



**SHROPSHIRE  
BUSINESS AWARDS**  
In business for Business

# 25 YEARS

*of the* **SHROPSHIRE  
BUSINESS AWARDS**



Hold the front page . . . Karen Webb and Carl Jones officially launch the awards in 2001

VIP invitation to the first awards night

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# How it all began...

**The origins of the awards can be traced all the way back to the autumn of 2000, when four people sat round a table at Shropshire Chamber of Commerce's offices on a rainy October afternoon to throw around some ideas.**

For several years, the Chamber had held a Summer Ball, offering businesses the chance to dress up for an annual night of music, merriment and team building.

Meanwhile, the Shropshire Star newspaper was looking to resurrect its business awards, which it had last run in the newspaper in the late 1980s.

Why not combine the two, for an event that would truly celebrate the cream of the county's business community? That was the item on the agenda.

And so, the foursome – Angie Robinson and Lorraine Holmes from the Chamber, and the Shropshire Star's business editor and promotions manager Carl Jones and Jackie Gaze – shook hands on a deal to make it happen.

The awards were officially launched with a photoshoot outside the Chamber's headquarters at Stafford Park in Telford on Wednesday April 25th 2001, and the awards night was set for the summer.

The venue was to be Weston Park, the stately home on the east Shropshire border, where a marquee housing 250 guests would be erected in the grounds, and a spectacular firework display was to be lined up to bring the celebrations to a memorable climax.

The event, just like the fireworks, went with a bang and was a huge success. It returned to Weston Park the following year – but it was already beginning to outgrow the venue.

Sure enough, by 2003 organisers found themselves having to look round for a larger home. Various sites were visited including Ludlow Racecourse, Ellesmere College, and several potential locations in Shrewsbury, but it became clear that there was only going to be one local venue large enough to deliver...Telford International Centre.

From that year on, the exhibition centre has been home to the awards night virtually every year.

The name of the competition has evolved somewhat over the years, though. It started off as the less than snappily titled Shropshire Chamber Summer Ball & Shropshire Star Business Awards; then in 2005 it became the slightly abbreviated Shropshire Chamber & Shropshire Star Business Awards.

Two years later it was rebranded as simply the Shropshire Business Awards, which is how it remained until the Star stepped down as headline sponsor and it became established as the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards.

The awards have been held every year apart from 2021, when a planning meeting was held at the centre, but with companies only tentatively emerging from the pandemic, it was deemed unviable. In 2020, they had gone ahead as 'virtual' awards, live-streamed from the Yarrington TV studios in Frankwell, Shrewsbury.

This was the time, remember, when in-person events were prohibited due to social distancing rules (unless you were holding parties in Downing Street, of course!)

Over the last 25 years, the awards have become firmly established among the biggest and best events of their kind in the UK, with audiences as high as 950 people.

Nearly 15,000 people have now attended the celebratory nights since that first year, while more than 200 businesses have received awards – several going on to achieve regional or national recognition.

The coveted Company of the Year title has toured around all corners of the county, including Telford, Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Ludlow, Whitchurch, Bridgnorth, Upton Magna and Burford.

Aico of Oswestry currently sits at the top of the hall of fame as a three-time winner, while two companies – Grainger & Worrall of Bridgnorth and Grocontinental from Whitchurch – have won the county's biggest business prize twice.

McConnel of Ludlow is also a two-time champion, winning the 'Champion of Champions' prize for the 10th anniversary, having been the very first Company of the Year.

Not only has the event attracted huge audiences over the years, it's also welcomed some A-list guest speakers and entertainers.

Sir Norman Fowler (the former employment, transport and health secretary) led the way in the first year, followed by another government heavyweight – Margaret Thatcher's former Downing Street press secretary Sir Bernard Ingham – in year two.

From the world of sport, headliners have included Derek Redmond, Tanni Grey-Thompson, Roger Black and Frank Bruno, while captains of industry have included Sir John Timpson (founder of the Timpsons shoe chain), Poundland founder Steve Smith, jewellery entrepreneur Gerald Ratner, Dr Isabella Moore of the British Chambers of Commerce, and Lord Digby Jones, who at the time was director-general of the CBI.

From the world of entertainment, we've had the likes of supermodel Caprice, Spitting Image impressionist Steve Nallon, comedian and author Shed Simove, actress and comic Debra Stephenson, and finalists from the TV show Stars In Their Eyes. And for the 2007 event, we even had a James Bond movie star in the hall; the gadget-packed green Jaguar seen on screen in Die Another Day.

And who remembers 2007, when audience members were invited to vote for their 'Star Idea' from a shortlisted three presentations made by budding entrepreneurs looking for seedcorn funding to get their ventures off the ground? It ran for three years and helped to set the likes of an ethical 'growing' greetings card business, flat-pack brick maker, and whisky tasting enterprise off the ground.

Whatever its title, wherever the venue, and whoever's been headlining, one thing hasn't changed over the years, and that's the objective of the competition: to champion Shropshire business excellence, remind us all of the many remarkable, trailblazing companies we are so lucky to have in our county... and lay on one heck of a good party!



A socially distanced planning meeting for the 2021 awards that never happened



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Advertisement Feature

COMPANY of the YEAR - 2020, 2022, 2023

# More UK homes trust Aico to protect them

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The European Market Leader in Home Life Safety

# Aico: 35 Years of Home Life Safety

**Three-time Shropshire Company of the Year Aico is this year celebrating 35 years of innovative technology and quality alarms and sensors, which has led them to become the European market leader in home life safety.**

Founded in 1990, Aico has experienced remarkable growth and development, consistently adapting to the ever-evolving market landscape. Since the beginning, Aico has cultivated a reputation for innovation, quality and excellent customer service, resulting in a portfolio of cutting-edge products and solutions that have set industry standards.

Over the past 35 years, Aico has achieved so much. Their pioneering technology offers a variety of alarms and sensor types to guarantee full-circle protection for every home. In addition to products, education is a key part of home life safety and therefore is at the core of everything Aico does. This is reflected in its multiple award-winning CPD-accredited training courses which ensure quality at every stage of the supply chain.

Aico designs products to simplify the creation of safer homes – this is demonstrated by the HomeLINK Connected Home Solution, which has grown to connect over 483,800 devices across the UK and 80,338 live gateway systems. These systems aim to support landlords and protect residents.

It is also important that landlords keep informed about changing legislation to ensure they continue to stay compliant. Aico has supported and empowered landlords to network, develop and learn through the development of the Social Housing Professionals Network (SHPN), as well as the SHPN roadshow.

As well as educating the supply chain, Aico has seen the value of developing the knowledge of the future. With the introduction of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme in 2018, Aico has accumulated 249 educational visits, including visits to schools and colleges, and students coming to Aico's headquarters for the day.

These visits are there to inspire students and get them thinking about their future careers. This initiative has supported over 16,400 students and, most recently in 2024, over 3,259. Additionally, the CSR team organise the volunteering programme which has accumulated 7,547 employee volunteering hours for 247 causes. This support is set to continue and grow along with everything Aico does.

Managing director Neal Hooper commented on Aico's longstanding success: "It has been an incredible 35 years of growth. We have doubled our turnover approximately every five years whilst providing life safety solutions to millions of homes. Our market leading technology is being developed into new areas, further establishing our position as the dominant European manufacturer.

"The fact that we have colleagues who have been with Aico for the whole of its history, as well as a senior team wholly promoted from within, demonstrates the quality and loyalty that we are blessed with.



"We would like to thank all our clients for the support since 1990, without which we would not be celebrating such a milestone following another record year. It is massively appreciated.

"And finally, to the millions upon millions of households protected by Aico, thank you for choosing the very best solutions, it makes us very proud.

"We will continue to strive to provide world class quality, innovation, service, and education for the next 35 years and beyond."

