

SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS

Issue 5

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(front) Natasha Boaden, Chimene Felton, Jane Ward & Sarah Pryce*

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PLUS: Perils of Unpaid Overtime Marketing for Manufacturers Investment Legend

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ISSUE 5:
JUL / AUG 2017

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The views expressed by our columnists are not necessarily those held by the publisher, or editor.

Printed in the UK by The Magazine Printing Company:
www.magprint.co.uk

Making waves in business world

Well, it's been another incredible few weeks for UK plc. It's left us with a wounded and weakened Government, Brexit negotiations which appear no clearer than this time last year, and wages now growing noticeably slower than inflation.

All in all, it adds up that perfect storm which businesses tend to fear most of all . . . uncertainty. But through it all, Shropshire's economy

continues to show its mettle, making waves on both the domestic and worldwide stage. On the surface, at least, all seems reasonably well.

The 2017 Shropshire Business Awards were a triumph, epitomised by company of the year, Reconomy, which has dusted itself down after the last recession and built a £100m-plus success story.

It's not alone. Once again, this issue is packed with stories of local firms winning lucrative new contracts, taking on extra staff, and expanding premises.

If bosses are concerned of a possible downturn around the corner, they're certainly not showing it.

Their staff, however, may not be feeling

quite so bullish. It's emerged that the average Shropshire worker now puts in more than nine hours of unpaid overtime a week – desperate to stay on top of a rising workload, or to keep on the right side of management.

Sound familiar? Missing out on lunchbreaks, turning up early or hanging around late to clear those pesky emails?

It's a slippery slope of course, because people with that kind of work-life imbalance are never at their most productive. And I'm speaking from experience!

One man who's never had trouble multi-tasking is Michael Stoddart. In a revealing in-depth interview, he shares his journey from a trainee accountant to one of the most shrewdly successful

entrepreneurs of his generation which earned him top jobs at blue-chip companies like Next, and Goldcrest Films.

This issue also marks the start of our 'Beyond Shropshire' series, featuring some of the huge enterprises employing people from our county and spreading their wings far and wide.

We kick off by raising a glass to the folk at Radnor Hills, the £40m bottling company which has become one of the major players in the nation's soft drinks market.

There are plenty more talking points in this issue. For example, how come we don't see 'men only' networking groups when there are several just for women?

And are manufacturers really as bad at

marketing their services as people would have us believe?

In or out, blue or red, there's no doubt that Shropshire, like the rest of the country, is divided right now.

But we must not let that difference of opinion hold us back.

As some wise old sage once declared, the person who says it can't be done, should never interrupt the person who is busy just getting on and doing it.

Carl Jones, Editor



6



34



17



26



30



39



44



53



68

Contents

- 6 Shropshire Business Awards
- 13 Moving story
- 14 Ground breaker
- 16 Big money contract
- 17 An investor's life
- 22 Queen bee
- 25 Unpaid overtime
- 26 Apprenticeships
- 28 Hot topic
- 30 Election reaction
- 33 Staycation time
- 34 Businesses gather

- 36 Build a future
- 38 Design for life
- 39 Beyond Shropshire
- 43 Feel the squeeze
- 44 Networking women
- 45 Safety first
- 46 Equality matters
- 47 Tenth anniversary
- 48 Dream homes
- 49 Milestone marked
- 50 Gardens of Eden
- 51 Thinking big
- 52 Stick to the facts

- 53 Export
- 59 Business as usual?
- 60 Field of dreams
- 61 Common aim
- 62 Shropshire Youth Support Trust
- 64 Modern marketing
- 66 Magical meeting
- 68 Farming
- 72 Golf day
- 74 New businesses
- 76 Personal finance
- 78 Appointments
- 82 Get connected.....



74



76



51



62



78

Company of the Year – the team from Reconomy celebrate



Celebration

By Carl Jones

What a load of rubbish . . . three million tonnes a year, to be precise. That's how much is now being handled by the newly crowned Shropshire Company of the Year, Reconomy.

From its Telford headquarters, the waste management business is working with all the leading names in the UK housebuilding, construction and commercial sectors.

And despite the tough and uncertain times, it is growing faster than a neglected landfill site – specialising in commercial construction, house building, infrastructure and industry.

Reconomy's victory, in front of more than 650 Shropshire businesspeople at Telford's International Centre, marked quite a week for managing director Paul Cox.

Just days earlier, he'd also lifted the 'transformational leader' prize in the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year awards.

