted pretty

positively to the communication, which was in essence, globally and economically this has all got quite ugly. What was encouraging was that some of those clients looked at that downturn and sell-off as an opportunity to add to their holdings. We found that very reassuring and pretty encouraging as we navigated our way through some pretty jumpy waters. It showed us the maturity of our clients, in that they felt it was a good time to commit more capital."

As an owner-manager and client of the firm, Mr MacLeod says he is at pains to align his interests with those of his clients.

"If something goes wrong it goes wrong for all of us, and that absolutely adds focus on the clients. Doing the right job is crucial, because we have no business without our clients."

However, private clients are not Mr MacLeod's only potential audience. He also says he wants to work with IFAs and be their "support act" for those that need specialist investment management advice on a bespoke basis.

## Economic environment

"I've been a fan of the IFA market for 25 years, and we think IFAs have a massive part to play in the current environment and the future regulatory and economic environment. IFAs are absolutely the right people to give advice to investors, because they can communicate locally, they're available, they're often in the community, and there are lots of them. These firms will be relied up even more so in the new environment, and this volatility means that we've got to be in touch with our clients even more," says Mr MacLeod.

He's keen to stress however that Bam does not have an advisory business, nor does it intend to. "We're a support act for IFAs and other introducers. The IFAs do all of the holistic planning, all of the important understanding of risk, commitments and liabilities and wheel us in to support them. We're working as partners to any introducer, and have roughly 60 IFA firms that use our services."

Having worked at international, multi-million pound businesses, Mr MacLeod is keen to also extend Bam's international ties. Swiss private bank Bordier owns the other 70 per cent of Bam, but Mr MacLeod would like to enhance the relationship beyond this. Bordier has offices in Geneva, Zurich and Paris. It has also recently obtained a merchant banking licence in Singapore – which Bam could utilise.

"Bordier is a well established, traditional private bank and they've got a whole range of services that will be really appealing for wealthy clients – but it means much more than that. Bordier has unlimited liability at partner level, which is a crucial thing, because it focuses the mind. It's quite different from an investment manager working within a big investment bank," says Mr MacLeod.

Building on this relationship is beneficial for both parties, according to Mr MacLeod, as the bank has never really had a presence in London, and that's what Bam is going to give it. "We're optimistic and we have a vision, and I hope that is going to be attractive," he says.

Possessing this forward thinking, visionary attitude has helped Mr MacLeod get where he is today, combined with hard work and a touch of luck.

In spite of his success throughout the years, he retains his gratitude for Scottish Widows, the



PHOTOGRAPHER: SIMON HARGRAVE

company that gave him his "big break".

"I got a really lucky break and somebody gave me a job and paid for me to study privately, which gave me a chance to commit to whatever the exam was at the same time as doing the job. I'm very grateful to Scottish Widows for sponsoring me for those three years – it gave me a university life without the debt, and with the income and backing," he says.

"I've had four or five major pieces of good luck and good fortune that have created the situation that I'm in now," he adds.

Nevertheless, some things remain beyond his control. Mr MacLeod, a keen fisherman, peregrine falcon flyer and sailor, admits that

getting the right mix between work, family and his hobbies remains his most difficult challenge.

#### Balancing act

"My son's baggage lesson was an issue I was dealing with this morning and then I was looking at how the markets were going to open. Meanwhile someone sent me an email from British Columbia telling me what salmon they caught yesterday. And then I was having to make a decision about whether I can get out on a friend's boat on Saturday, and realising it's just not going to fit – so it's all a balancing act," he says.

And 2012 may make getting the balance right a little tougher, as Mr MacLeod predicts it's

going to be a year of decision making for wealth managers. "The big calls will be inflation, deflation, the euro and global growth. These are massive decisions and critical investment calls for wealth managers," he says.

"The markets presently seem to be being driven by politics rather than by company valuations and we are very focused on being ready and organised for the moves that are happening.

"Markets are going to offer some surprises, some on the downside, some on the upside, so we have to be robust. Our proposition is that we're dynamic and we do things and we react to changing circumstances."

## CV

### JAMIE MACLEOD

#### 2010-present

Chief executive, Berry Asset Management

#### 2002-2009

Chief executive and founder of Skandia Investment Management

#### 1999-2002

Head of UK and European retail and managing director of Investec Fund Managers and Investec Management and a member of the global executive board of Investec Asset Management

#### 1990-1999

Managing director and head of global business and client services, Scottish Widows Fund Management

#### 1986-1990

Broker consultant, Laurentian Life/Unit Trust Management