Aico's success is a testament to the dedication and hard work of the entire team, in addition to the unwavering support of its valued customers and partners.

Commercial and finance director Matt Small has been with Aico for almost 26 years and said: "I joined Aico as a warehouse apprentice back in 1999. Over the past 25 years, my role has evolved significantly, and my warehouse days are well behind me – thankfully, as I don't think I could keep up these days!

"I've had the privilege of watching the company grow and transform over the last two and a half decades. Looking back, it's incredible to see how far we've come. The technology behind our products has advanced dramatically, with innovations like RF connectivity, launched in the mid-2000s, now commonplace.

"Today, one in three installations use RF interconnection, revolutionising how our systems operate. Similarly, multi-sensor technology has seen remarkable growth, with one in three alarms sold now being multi-sensors.

"Both innovations have paved the way for the development and expansion of more connected sensors in the home. While Aico has long been the market leader in fire and gas detection, our vision has expanded to position Aico as the leader in home life safety.

"Beyond the products, it's our people who have driven Aico's growth. I feel incredibly fortunate to have found such a supportive employer 25 years ago and to have seen my career evolve within the company. I'm proud to be part of Aico's management team, where I can continue to contribute to Aico's success.

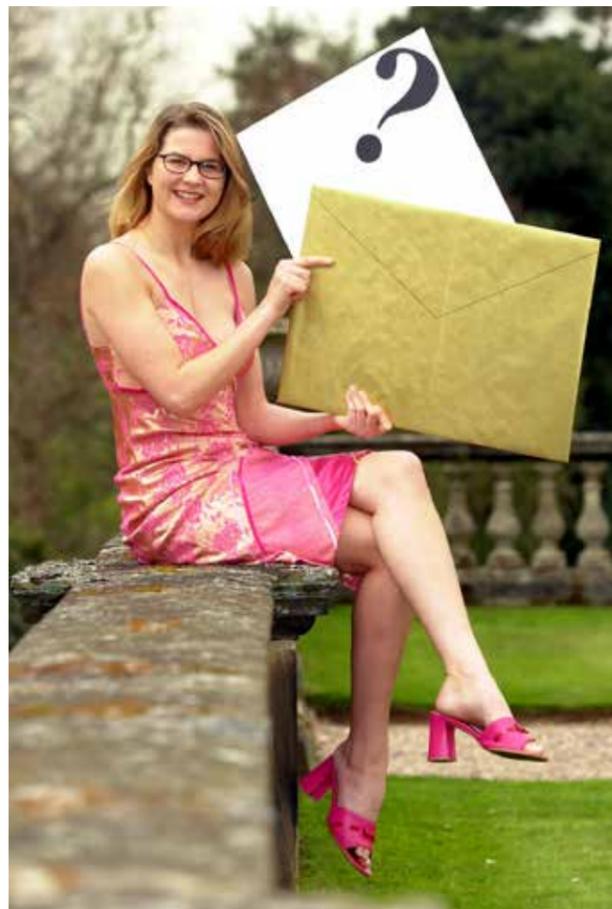
"It's truly rewarding to watch the next generation of colleagues begin their Aico careers, be given opportunities to develop themselves, and witness the phenomenal progress we've achieved in recent years. I'm excited to see what the next 25 years will bring as Aico continues to innovate and grow."

As Aico enters its next chapter, the company remains committed to innovation, customer satisfaction, and sustainability growth.





2001



The very first event was held on July 7, 2001 in a giant marquee in the grounds of Weston Park. An audience of 250 were entertained by the Cavatina string quartet during the pre-dinner drinks reception in the grounds, and the evening was rounded off by a spectacular firework display, plus dancing to the sounds of Take Four – which had shared the stage with the likes of Tina Turner, Shirley Bassey and Cliff Richard. Seven awards were handed out on the night, and McConnell of Ludlow, the farm machinery manufacturer, had the honour of becoming the first Shropshire Company of the Year. Former Government minister Sir Norman Fowler was guest speaker, and a raffle raised funds for the Shropshire Rural Stress Support Network.





**COMPANY of the YEAR - 2001**  
**CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS - 2010**



# A Legacy of Excellence: McConnell Celebrates 90 Years of Innovation



McConnell recently completed a £4 million facility improvement program, which included the installation of a new factory roof and 1,000 solar panels reducing its environmental footprint

Few companies can boast a legacy as rich as McConnell's. Founded in 1935, this Shropshire-based manufacturer has grown into a global leader in vegetation maintenance machinery, renowned for its engineering excellence and commitment to innovation. For nine decades, McConnell has remained at the forefront of the industry, setting new standards in reliability, performance, and customer service.

As McConnell celebrates its 90th anniversary in 2025, the company is marking the milestone with a limited-edition PA1935 Power Arm. This special model features an exclusive all-black livery and proudly carries the names of every employee, a testament to the dedication and expertise that have driven McConnell's success. The PA1935 is more than just a commemorative model - it is a tribute to the craftsmanship, passion, and engineering excellence that have defined McConnell's legacy.

### A Record-Breaking Year

2024 was a landmark year for McConnell, with sales revenue exceeding £50 million for the first time in the company's history. This remarkable achievement underscores the strength of McConnell's product range and the trust customers place in its machines. Despite

increasing competition, McConnell's reputation for quality and innovation continues to drive demand, both in the UK and across its global markets.

At the heart of this success is McConnell's flagship Power Arm range. Designed for precision and durability, these machines have become essential tools for farmers, contractors, and local authorities worldwide. With continued investment in research and development, McConnell is ensuring its Power Arms remain at the cutting edge of vegetation management technology, offering increased efficiency, enhanced safety, and superior performance.

### Investing in the Future

McConnell has never stood still, and its latest investments reflect a long-term commitment to growth and sustainability. The company recently completed a £4 million facility improvement program, which included the installation of a new factory roof for improved insulation and lighting. Additionally, 1,000 solar panels have been added to contribute to the factory's electricity needs - an initiative that aligns with McConnell's focus on reducing its environmental footprint. These upgrades not only improve operational efficiency but also demonstrate McConnell's commitment to responsible and sustainable manufacturing.

Beyond these upgrades, McConnell has secured planning permission for a 1,500m<sup>2</sup> factory extension, marking the first expansion of its Ludlow facility since 1965. This significant investment will enhance manufacturing capabilities, allowing the company to meet growing global demand and continue supplying machinery for years to come. As market requirements evolve, McConnell remains dedicated to adapting and expanding its facilities to maintain its industry-leading position.

### A British Success Story

One of the most unique qualities of McConnell's operation - and a significant competitive advantage over its rivals - is that the company designs and manufactures most of the components that make up its products. Over 80% of its components are designed and created in-house, with every element of research, development, design, prototyping, production, and quality testing carried out at Ludlow. This level of control ensures rigorous quality standards and continuous innovation.

McConnell has built a sizeable research and development department that works closely alongside its manufacturing team. To keep pace with growing demand from key markets - including farmers, contractors, professionals, local authorities, and amenities - the company has launched a recruitment drive to expand its 180-strong South Shropshire workforce over the coming year.

General manager Christian Davies reflects on the company's journey: "We are immensely proud of our skilled and experienced workforce. The vast majority come from a 15-mile radius of our Ludlow factory. We are proud to fly the flag for Shropshire, and we see our factory here as one of our biggest and best sales assets. We host visitors from all over the world and are always keen to give customers the chance to see what we do, and how we do it."

McConnell's reach extends far beyond the UK. Around 45% of its production is expected to be exported during 2025, with Europe accounting for nearly 70% of overseas sales. While fast-growing markets like Asia offer new opportunities, McConnell's domestic and international sales strategy is based on quality and innovation rather than price. All signs indicate that export sales will remain strong in the years ahead.