"Winning the Shropshire Company of the Year award is pretty amazing and capped off a phenomenal week," he said. "We are really proud of the whole team who have helped to make all of this happen."

"This award means a lot to the local people and their families – not only the ones who are with us today, but also to the many others who have been with us on the hard



Guests arrive at the International Centre, Telford, for the Shropshire Business Awards

slog to help us get to where we are today."

So where exactly is that? Well, Reconomy now has more than 300 staff and a big base at Stafford Park, and has long since smashed through the £100 million turnover barrier.

At its current rate of growth, it expects to reach the £200 million mark within three years.

It was formed in 1994, and after riding through the dark days of recession just

under a decade ago and restructuring for the future, it has been on a steep upward curve.

To put those three million of tonnes of waste into some sort of perspective, it's equivalent to 15,000 movements of the typical sort of skip you might have on your drive . . . every single week!

And 93% of all that waste which Reconomy handles is diverted away from landfill.



Nicole Gunter of Global Freight, apprentice Joanne Jago, and Graham Guest from sponsors TCAT

Last summer, the company acquired Cory Environmental's National Waste Brokerage Businesses, consisting of Skippy Nationwide, Skip Hire UK and Cory Environmental Recycling Services, which is now trading as Reconomy Recycling Services.

That came just months after it had also bought Kings Lynn-based Just Hire Group, plus Countrywide Waste Management Limited and its subsidiary, MT Waste Management Limited.

Paul Cox said: "Things are good for us right now, but I'd have a few less sleepless nights without the current economic uncertainty, and could do without Brexit and general elections. But we are punching through those downturns – it's maybe more of an Audley Harrison than a David Haye punch at the moment, but for us, it's all about constantly looking forward."

"I'm hugely proud of everything that has

been achieved at Reconomy, particularly in the last few years during which we've experienced unprecedented levels of growth."

Reconomy's success capped a great night for Telford at the 2017 Shropshire Business Awards, which were organised once again this year by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce.

Global Freight of Halesfield picked up the Apprenticeships award for the work it has done with its first apprentice Joanne Jago, who has become an integral part of the team and helping – in the company's own words – to 'future proof the business'.

The family-owned Hadley Park House Hotel won the Tourism and Leisure trophy in a year which has seen it undergo a £100,000 refurbishment, earn a four-star AA rating, and gain recognition in the latest Wedding Industry Awards. It now employs 40 staff. ▶



Hadley Park House Hotel team with Anna Brennand of Ironbridge Gorge Museum



COMPANY OF THE YEAR:

Winner: Reconomy
Finalists: TTC Group, Dale Brothers UK Ltd, Culina Logistics

OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE:

Winner: Mincher-Lockett & Co Market Drayton
Finalists: FBC Manby Bowdler, R&D Tax Claims, Best Western Valley Hotel

BEST NEW BUSINESS:

Winner: The Inspirational Learning Group
Finalists: Beaver Bridges, Purition, SkinSincere

ONLINE BUSINESS:

Winner: Choice Shops Limited
Finalists: Purition, Kadai Firebowls, Croud Inc

TECHNOLOGY, ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATION:

Winner: Stallion AI Services
Finalists: Seymour Manufacturing International, Sentinel Care Services, QI Van Systems

INTERNATIONAL TRADE THROUGH EXPORT:

Winner: Stallion AI Services
Finalists: Sirane Limited, Red Step Marketing, KRL Limited

MANUFACTURING, TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS:

Winner: QI Van Systems
Finalists: Fabdec Limited, Dale Brothers UK, Flowfit

BEST SMALL BUSINESS:

Winner: Ascendancy Internet Marketing
Finalists: Quorum Support Limited, China Enterprise UK Limited, Burlton Cottages

APPRENTICE OF THE YEAR:

Winner: Global Freight
Finalists: The Inspirational Learning Group, Shrewsbury Colleges Group, Ace Supplies UK Limited

BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY:

Winner: J&PR
Finalists: Reech Media, Energize Shropshire Telford & Wrekin, Pave-Aways Limited

TOURISM LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY:

Winner: Hadley Park House Hotel
Finalists: Buckatree Hall Hotel, Lakeside Coaches Limited, Wroxeter Hotel

THE JOHN CLAYTON AWARD:

Graham Wynn OBE



Jenny Wynn is pictured with the J&PR team and their award



Online Business of the Year winner – Choice Shops Limited of Telford



Graham Wynn OBE was presented with the John Clayton Award

◀ The Business In The Community Award went to Wellington-based publicity company J&PR. The team give up their time to help many local causes. They are involved in organising the annual Businesses for Children Awards, run the Kids Zone at Shropshire County Show, and support the likes of Cancer Research, MacMillan Cancer Support, and Wrekin Riders BMX club.