McConnell's best-known product, of course, is still the Power Arm. First launched in 1945, it revolutionised the hedge-cutting and verge-mowing sector and is now sold around the world in an extensive array of different shapes, sizes, and configurations.

In recent years, McConnell has expanded its product portfolio with the ROBOCUT series, a range of advanced remote-controlled mowers engineered to tackle hazardous and hard-to-reach areas. Designed for maximum safety and efficiency, these all-terrain machines allow operators to work from a secure distance, enhancing both productivity and protection in challenging environments.

Products are sold through a network of distributors, spanning from Norway to New Zealand, and the company exhibits its wares at some



McConnell's manufacturing facility in Ludlow is the world's leading producer of Power Arms



Limited Edition PA1935 Power Arm launched earlier this year at LAMMA exhibition carries the names of every McConnell employee

of the biggest trade events on the planet each year.

### Looking Ahead

As McConnell enters its 10th decade, the company's focus remains on innovation, quality, and growth. With major investments in its facilities, a record-breaking year of sales, and an unwavering commitment to excellence, the future is brighter than ever. Whether it's through its flagship Power Arm range or pioneering advancements in vegetation management, McConnell continues to set the standard for the industry.

McConnell's legacy is built on more than just its machines - it is built on the people, the craftsmanship, and the relentless pursuit of excellence that have driven the company forward for 90 years.

As the company celebrates its past, it is also building for the future - ensuring that McConnell remains at the cutting edge of agricultural and municipal machinery for generations to come.



2002



It was back to Weston Park for the second awards ceremony, when an even larger gathering witnessed Telford-based office equipment firm Lyreco collect the Company of the Year trophy. Guest speaker this time was the no-nonsense Downing Street spin doctor Sir Bernard Ingham, who worked for many years with Margaret Thatcher. The sun shone for a wonderful pre-dinner drinks reception in the grounds... but it was already becoming clear that the sell-out event was outgrowing the venue. Music was provided by top tribute band Fairplay.



# 2003



Shropshire Chamber *Summer Ball*  
& Shropshire Star *Business Awards*  
2003

This was the year that the awards moved for the first time to Telford's International Centre, which has staged the event in all but two years since. CJ Wildbird Foods of Upton Magna, which had recently rebuilt itself after a devastating fire, was crowned Company of the Year, and the director general of the British Chambers of Commerce Dr Isabella Moore was the guest speaker. Entertainment was provided by award-winning 1970s tribute showband Carwash, and the star prize in the charity raffle was a stay in the five-star Le Meridien hotel in London's exclusive Park Lane.





2004



Shropshire Chamber *Summer Ball*  
& Shropshire Star *Business Awards*  
2004

A gathering of nearly 500 people – the largest yet – converged on Telford International Centre to see Whitchurch-based haulage group Grocontinental win the first of its two Company of the Year awards. Guests were entertained by magicians and caricaturists at the pre-dinner drinks reception, and enjoyed a main course of fillet steak in Drambuie and black pepper jus. The night was brought to a musical climax by performers from the hit TV show Stars In Their Eyes, including Tom Jones and Diana Ross, as well as singalong pianist Mauro – a former musical director of Andrew Lloyd-Webber's Starlight Express.





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## MY BUSINESS AWARDS *memories*



# Leaky pens and celebrity lookalikes

**LORRAINE HOLMES is one of the 'founding four', a former chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce who went on to lead Business Link West Midlands, and the region's Manufacturing Advice Service.**

**When I was asked if I would do a short piece on my memories of the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards to mark the 25th anniversary, I was amazed that it had been running so long. Where did the time go?!**

I can remember very clearly the early meetings between the Chamber and the Shropshire Star to develop the ideas of the business awards.

I had recently moved to Shropshire Chamber from Dudley TEC, and what struck me when I started working in Shropshire was how many amazing and innovative businesses there were who were not getting the recognition they deserved – and also how Telford and Shropshire, as an area, were not seen as a significant economic contributor within the region.

We were very keen to address both of these issues, and so the idea of the business awards was born...

The first year was a real nail-biter as we had no idea what the interest would be, but due to the fantastic support of the Shropshire Star, the awards really took off, and it was clear that a partnership between the Chamber and the Shropshire Star was a match made in heaven.

The first two award nights were held in a marquee at Weston Park, and on the surface the events were very smoothly done... but believe me behind the scenes we had quite a few funny moments.

There was the year when we had Sir Bernard Ingham (Margaret Thatcher's former press secretary) as the guest speaker. He arrived about an hour before the event and was distraught that his pen had leaked in his pocket and stained his shirt. We had to take him to my bedroom in the house, strip him to the waist (not pretty), clean his shirt and dry it with a hairdryer!

On another occasion, we had hired a Marilyn Monroe lookalike to sell raffle tickets. When she arrived, one of the team – unknown to me – had given her the key to my bedroom to get changed in. Now, I was already downstairs working at this point but my husband

was still in the shower. I'm sure you can imagine his horror (or more probably delight) when he came out of the bathroom to find himself face to face with Marilyn!

Then there was the year, 2004 I think, when Carl Jones and I were on stage presenting the awards and someone knocked over the stand with the winners' envelopes on. They had been arranged in the correct presentation order, but with nothing written on them, so we ended up just scooping them off the floor and improvising. Somehow we managed to make it look seamless... so eat your heart out Richard and Judy!

The awards grew year on year, and by year three we had got to the point where demand for tickets exceeded the capacity at Weston so a new venue had to be found.

Now I have to admit that when my then colleague Karen Webb proposed a move to the International Centre and a reformatting of the event to include features like casino tables and a Tom Jones tribute act, I was sceptical. But I'm delighted to say I was wrong... it was an outstanding success.

Every year we saw more amazing companies entering the awards, making the job of judging very difficult, and the awards dinner became a highlight of the business calendar, as it remains today.

I am so proud to have been involved with the business awards and delighted that it has endured for so long, bringing the recognition that the businesses of Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin so richly deserve.

**The Marilyn Monroe lookalike who gave Lorraine's husband a fright**



Lorraine's message in the 2004 awards programme



*Chamber of Commerce and Shropshire Star  
Summer Ball & Business Awards  
2005*

It was the fifth anniversary of the awards, and attendances were continuing to grow. Another new name was added to the Company of the Year roll of honour – this time Telford-based forensic fingerprint creators Smartwater, which was making a real name for itself in the hi-tech fight against crime. There were also wins for the likes of Furrows, and Lyreco . . . and the caricaturist was back again by popular demand to mingle with guests before dinner. 1970s tribute band Carwash also returned to provide the post-awards entertainment, and the charity raffle raised funds for Young Enterprise.





# 2006



Caterpillar Remanufacturing, the Shrewsbury-based business which cleans, refurbishes, re-assembles and updates industrial products, lifted the Company of the Year title this year in front of an audience of more than 600 people in the Ironbridge Suite at Telford's International Centre. Entertainment was provided by Steve Nallon, the man behind many of the most famous voices in TV show Spitting Image. Lord Bruce Grocott, the former Telford MP, was also a guest speaker.





# 2007

## The Business Awards 2007

Licensed to thrill... the awards were given a James Bond theme for their 007th anniversary, and the Jaguar XKR which featured in the movie Die Another Day was a star attraction in the concourse at the International Centre. On the stage, the Company of the Year title went to Salop Leisure, and the event saw the debut of 'Star Idea', when audience members got to vote on the best of three pitches for new businesses. Lisa Pickering won with her 'Growing Greetings' plantable cards. Beat Connection provided the live music, followed by a DJ set from Paul 'Shuttsie' Shuttleworth.



MY BUSINESS AWARDS *memories*



A whirlwind of excitement and emotion

**TERESA MADEN remembers selling tickets and tables for the very first awards dinner, and went on to be involved in the event in various capacities for 20 years.**

**My journey with the Chamber began in July 1999 as a customer services adviser - completely unaware that one day I would be responsible for organising the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards!!**

I vividly remember my first experience with the awards, surrounded by a dedicated sales and marketing team in the Chamber office on Stafford Park. They were fully immersed in planning and executing this grand event.

Each time a table or ticket was sold, a large sticker would be placed on a pillar or wall, marking the sales progress and no doubt on an excel spreadsheet (it was the 90s after all!) but it truly was a collective team effort.

There were a few years when I missed the awards, likely because I was on holiday - what was I thinking!?

Before long, I transitioned from events co-ordinator to events manager, a role that came with significant responsibilities. It was finally my time to shine, with the support of my team and collaboration with Yarrington in Shrewsbury to organise the awards - my biggest challenge yet!

A whirlwind of excitement, emotion, and anxiety filled my days. I feared disappointing others or making mistakes, like mistakenly notifying a company that they were shortlisted when they weren't.

I took deep breaths and double-checked everything, but I loved it... the adrenaline, the structure, the planning, the communication, and the thrill of knowing who the winners were weeks in advance.

As soon as one awards event concluded, we were already planning for the next, always seeking ways to make it bigger and better.



**The Chamber team behind the awards in 2014. Teresa is pictured with Rachel Owen, Chris Jones, and Libby Williams**

I've witnessed countless high-profile guest speakers, cheered as hundreds of deserving companies and their staff collected their awards on stage, sent countless emails, savoured delicious starters, mains, and desserts, and watched many bottles of beer and wine being poured.

Despite challenges, the awards continued each year, even through the Covid pandemic, which forced us to cancel the summer 2020 event. We adapted and successfully held the awards online in November 2020.

This unique and unexpected format left a lasting impression on me. I felt immense pride in delivering the event during such tough times and creating a new award category to honour the businesses that came together to support Shropshire's community.

This was my final personal memory of organising the awards; a remarkable way to conclude my journey.

Now, as just an attendee, I can sit back, relax, and enjoy the awards evenings, knowing everything is in capable hands.

I'd like to congratulate Carl Jones on his 25th year as master of ceremonies. He is a true gentleman and professional who has played a vital role in the success of every event. It has been a genuine pleasure and honour to have worked with him over the years.

Here's hoping 2025 is the best awards ever.



**The 2020 virtual awards were the last for Teresa, and a special memory**

**Top picture: Teresa with Gillian Farrell at the launch of the 2019 awards**

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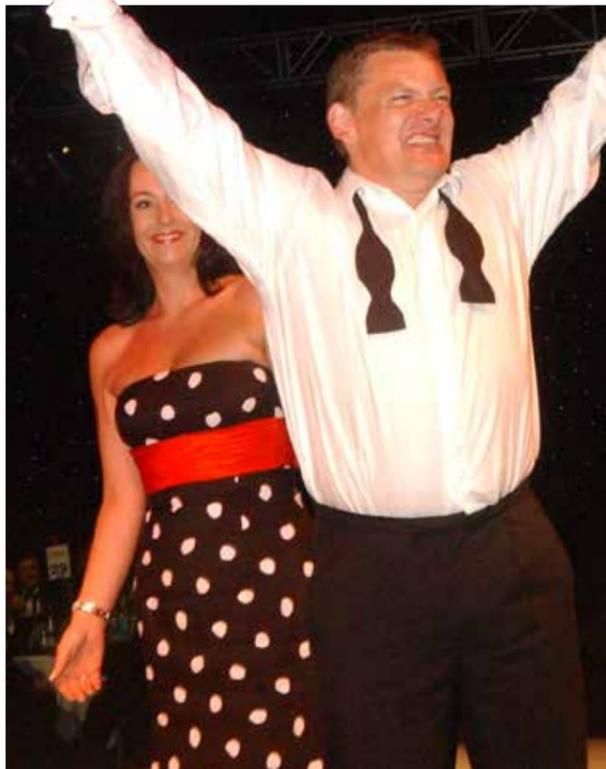


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2008



After two years in the first floor Ironbridge Suite, the awards moved to the ground floor at the International Centre where the hall was given a makeover – the stage was in the centre of the hall. There were two hosts on the night – regular MC Carl Jones was joined by Juliette Ferrington from BBC Five Live. The Company of the Year award went to Telford-based Dodd Group, and Olympian Roger Black was the guest speaker. Guests danced the night away to live music from Platinum Gold, and Severn Hospice was the recipient of the charity raffle, where first prize was a voucher for a trip on the Orient Express.

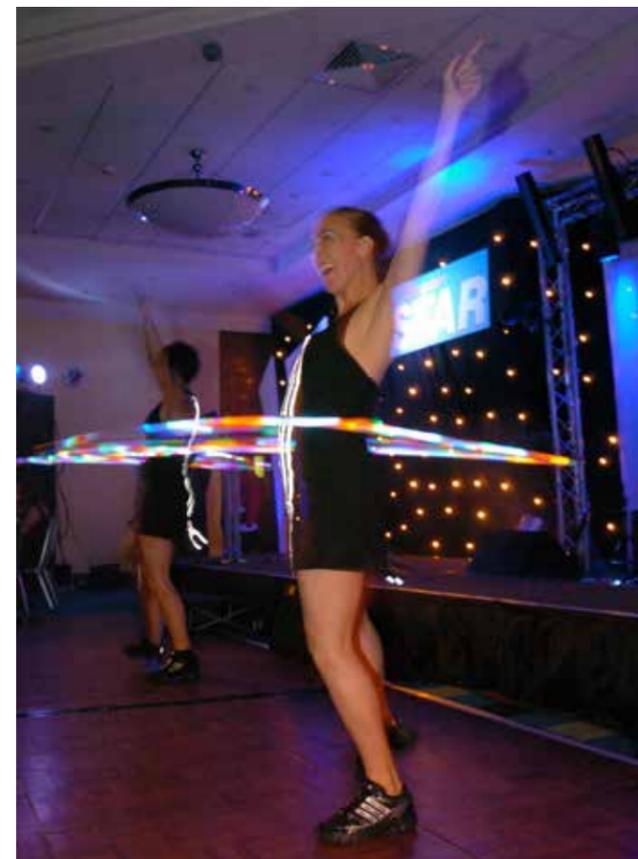




# 2009

Shropshire  
Business  
Awards 2009  
Celebration of excellence

With the International Centre unavailable, the awards moved to the Park Inn hotel in the centre of Telford, where the room was packed to the rafters to see SP Holding of Telford win the Company of the Year title. Other category winners on the night included law firm Lanyon Bowdler, and manufacturer Eurofilms Extrusion. Jewellery maverick Gerald Ratner was guest speaker, and guests were greeted by a town crier and entertained by glow-in-the-dark circus performers. Such was the demand for tickets to the sell-out evening that many would-be guests were left disappointed.





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2010



The 10th anniversary of the awards remains the largest gathering in the event's history. More than 950 people were at the International Centre on June 4 where McPhillips (Wellington) Limited took the Company of the Year title, and McConnel of Ludlow was crowned 'Champion of Champions' in a special award for past champions which was created to mark the milestone. Lord Digby Jones, who was director-general of the CBI at the time, was guest speaker, and 'Star Idea' appeared for a third and final time, with The Whisky Tasting Company this time winning the audience vote. Soul Party brought the night to a musical climax as companies celebrated the economy slowly moving out of recession.





**COMPANY of the YEAR - 2010**

# Awards win was the start of success for McPhillips

**Shropshire's largest construction company has come a long way since being named the county's business of the year in 2010.**

Telford-based McPhillips – which last year celebrated its 60th anniversary – has grown significantly in the past 15 years which has also seen new leadership take the helm following a management buyout.