There was also victory for Choice Shops Limited of Telford in the Online Business of the Year category – it specialises in areas such as healthcare and gardening, working with top brands like Age UK, and the Royal Horticultural Society. And QI Van Systems, a commercial vehicle contractor which has been trading in Telford for over 30 years and seen year-on-year growth for the past three years, picked up the Manufacturing prize.

Best New Business also went to Telford, with The Inspirational Learning Group. The company was formed in March last year to help inspire the next generation to become more employable, and to excel in their chosen field of expertise. It's done this through a combination of workshops, and real-life business challenges. And there was one more Telford-based success story, as Graham Wynn OBE was



Carl Jones compered the evening



More than 650 people at Shropshire's Business 'Oscars' heard inspirational stories

presented with the John Clayton Award for his outstanding contribution to the local business community. The award, chosen by the Chamber's directors, is named after a champion of the Shropshire business community who gave his time, wisdom and energy to so many organisations and campaigns. Carl Jones, Shropshire Business editor and the event's master of ceremonies, told

the audience: "He set up a company which won the Best New Business award way back in the early years of this competition – it's a business which has gone on to win many other awards since, and has been listed in the stock exchange as one of the UK's most inspirational companies. "But that company is just one of the strings to his bow. An engineer by trade, he was awarded an OBE back in 2006 for

his contribution to road safety, and sits on a string of advisory boards and committees. "He's a founder member of Telford Business Partnership, and has also been chairman of Telford Business Board, and a member of the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport. "Not to mention helping to raise thousands of pounds for local charities and good community causes. ▶

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MADE IN THE MIDLANDS

Shropshire Chamber



Award – Mincher-Lockett & Company



Cheers – raising a glass to the winners

Double winner – Whitchurch-based Stallion AI Services had two reasons to celebrate at the event

◀ “He’s currently the chairman of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership – banging the drum for Shropshire with local, regional and national Government at every opportunity.”

Graham said: “This really is an honour for me – I didn’t expect this.”

But Telford didn’t monopolise the evening. The only double winner on the night was Whitchurch-based Stallion

AI Services, which picked up both the International Trade, and Technology Enterprise & Innovation awards.

The company is an expert in artificial insemination which has worked with champion racehorses and completed pioneering work in the preservation of rare breeds.

It is at the very forefront of equine breeding technology, and has invested

£1.5 million in a new laboratory, which is recognised as the most advanced of its kind in the UK for freezing and evaluating horse semen.

Another north Shropshire winner was optician’s store Mincher-Lockett & Company from Market Drayton, which took the Outstanding Customer Service prize in one of the year’s most competitive and closest-fought fields.



Best Small Business – Ascendancy Internet Marketing in Shifnal



Richard Sheehan and Carl Jones



Chamber president Peter Guy



Poundland founder Steven Smith on stage



Steel drums play at the glittering event



Fun and games after the awards ceremony

Best Small Business, Ascendancy Internet Marketing in Shifnal, is one of only 300 accredited Google Premier Partners which specialises in online advertising consultancy, and is regularly winning contracts ahead of major national agencies.

The guest speaker was Steven Smith, founder of discount retail chain Poundland, who revealed how, though people told him that selling everything for £1 would never

work, his first store in 1990 earned £13,000 in its first day alone – and he ended up selling the business for £50 million in 2002.

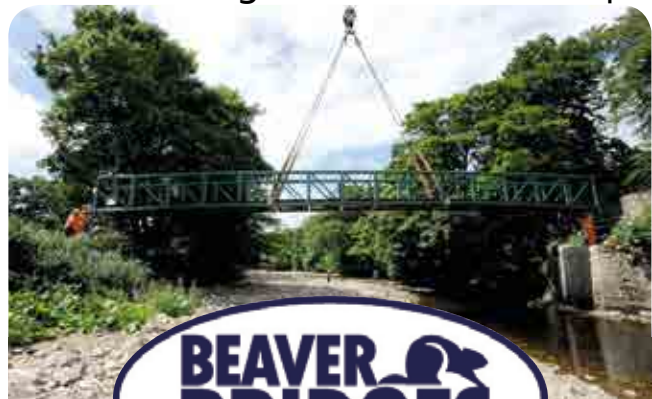
Shropshire Chamber chief executive Richard Sheehan, who took to the stage to lead a ‘red card, blue card’ charity fundraising game which brought in more than £4,500 for the Severn Hospice, said:

“It was another incredible evening, with an infectious atmosphere – and it was terrific to

see a real mixture of old and new faces.” And chamber president Peter Guy: “Without doubt the uncertainty in our economy and the negotiations which started the leave process means there has never been a better time to join forces with other like-minded people and companies on which you can rely.”

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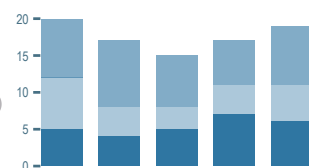
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Bridgnorth businesses share ideas

A new networking group has been launched in Bridgnorth, with 34 representatives attending its initial breakfast meeting, held at the Woodberry Inn.

The four businesswomen behind the 'Bridgnorth Is Business' initiative are Rachel Wood of Terry Jones Solicitors, Louise Welsby of Buy From Shropshire, Jo Frith from Credibly Green, and Ruth Burley of RMB Financial Planning.

"Bridgnorth is a fantastic place to live and work in and we are excited to have created this new group, which is designed to enable networking within the town in a relaxed setting," said Rachel.

"We intend to provide an

invaluable platform for business people to get together over breakfast to talk about their services and exchange ideas.

"Our first meeting exceeded expectations, with a large number of representatives, such as retailers, accountants, designers and consultants attending."

Bridgnorth in Business is a non-profit making group which charges £10 to attend monthly meeting. Any funds raised after expenses will be donated to charity.

For more details, contact Rachel Wood at rachelw@terry-jones.co.uk or message them on their Twitter page @bridgnorthisbiz



At the launch of Bridgnorth Is Business, from left, Ruth Burley, Jo Frith, speaker Dr Tim Jenkins, Rachel Wood, Louise Welsby and Wendy Yates of the Woodberry Inn

A moving story that's no tale from the river bank

A £1.7 million project to stabilise the south bank of the river Severn at Jackfield has won a top prize from the Institute of Civil Engineering.

The scheme, protecting residents, businesses and tourist attractions from potential landslips, won the Geotechnical award category – and was also declared overall West Midlands winner.

It now goes through as the regional entry for the ICE People's Choice national award, to be judged by public vote in November 2017.

The entries were judged by a panel of chartered civil engineers, chaired by former ICE West Midlands chairman, Mark Downes.

He said: "This is an outstanding solution to a problem of historic slope instability with great geotechnical complexity.



Time to take action – the hillside at Jackfield has slowly been moving for hundreds of years

"By stabilising this hillside which has been moving for hundreds of years, not only has the local community been protected, but also the works helped to protect Ironbridge Gorge, part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site, for future generations."

Judges thought Jackfield to be an "outstanding project which solves a large,

longstanding and geotechnically complex problem."

The hillside at Jackfield has been stabilised with nine rows of reinforced concrete piles and a comprehensive drainage system.

The riverbank was reprofiled and reinforced with a row of mini-piles and large revetment stones. A new road was built to allow access for residents and business and part of the Severn Valley Way reconstructed with new footpaths and seating facilities.

Angie Astley, Telford & Wrekin Council's assistant director for neighbourhood and customer services, said: "I am delighted that such an ambitious and innovative project which had the protection of residents and their properties in Jackfield at its heart has won a major award from such a prestigious body as the ICE.

"It is also very much an honour for us to be representing the West Midlands as the regional entry in the ICE's national awards later this year."



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Breaking new ground

A new construction industry ground working company has been launched in Shropshire.

Saxonby (Groundworks) Ltd is part of the Shrewsbury-based Saxonby Group.

It will offer customers the services required prior to the start of any construction or civil engineering project, such as excavating and laying foundations, drainage ditches, sewers, footpaths and driveways, preparation for the installation of other essential utilities and road building.

The Saxonby Group holds all required accreditation and health and safety qualifications to work on public highways.

The new company combines over 100 years' experience of the previously sub-contracted groundworks team with Saxonby's business knowledge and acumen.

As well as working on the numerous projects currently on Saxonby's expanding order book, its services will also be presented to the region's architects, public authorities, house builders, civil engineering and infrastructure operators.

Saxonby director James Wood said: "To bring the ground working aspect of our operations in-house is a benefit, but we also realise that move has huge potential in enabling us to pitch for a variety of multi-service project tenders.

"We have created a hard-working, highly-experienced and professional specialising in an area of construction that we're already specialists in!"