Some of the key landmarks since lifting the Shropshire Chamber business of the year trophy in 2010 include:

- The completion of 140 projects worth over £300 million in the last five years alone.
- 240 people now employed by the company with 92% living within 20 miles of the Telford head office.
- More than 30 separate projects under way in 2025 across Shropshire, the Midlands and North West.
- Prestigious contract wins including the Heart of Africa attraction at Chester Zoo, transformation of Telford Central Fire Station and Station Quarter, new vet school at Harper Adams University and major infrastructure projects in Oswestry, Shrewsbury and Birmingham
- The launch of the McPhillips Community Fund with Shropshire Community Foundation to help disadvantaged and hard-to-reach communities and people across the county.

Managing director Paul Inions said investing in people, an unwavering commitment to quality and an understanding of the business's role in the wider community were among the key reasons for its success.

"For 60 years the McPhillips name has been a byword for excellence. The McPhillips family created a wonderful legacy in the way they ran the company, and it is something we have been dedicated to continuing since the family retired in 2017.

"I am immensely proud of the fact that in the last 60 years we have



**McPhillips began work on the £20 million retirement community in Newport in Autumn 2024**

delivered projects worth more than £1billion, not just because of the success we have delivered to clients but also because of what that success means to our people and their communities.

"Our success is quite literally the county's success. We employ local people, work with local supply chain partners and sub-contractors and have supported more than 100 local groups and organisations."

If anything sets McPhillips apart, it is its approach to people. More than 20 per cent of its direct workforce started out as apprentices with the firm, and many have stayed with the business for two decades and more.

"Everyone knows that there is a big skills crisis in our industry, but we believe in solutions rather than problems so have invested heavily in our own training centre. We enjoy fantastic staff loyalty as a result, with retention rates which are the envy of the industry."

It's not just its own people McPhillips cares passionately about. It has just launched the McPhillips Community Fund with Shropshire Community Foundation supporting innovative local projects that improve mental health and wellbeing.

"If we cannot deliver real social value to the communities we live and work in, what is the point of enjoying all this success?" says Paul.

"The same applies to our environmental responsibilities. There's little value in being rich in a world where the climate is out of control. We have set ourselves the ambitious target to be carbon neutral by 2035 and fully intend to meet that goal.

"We are custodians of this planet for future generations, in just the same way that my fellow directors and me are custodians of McPhillips. We fully intend to do everything we can to ensure both are passed on in the healthiest condition possible."



**McPhillips has been awarded the contract to transform Addenbrooke House into a new sixth form centre for Telford College**



2011



The 2011 event saw another new name on the Company of the Year trophy – Telford-based Pebble Learning. Other winners on the night included Telford College, Fishmore Hall of Ludlow, Shropshire Fine Herbs, Grainger & Worrall of Bridgnorth, and Telford Laundry. Lord Bruce Grocott made a second guest speaking appearance, and AFC Telford United chairman Lee Carter also took to the stage to parade the football club's recently-won promotion trophy and take part in a Q&A with compere Carl Jones. The Shropshire Star joined forces with motor dealer Furrows to give one person a job after an on-stage 'Just The Job' live interview with two candidates, and an audience vote. Great experience for the winner, but brutal for the other guy!



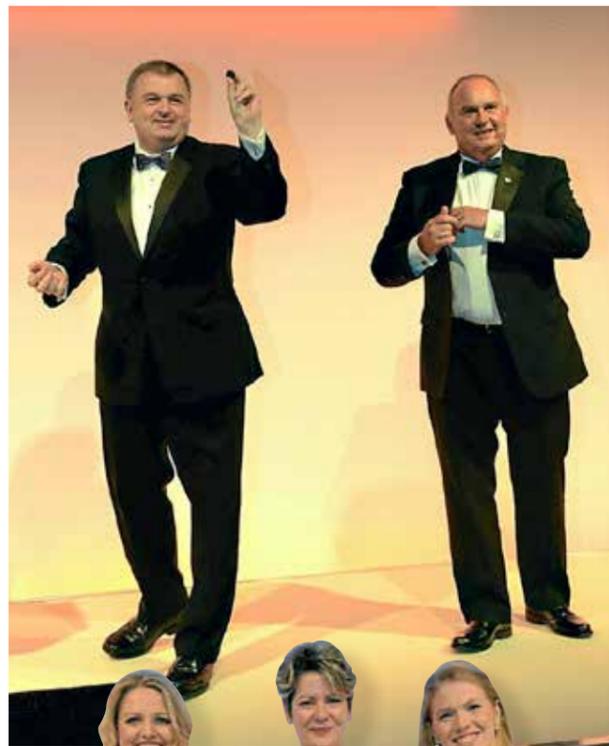


2012



More than 700 people packed into the hall for an Olympic-themed event, held just a few weeks before the start of the London Games. An Olympic torch from the flame relay which had travelled through Much Wenlock - birthplace of the modern Olympics - was on display, and Team GB athletics legend Derek Redmond was guest speaker. The Company of the Year title went to Natural Welsh Water of Oswestry, while other category champions included Ludlow Food Festival, Grocontinental, Filtermist, Fabweld, and Choice Shops.





# 2013



Whitchurch haulage company Grocontinental made history by becoming the first business to win the Company of the Year award twice, in front of another huge audience at Telford International Centre. Other winners included Ra'Alloy Ramps, Belvoir Lettings, The Marvellous Group, and Bronze Software Labs, while the guest speaker was multiple gold medal winning Paralympics GB legend Tanni Grey-Thompson. There was also an award for the hosts, as Telford International Centre picked up the prize for travel, tourism and hospitality, and a new apprenticeships award, sponsored by TCAT, was won by Air Systems Group.





COMPANY of the YEAR FINALIST - 2008, MANAGING CHANGE WINNER - 2011

## Proud to partner with local employers

**Telford College has a long and proud connection with the Shropshire Business Awards – as a sponsor, a judge . . . and a winner too.**

The college is a past champion of the Managing Change category, a former Company of the Year finalist, and a sponsor of the new Inspirational Adult Learner award for 2025.

It has won a series of awards in recent times, recognising quality of education, and engagement with the business community, including: **THE BEACON AWARDS** – known as the ‘Oscars’ of further education – for engagement with employers

**THE PEARSON NATIONAL TEACHING AWARDS** for staff who have gone ‘above and beyond’ to support students

**THE NATIONAL LEARNING DISABILITIES & AUTISM AWARDS** for work supporting people with learning disabilities

**THE FE FIRST AWARDS** for teams who ‘set the bar high in the education sector’

The college, a patron member of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, has been rated ‘Good’ across all areas in its latest Ofsted inspection.

It works with many of the region’s largest employers, including Capgemini, Muller, McPhillips, Denso, Wrekin Housing Group, Dodd Group, Avara, Kier, Telford & Wrekin Council, and more.

The college is also launching new aviation engineering courses in collaboration with RAF Cosford this autumn, and new cyber security courses at its digital and maths skills hub in Telford’s Station Quarter.

Keele University is opening a new base at the college’s Wellington campus in September to run an innovative new Nursing Associate apprenticeship.



**Telford College has opened a new engineering centre as part of an ambitious plan to bridge skills gaps and boost productivity in the local economy – working in close partnership with employers.**

The college is playing a leading role in the Local Skills Improvement plan for the region, and the Marches Education Partnership, and has opened a new high-quality engineering centre at the Wellington campus providing upskilling opportunities for maintenance technicians.

Principal and chief executive officer Lawrence Wood says he is keen to build strong partnerships with businesses.

“We are helping to kick-start the economy through partnerships with employers to deliver high quality apprenticeship opportunities in areas like construction, engineering and digital.

“In addition, our work with adult learners has gone from strength to strength, supporting many to upskill or retrain and get back into employment.”

He says: “My experience of working in partnership with industry goes back many years, and I know that it can really make a difference.”