The Saxonby (Groundworks) Ltd team James Wood, Ian Rowson, Clayton Rowson, Roy Rowson, Ken Fisher and Andrew Copson



Happy shoppers

Shrewsbury Shopwatch has appointed a new chairman and introduced a digital information sharing service designed to promote safe trading in the town centre.

Kevin Lockwood, manager of Shrewsbury Shopping Centres, will lead the business crime partnership, which is run by members and administered by Shrewsbury Business Improvement District.

Shopwatch represents businesses and works with police to combat shoplifting and other concerns. Together with Pubwatch, it forms the Shrewsbury Watch partnership.

The Database and Intranet for Safer Communities app, which was piloted by Pubwatch,

is now available to Shopwatch so members can share business crime information with other traders and police, securely online.

Kevin Lockwood said: "It is an asset to the town and shows the value of working together and looking out for each other. I would encourage more members to join and become actively involved."

Sergeant Simon Morris said: "We value the support of Shopwatch as policing is strengthened and more effective when we work in partnership with the community."

Shopwatch is free for Shrewsbury BID members; others can join by becoming a voluntary BID member or signing up for a Shopwatch membership.

'Bean' working on it

Shropshire's Real Coffee Bag Company has launched a new Coffee Club – and is challenging drinkers to sample what it claims to be the world's strongest coffee bag.

Founder and director Paul Day, 50, says: "We developed the secret blend of beans on a Monday afternoon after a particularly drab morning.

"We didn't think anything of the blend until we tried it and it blew our heads off.

"We are yet to roll it out as part of our line for sheer fear that even the two-shot coffee drinkers wouldn't be able to handle the kick, but we thought what better way to define the hard-core caffeine worshippers than by asking drinkers to take up the challenge."

Founded in 2013, and based at the Food Enterprise Centre in Shrewsbury, the company makes coffee bags for consumers who want real, authentic coffee with the convenience of instant.

"We have noticed an incredible uptake in demand for the coffee bags as austerity bites and coffee worshippers, who still want real coffee, are having to cut their daily take out," explained Paul.

The company now stocks across the UK to Nisa Stores, plus other sites including Chatsworth House, the Rhug Estate and Charlies Stores.



Strong stuff – the new coffee

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Thanks a million...

A Shropshire communications company is celebrating the biggest new client win in its history – which is set to create several new jobs.

Shrewsbury-based Pure Telecom has been awarded the big money contract from McNicholas, a major UK infrastructure services provider. "This is an important milestone for our business," said Matt Sandford, managing director of Pure Telecom.

"We are supplying around 1,800 mobile phones on the O2 network and mobile device management software in the initial stage of the contract, which is the largest contract in our 11-year history.

"Our team has built a positive relationship with McNicholas and the initial planning and delivery of the rollout has been very smooth. I am very proud of this success – it is an endorsement of Pure Telecom's professionalism and expertise.

"As a result we will also be creating more jobs at our Shrewsbury Business Park head office to service our new client – it is a very exciting time for Pure Telecom."

McNicholas provides services to the UK's multi-utility, telecommunications, gas, power, water, renewable energy and rail sectors, delivering innovative infrastructure solutions to blue chip customers for more than 65 years.

Based in Elstree, Hertfordshire, the company chose Pure Telecom after a period of intense vetting which included all major networks.

Chief executive Barry McNicholas said: "Our telecoms infrastructure is massively important to the success and running of the business.

"Having been with our previous supplier Vodafone for over 15 years we needed to be extremely thorough in our selection process and were delighted with how Pure Telecom and O2 delivered a very attractive proposition, managed their way through the tendering process, planning and most recently the implementation with minimum impact on day to day operations."



Pictured from left, David Hayward, sales and operations director at Pure Telecom; Andrea Cunningham, IT project manager at McNicholas; Stephen Pearce, ICT infrastructure manager at McNicholas; Duncan Niblett, business development manager at Pure Telecom; Tony Silver, senior buyer at McNicholas and Liam Baker, head of support at Pure Telecom.

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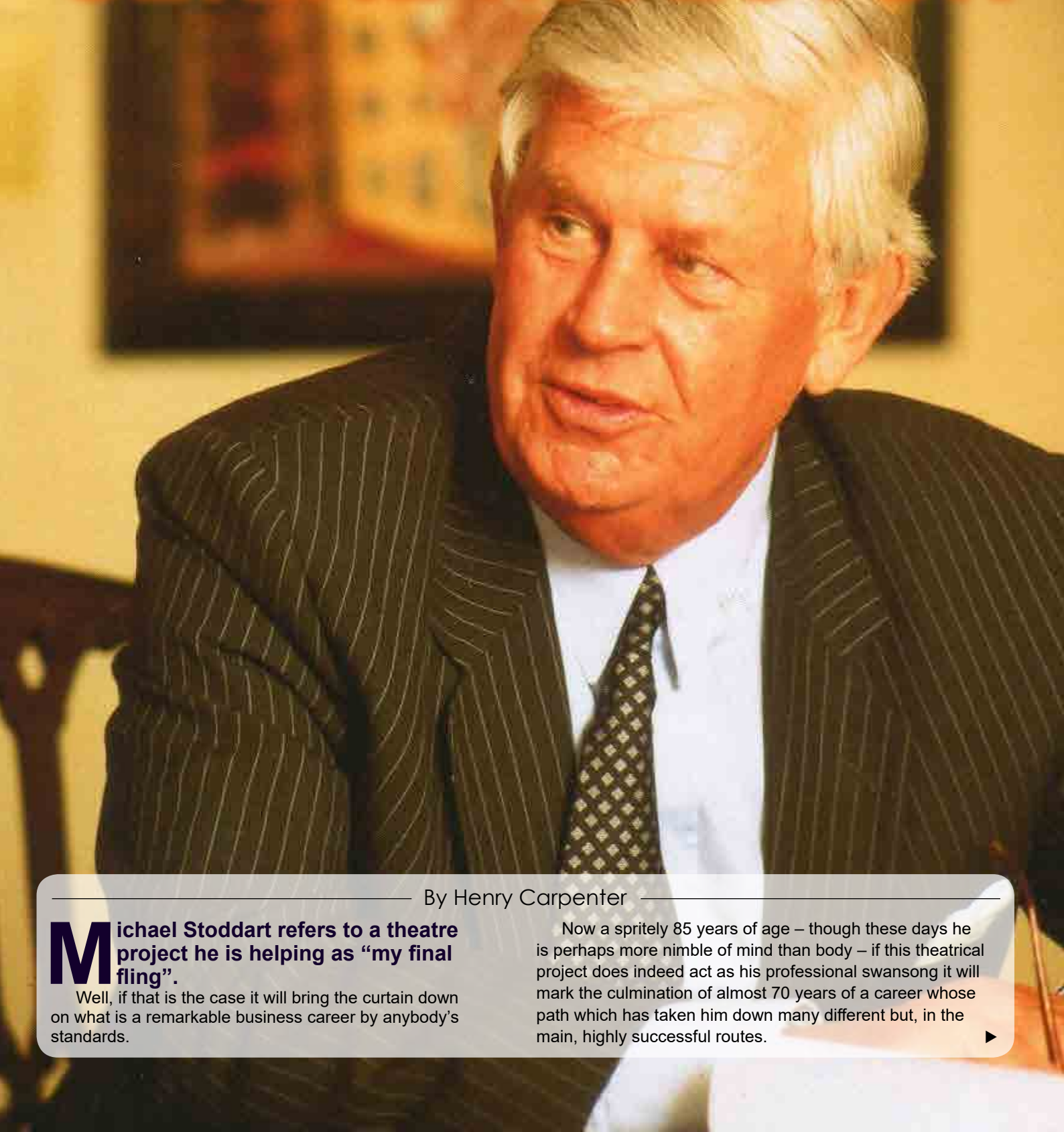


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In this issue's big interview we meet **MICHAEL STODDART**. The man behind Shropshire Youth Support Trust has enjoyed many illustrious careers during the last seven decades.

THE LIFE OF A SERIAL INVESTOR



By Henry Carpenter

Michael Stoddart refers to a theatre project he is helping as "my final fling".

Well, if that is the case it will bring the curtain down on what is a remarkable business career by anybody's standards.

Now a spritely 85 years of age – though these days he is perhaps more nimble of mind than body – if this theatrical project does indeed act as his professional swansong it will mark the culmination of almost 70 years of a career whose path which has taken him down many different but, in the main, highly successful routes.



Michael became chair of Goldcrest Films which was behind blockbusters including Chariots of Fire

◀ Not only was Michael the founder and boss of the private equity firm Electra Investment Trust, but he was also non executive chairman or director of a myriad of publicly listed companies too extensive to list but which include several household names such as the retail giant, Next, and Goldcrest Films which was behind blockbusters such as Chariots of Fire, Gandhi and The Killing Fields.