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2014



More than 700 people were again at the International Centre for another huge night of celebration, which was given a samba theme to coincide with the summer of the football World Cup in Brazil. Hawk Group from north Shropshire was named Company of the Year – one of two awards for them on the night – while other winners included GWR Fasteners and Aubrey Kirkham Funeral Directors. After dinner entertainment was provided by comedian, author and TedX speaker Shed Simove.



The night in tweets

- Nick @sussexmouette: Friday night was great & @RockfordIT ending up winners made it one to remember #sba14
- Teresa Rowe @ShropsChamber: @shedsimove thank you for being our guest speaker last night, funny, innovative and a little bit out of the box! You were great #sba14
- Nick Jones @NickJonesDipPFS: @CapriceBourret You missed an excellent evening – hope you are sorted asap. Maybe next year? #sba14
- Heather Noble @saltsolutionsuk: Good morning to all those with thick heads after celebrating success @ShropsChamber #sba14 last night!! #puttingshropshireonthemap
- Jude Robinson @GWRFasteners: Thank you to the @ShropsChamber for an amazing night and to @TurnerPeachey @elwynturner for sponsoring the award, we are buzzin #sba14
- Rachel Jones @racheljonespr: And most enthusiastic welcome award from a client last night at #sba14 goes to @Henshalls – thank you girls you were great! :-)
- Mandy Thorn @oxoncarr: @ShropsChamber Absolutely, fantastically, a brilliant evening, thank you! #sba14
- J&PR Ltd @JandPR: How did it become 1.20am?! Knew I should have left with Rhea at 11.30am! #SBA14
- Salop Design @salopdesign: @ShropsChamber we will be back next year ;) bigger, better and ready to win. Great event, great people and great business's. #sba14 #tfn
- Reech Media @reechmedia: Congrats Jesmonite! So pleased to be shortlisted in such a competitive category, well done everybody! #sba14
- Hannah Noakes @Hannah\_ZenPR: Love the carnival theme at this year's Shropshire Business Awards #SBA14
- Jan Minihane @JanMinihane: Watching the scantily clad Brazilian dancers at #sba14 and wondering where the scantily clad men are?! :-)
- Jessie Hinds @HatchersLLP: Everyone is looking amazing at #sba2014 tonight
- Sheridan Shed Simova @ShedSimove: Thanks so much Teresa @ShropsChamber An amazing event that you put on! I was chuffed to step into Caprice's shoes – perfect high heeled!





2014



Celebrating 25 years of the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards



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# 2015



The Company of the Year title went to Bridgnorth for the first time with victory for manufacturing firm Grainger & Worrall, which was a multiple trophy winner on the night. This was the year of the catwalk and the selfie . . . everyone wanted a picture, it seemed, with guest speaker Caprice, the model turned entrepreneur who spoke about her lingerie company and answered questions. Other prizewinners included Thermserve, Eaton Manor Country Estate, and Ray Grocott – inaugural recipient of The John Clayton Award for his outstanding contribution to the local business community.





MY BUSINESS AWARDS *memories*



Four fights and a premature emission

**MARK ALLSOP is a multi-award winning live event specialist who has produced the Chamber Awards since 2010.**

**Telford International Centre, Friday, June 20, 2010: After 12 gruelling hours of setup, the stage gleams under the spotlights, the tables are impeccably set, and the air crackles with anticipation.**

Over 1,000 guests begin to take their seats for what promises to be the most dazzling Chamber Awards yet. Background music fills the room, and sweeping lights add an extra touch of elegance to the spectacle about to unfold. It has taken nine months of relentless planning, creative brainstorming, and sheer hard work to reach this moment.

Then, above the chatter of guests and the constant buzz in my headset, I hear it – a low, ominous rumble. Another follows, louder this time. A summer storm is rolling in. Within minutes, casual conversations are drowned out by the sharp crack of lightning and the deafening drum of rain hammering against the roof.

The lights flicker. Once. Twice. And then the projectors cut out for a split second. A chill runs down my spine. I calmly (or so I hope) ask: "How long for backup power?" The hesitant response: "Two minutes."

Two minutes. A mere 120 seconds. Yet, in the world of live events, it's an eternity – one that could leave 1,000 guests quite literally in the dark.

Then, just as suddenly as it began, the storm passes. The power stabilises. My heart rate follows suit. And the show? Well, the show goes on without further incident. That was the closest brush with disaster I've ever had in all the years of the Chamber awards.

Over the next 13 events, we've had our fair share of surprises – though none quite as nerve-wracking. There have been the



**Mark Allsop at the lectern for the virtual awards in 2020**

unscripted moments that left us speechless (who could forget Frank Bruno's riotous takedown of Carl's psyche?) and Richard Sheehan's infamous Red Card/Yellow Card game that kept finalists on their toes.

And, of course, the legendary premature confetti cannon explosion that we will never live down. But through miles of cabling, thousands of speakers, mics, lights, cameras, and computers, the show has always gone off without a hitch.

But there's always a first time.

Every year, as we plan the awards, we create a 'What If' list. What if England is playing in a World Cup match? What if a General Election is called? What if an ageing monarch passes? What if the guest speaker doesn't show – or worse, shows up spectacularly drunk? We prepare for the unexpected, but nothing could have prepared us for 2020.

That year turned the world upside down, and it's already hard to recall just how surreal those months of lockdown felt. But hats off to the Chamber for boldly taking the awards online, keeping the business community engaged, and celebrating those companies making a difference.

Broadcasting from a makeshift studio in our office, we delivered a show to Shropshire and beyond, complete with outside broadcasts and even in-car entertainment.

Usually, around 40 crew members handle the technical magic of the awards. It's the same dedicated team year after year – specialists in lighting, audio, video, rigging, data engineering, and more. They arrive at 8am to an empty hall and, by 4pm, the venue is transformed. Rehearsals wrap up just in time for the first guests to walk through the doors. And after the final trophy is handed out, the crew dismantles it all with military precision, clearing the venue in just two hours. They are the unsung heroes behind the glamour, and it's an honour to work alongside them.

As for the afterparty? While the crew stays sober on the job, we've seen our fair share of colourful moments. From dramatic standoffs worthy of a soap opera to guests who clearly indulged a little too much. But that's all part of the magic, the energy, and the unforgettable spectacle that is the Chamber awards.

And long may it continue.



Before...



2016



Orchard Valley Foods from Burford on the south east Shropshire border were celebrating this year as they lifted the Company of the Year title. Other winners included Beaverfit, Champion and Reeves, Boxall & Edmiston, and Henshalls. John Timpson, boss of the Timpson Group, was mesmerising when he took to the stage to tell his life story – the most powerful guest speaker the event has ever had. This was also the third year of what had become a tradition for the awards – a business awards launch event at the start of the year. This one was held at Rybrook in Shrewsbury.





# 2017



Another huge audience packed into the International Centre to see Telford waste management specialist Reconomy crowned Company of the Year. Other winners on the night included Stallion AI, Ascendancy Internet Marketing, J&PR, QI Van Systems, Global Freight Services and Choice Shops, while Graham Wynn OBE became the second winner of The John Clayton Award for his outstanding contribution to the local economy. A steel band entertained guests before dinner. 'Shaping The Future' was the theme for this year's awards, and Severn Hospice was the beneficiary of the charity fundraiser.