To put his longevity into some kind of perspective, when Michael got his first job wartime rationing was still being phased out, Winston Churchill had another term as Prime Minister yet to serve and the average house price in the UK was £1,800.

He was fresh out of school where, while he didn't excel academically, he developed an aptitude for trading.

"I didn't have any brains but I did enjoy a bit of trading, particularly in fruit," recalls Michael from his home of the last 50 years near Bridgnorth.

"A contemporary of mine at Abberley prep school told me that he thought I went long on plums with a questionable outcome!"

"I went to Marlborough which is where I had to think about what I wanted to do in life. After the senior partner of a large firm of accountants came to the school to give a lecture on his profession, I decided to become a chartered accountant.

"My father didn't approve of university and I was sent to Liverpool, where my parents had lived, to learn to become an accountant. I didn't do much work and consequently failed my intermediate exams. I had to go to a crammer in North Wales, after which I scraped through my



Michael took on the non-executive chairmanship of Hepworths, which was to become Next, from Terence Conran

accountancy exams, coming 1,451st out of the 1,452 who passed!"

It wasn't long afterwards that Michael realised that a career in accountancy wasn't for him.

Merchant banking, however, "seemed to be interesting and I thought might be rather fun". Through family connections Michael was introduced to Francis Hock, one of two brothers who ran a small merchant bank called Singer & Friedlander.

He accepted a job offer at 'Singers' in 1955 and it was from this point on that Michael really developed his entrepreneurial nous.

"After five years with the bank I suggested to the powers that be at Singers that they opened up offices in the provinces," he explains.

"I opened office in Leeds in 1961 as there didn't appear to be any competition.

"Soon afterwards, my wife Brigid and I moved to this part of the world, an area I had always liked.

"The next logical step was to open an office in Birmingham, which duly happened in 1963.

"This turned out to be quite a success, not least because we recruited well by bringing in some first class people."

Office launches in Nottingham, Glasgow and Bristol were to follow, by which time the network of Singers' provincial offices were major contributors to the bank's success.

Then, in 1973, the Hock brothers decided to sell Singers and this led to the most significant shift in Michael's career path.

"While I was at Singers I was elected a non-executive director of Globe Investment Trust, the original 50% owner of what was to become Electra Investment Trust.

"I suggested there was a role for a publicly listed company to invest in private equity, and therefore joined what became Electra Investment Trust in 1974.

"As managing director I started to develop Electra which invested in unlisted companies; it was a private equity operation which no one was really doing.

"I believed there was an opportunity to exploit and I enjoyed that sort of thing.

"It worked, and ended up doing reasonably well."

"Reasonably well" is a bit of an understatement.

The share price rose from the original figure of 29 pence to slightly in excess of £50 a share over the next 40 years, a multiplication of 150.

Even as Electra's CEO, Michael refuses to take credit for this, insisting its success was "down to good markets, a lot of luck and some very good people who we involved in the business".

He retired from Electra in 2000 and his successors continued with the good work, enabling the company to increase its net asset value. ▶



Michael Stoddart as a young businessman



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Proud moment – HRH Queen Elizabeth II with Michael Stoddart at Electra

◀ To gain a detailed understanding of the intricacies of Michael's business career, particularly from 1975 onwards, it would be advisable to read his memoirs, called Finding a Balance, in which he weighs up the work-life balance (concluding, for the record, that if anything he might have erred slightly on the work side of this delicate spectrum).

The book reveals that, predominantly through Electra as a financing tool, Michael was involved with a bewildering number of companies and his connections spread far and wide.

There's a section describing his role as chairman of Next, having succeeded Terence Conran in the role, and a chapter chronicling his association with Robert Maxwell – "a gentleman who didn't have the same ethical standards".

The book describes the highs and lows of setting up a film company – Goldcrest – and the huge success of Candover, an associate of Electra which became a national leader in management buy-outs.

These and countless other associations, not to mention various corporate and social adventures, are all related with a light and conversational touch in Michael's book which also shows him to be a devoted family man. His beloved wife since 1961, Brigid, and their four children have clearly

been an enormous support throughout his career.

The memoirs describe Michael's life in his autumn years after retiring from Electra. To say he has fully retired from corporate life isn't quite accurate - he still works on a part-time basis as a business consultant for Stonehage Fleming Limited.

What the book also touches on is Michael's lifelong passion for the theatre, which brings us back to the aforementioned project in which he is currently immersing himself.