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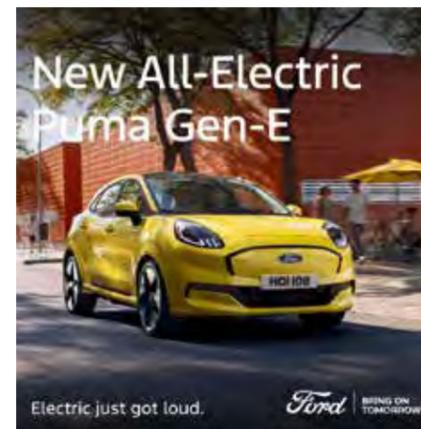


# 2018



Grainger & Worrall of Bridgnorth became the second two-time winner of the Shropshire Company of the Year Award on a night which also saw category wins for the likes of Morris Joinery, David Dexters, Bridgnorth Aluminium, Fabdec, Shropshire Festivals and Beaver Bridges. There was also a 'Telford 50' award to mark the golden anniversary of Telford New Town, and it was Exotic Zoo which won the title on the back of a public vote. The John Clayton Award went to the Coward family, owners of motor dealership Furrows.





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2019



Nearly 700 people convened in the Ironbridge Suite at the International Centre to see Knockin-based construction company Pave Aways crowned Company of the Year. Other winners on the night included J&PR, McPhillips, Hospital Direct, Love2Stay, Fabdec and Xscape Now, while Shropshire-schooled millionaire leisure entrepreneur Mo Chaudry was guest speaker. Charity cash was raised for two great local causes - Severn Hospice, and the Lingen Davies Cancer Fund. Salop Leisure had hosted the launch event earlier in the year.







2020



The year began with a January launch event at Salop Leisure, and plans to return to the International Centre in the summer... but the pandemic had other ideas. Instead, a 'virtual business awards' event was live-streamed from the Yarrington studios in Shrewsbury later in the year. Oswestry home life safety company Aico was named Company of the Year, and there were a few special surprises on the night, including a video message from Chancellor Rishi Sunak. Other winners included Coopers Gourmet Foods, 7Video, Pave Aways and Aviramp. Several of the winners connected to the studio with live zoom links, while the 90-minute stream also included a quiz, and even a pre-event wine tasting masterclass, courtesy of Tanners!





## MY BUSINESS AWARDS *memories*



Forging friendships, and celebrating success

**RICHARD SHEEHAN began his long association with Shropshire Chamber of Commerce in 2007, and served as chief executive for more than 15 years.**

**It was 2007, and I was at a crossroads. After 26 years in the motor trade I was taking a year out to do something different, before returning to the motor trade. That was the plan, anyway – but it didn't pan out that way.**

My year out was to be spent working for Shropshire Chamber of Commerce as patron director. I was invited to attend the Shropshire Business Awards a few weeks before my start date to help integrate into my new world... wow, what a shock!

Businesses from across Shropshire came together on an amazing night of celebration of success; people from all levels within businesses, large and small, oozed excitement, forged new friendships and enjoyed friendly rivalry in front of an audience of hundreds. I was hooked.

When I became chief executive, I was determined that no matter if we were in a credit crunch, recession, Brexit or even pandemic, businesses wanted – no, demanded – an opportunity to let their hair down and celebrate success on a grand scale. No matter how challenging the times, the Chamber had to find a way of making that happen.

Over the years we heard from speakers representing high profile businesses, Olympians and celebrities, all unique in their field. No doubt we will all have our own fond memories as we approach the 25th anniversary event this year.

For me, it was always seeing the looks of astonishment on the faces of people when they walked into the vast hall housing the event, humbled that their business could be at such an event. I knew that the self-belief and confidence such recognition gave to people would help them through life's ups and downs for years to come.

Seeing the pride within the Chamber team as they said to each other 'Look what we have done' is also a special memory.

All the speakers have been amazing, but it was John Timpson who stood out the most. You could have heard a pin drop as he captivated over 650 people, speaking about his business model that gave offenders and people with challenges in life a chance to be proud of their contribution to the company.

As the room fell silent, people looked around – and at each other – in utter disbelief; never before or since has the awards audience been so totally captivated.

As a demonstration of our diverse approach, we welcomed the world-renowned supermodel Caprice Bourret who spoke of her change of career into a successful businesswoman. I was lucky enough to escort her safely back to her hotel... not something you forget.

Over the years we were privileged to raise significant sums for a wide range of charities at the awards – doing what the Chamber does best, making a real difference within Shropshire.

As a thank you for their generosity, the audience were invited to participate in a charity game which would usually be full of hilarity, laughter and comments whispered in my ear along the lines of: "Oh no, what am I doing up here on this stage?" Great sports one and all.

As the 25th anniversary event approaches, I know Ruth and her team will be giving it their all to ensure that Shropshire business success is once again held up in lights, at yet another event which will be the envy of so many across the country.

**Top: Richard with Ruth Ross, who succeeded him as Chamber CEO**



Mo Chaudry shares a joke with Richard Sheehan



At the 2019 launch event



2022

SHROPSHIRE CHAMBER  
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After being denied a celebration by Covid in 2021, there was renewed excitement, beginning with a launch at Salop Leisure and culminating on June 10 with a second Company of the Year success for Aico of Oswestry. Other winners included Beaver Bridges, SNG Barratt, and Shropshire Business Live TV. Guest speaker Frank Bruno sparred with MC Carl Jones in a Q&A which no-one who witnessed it will forget, and the Chamber surprised retiring chief executive Richard Sheehan with a 'This Is Your Life' presentation. Earlier in the month the Chamber also hosted a pre-awards conference featuring Music Magpie entrepreneur Walter Gleeson, and British Chambers of Commerce president Shevaun Haviland.





2022





2022



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2023



History was made this year as Aico of Oswestry became the first and, so far, only business to lift the Company of the Year award on three occasions. Other firms celebrating on the night included Dyke Yaxley, The Shropshire Distillery, Shrewsbury Colleges Group and SDE Technology, while entertainment was provided by the many voices of comedy impressionist, singer and actress Debra Stephenson, whose screen credits ranged from Spitting Image and Bad Girls to Coronation Street. A stunned world record breaking adventurer Kelda Wood of Climbing Out collected The John Clayton Award.





2023

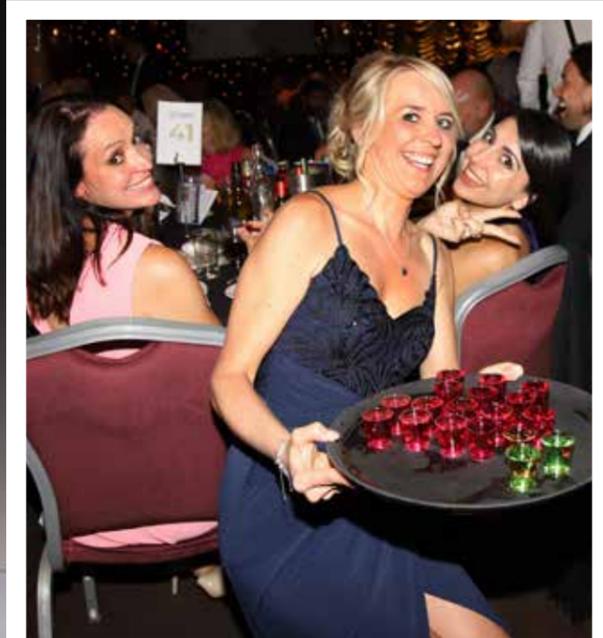


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2024



Another new name was added to the Company of the Year roll of honour as Stallion AI from Whitchurch took the top award for the first time. Other winners included Autocraft, Bridge Cheese, Chrisbeon, Salop Leisure, Hadley Park House Hotel, and the Learning Community Trust, while thousands of pounds were raised for Severn Hospice in a fun game of Play Your Cards Right. A tearful Elizabeth Wilkinson, known as 'the dyslexic dyslexia consultant', was presented with The John Clayton Award.





2024



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2024



MY BUSINESS AWARDS *memories*

The accidental compere...

**CARL JONES has been involved in organising and hosting the awards every year since day one, giving him a unique perspective on the past 25 years.**

**Well, where to start? At the very, very beginning, I suppose.**

There we were, sat round a table at Shropshire Chamber HQ, putting the finishing touches to plans for the first awards night, when the conversation turned to master of ceremonies duties.

"Who's going to host it?" someone asked. "Well, you're the business editor – why don't you do it?" came the reply, and all eyes were on me.

Just like that, my accidental introduction into the world of event compering was sealed.

To say that it's been a rollercoaster of an adventure over the subsequent quarter of a century would be an understatement.

I'm so grateful to have been nudged in the direction of compering, which opened up a whole new career path for me. I'm also proud to be the only person who has taken to the stage at the business awards every single year... sometimes flying solo as emcee, and sometimes as one half of a double act.

That first year I shared the lectern with the Shropshire Star's editor Adrian Faber, while my other co-hosts over the years have included Paul 'Shuttsie' Shuttleworth, the BBC's Juliette Ferrington, and one of my successors as Shropshire Star business editor, Amy Bould.

If I'm honest, I can't quite grasp the fact that nearly a quarter of a century has passed since the Chamber's business manager Karen Webb and I posed outside the Chamber's offices on Stafford Park – where they still are today – with a mocked up newspaper front page to officially launch the awards.

The team have tried to stitch me up a fair few times since then, most notably in 2014 when I was coaxed into an impromptu spot of samba after some unscheduled, scantily-clad dancers appeared on



Shall we dance - an unexpected invitation in 2014

stage in full Rio carnival costume. A Strictly Come Dancer I am not... as everyone discovered!

And even now I still meet people who say to me: "You're that guy who interviewed Frank Bruno, aren't you?", referring to the VIP guest spot in 2022.

Just seconds before stepping onto stage to welcome him for a 30-minute chat, his manager had whispered in my ear: "Now you've got all the pre-agreed questions, haven't you?"

"WHAT PRE-AGREED QUESTIONS?" That was the first I'd heard of their existence. Going on stage in front of hundreds of people is always an adrenaline rush, but a totally blindsided sparring match with a former world heavyweight champion is on a different level altogether!

There have been a few other hairy moments, like the occasion mentioned by Lorraine Holmes when all the winners' envelopes fell on the floor and we didn't know which was which because we hadn't written the category names on the front. We didn't make that mistake again.

And my wife Rachel has never completely forgiven me for dragging her up on stage in 2015 to be 'judged' on an impromptu catwalk in front of modelling legend Caprice.

Then there are the after-show parties in recent years at Albert's Shed. Enough said about those - what goes on tour, stays on tour!

For me, though, it's not so much these single moments that dominate my business awards memory bank; it's the camaraderie and collective teamwork which makes all the magic happen.

People turn up on the night, dressing to impress for the Shropshire business community's biggest night of the year, without any knowledge of the work that goes on behind the scenes to make sure it all runs smoothly.

The sound checks, the lighting rigs, the staging, the branding, the ticket and sponsorship sales, the planning meetings, and all the mechanics around sourcing, shortlisting and judging the entries. It really is a mammoth effort.

Ah yes, the judging; that's definitely another highlight. Touring the county visiting finalists in their premises has always been an eye-opening and rewarding experience.

In the days before satnav, it could sometimes be an expedition too. I vividly remember following a dusty single track in the Clun Valley one year in search of a tourism business, only to end up marooned in a muddy field.

That's Shropshire for you, though... full of joyfully unexpected surprises.



People still speak to Carl about THAT interview with Frank Bruno in 2022



2025



Roll up, roll up... Organisers have pulled out all the stops to make the 25th anniversary an occasion to remember. The Greatest Showman-style theme was unveiled at a launch event at Hatfields in Shrewsbury in January, and the finalists were announced at the Chamber of Commerce's spring expo event, held at the Mercure Telford Centre Hotel. The Midlands Air Ambulance was announced as the beneficiary of this year's charity game on awards night, and event co-founder Carl Jones revealed he would be on master of ceremonies duties for the 25th and final time.





2025



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Following the success of the first ever Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Apprenticeship Awards, SBLTV and Yarrington are delighted to be launching a new series of awards for 2025, celebrating the best of the best across a range of important sectors across our county.

It's a great opportunity to promote and showcase your businesses - from farms and restaurants to shops, leisure establishments and much more.

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# The John Clayton Award



**The John Clayton Award was introduced to the awards ceremony in 2015 in memory of the former Shropshire Chamber of Commerce president to honour individuals who – like him – are celebrated for their outstanding contribution to the local business community over many years.**

John was a fierce and proud campaigner for the county, who gave his time, wisdom and energy to many local causes and was on the board of the Chamber for more than 28 years.

The first winner was the late Ray Grocott of Whitchurch haulage firm Grocontinental in recognition of his service to the local community – including putting £1 million of his own money into a new medical centre in Prees.

Dr Geoffrey Davies of McConnel (the Ludlow-based farm machinery firm which was the very first Company of the Year in 2001, and Champion of Champions in 2010) was given the award in 2016. He flew the flag for the region by sitting on a number of key business development committees.

The third winner was Graham Wynn, who won a Best New Business award when he founded TTC Group before being a key figure at the Marches LEP, and supporter of local charities.

Tony Bywater, known for his pivotal role in the growth of 2007 Company of the Year Salop Leisure, took the trophy in 2017, before



Tony Bywater



Elizabeth Wilkinson



Kelda Wood



Geoffrey Davies



Ray Grocott

it was given the following year for the one and only time to an entire family – the Coward family behind renowned Shropshire motor dealership Furrows.

The trophy has also been handed out three times since the awards returned after the pandemic.

In 2022 it went to Howard Thorne of Shropshire Homes. Having founded the company in 1981, he has become known for his generosity and involvement in various projects, including the Shrewsbury Town FC Foundation.

"I was really surprised and very honoured," he said. "I knew John and how much he contributed to Shropshire and its business community. I also know some of the previous recipients and am pleased to be in their company."

In 2023 a stunned Kelda Wood was the recipient. The founder of the Climbing Out charity, and first para-athlete to row single handed across the Atlantic, was described by the judges as 'an inspiration, and a role model in the art of positivity, determination and resilience'.

And in 2024, The John Clayton Award went to Elizabeth Wilkinson, best known to many as The Dyslexic Dyslexia Consultant.

Four years earlier she had won the Business in the Community award – which she said she shared with the amazing volunteers who make her events what they are, and the clients who continue to share stories and inspire their local communities.



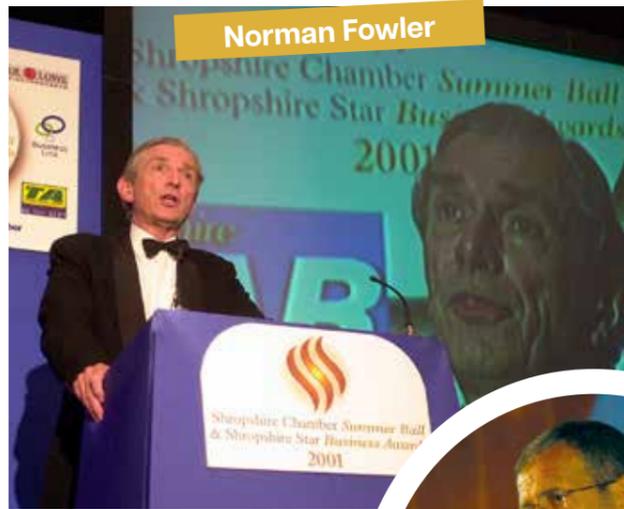
Jane Coward



Graham Wynn



Howard Thorne



Norman Fowler



Bernard Ingham



John Timpson



Derek Redmond



Debra Stephenson



Tanni Grey-Thompson



Gerald Ratner



Digby Jones



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Steven Smith



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Caprice



Bruce Grocott



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