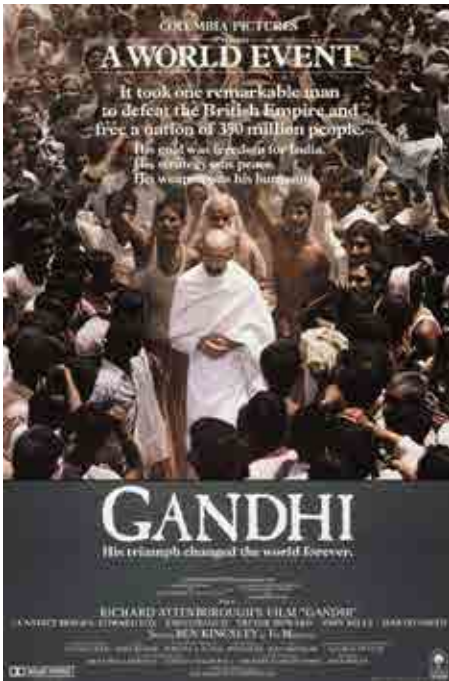
"My personal fascination with the stage led me to become a theatre 'angel', investing in both plays and theatres, and I am now involved in setting up a central fund for theatre productions to turn to," he explains.

Then there is the charity work, and since retirement Michael has been able to offer more time to charitable causes.

"I have always liked helping and backing young people and thought the Prince's Trust was a very good idea," says Michael.

"I was introduced to the London Youth Support Trust and suggested that instead of sitting on the London board we should set up a Shropshire equivalent."

Shropshire Youth Support Trust offers advice, mentorship and subsidised office space to budding entrepreneurs in need of



Gandhi was a huge hit for Goldcrest

a helping hand, and as its president Michael helped the charity first open a facility in Telford Town Centre, two years ago, and then in June its second centre near Oswestry to help those in the northern part of the county.



Ed Stoddart, Tim Beech, managing editor of BBC Shropshire, Brigid and Michael Stoddart at the opening of the second of the county's trusts in June

The north Shropshire centre is housed at the British Iron Works just off the A5 and was launched on a cloudless evening in June.

The official opening was conducted by Sir John Timpson, and in his speech the shoe repair mogul repeatedly paid tribute to Michael as the man, and friend, who guided him through the takeover of his family business. Indeed, Michael's influence on businesses and individuals since he started his first day at work 67 years ago has been profound – that much can be gleaned from various facts laid out in his book, even if he is far too modest to admit it.

The final words in Finding a Balance perhaps provide a clue as to what lies behind Michael's success and popularity as a businessman and friend.

"I have always tried to emulate the character in a book by Reverend Charles Kingsley, The Water Babies. The person concerned was a Mrs Doasyouwouldbedoneby." 📖

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Alison Wakeman with her Bee Class

Queen bee

Alison Wakeman is getting children buzzing about education, thanks to her new business venture.

With a background in education and a passion for the beloved honey bee, she decided in January 2015 to sit down and write an educational programme to teach primary school children about bees and why they are so important.

Her programme, 'Awareness of Bees and their Importance in the Environment', is now being delivered under the brand of Alison's Bee Class.

Alison, from Telford, says: "Initially I approached my local primary school in order to pilot the programme, voluntarily, to check I'd created a viable product as well as pitched at the right level.

"The school were so impressed with the impact I had, they rewarded my work by purchasing an observation hive for use in educational situations as well as booking me to teach the entire school, on a paid basis.

"Soon word was spread amongst other head teachers and I started to take bookings from new schools."

The programme is based on three half-day sessions, which total around seven hours of contact time. It addresses national curriculum-based areas including life-cycles, habitats, and pollination.

"If a school has a particular topic during the term, I tailor the programme to include topics such as Victorians, Egyptians, or the rainforest. This is great fun for me also, as it often requires me to carry out new research myself.

"I do get very passionate and animated in my delivery as I feel it's so important children learn about this subject matter and engage in it as it's their future world, not mine, and their turn to look after it."

Since walking into the classroom for the first time over two years ago, Alison has now been to 15 different primary schools within the local authorities of both Telford & Wrekin as well as Shropshire Council, and educated over 2,500 children.

She has also met the Duchess of Cornwall, with her observation hive: "My opening comment was good afternoon Duchess, please may I introduce my Queen!

"I truly love and believe in what I do, and can't think of anything better than being paid to talk about your hobby."



Alison Wakeman introduces the Duchess of Cornwall to a very different queen



In just over two years, Alison has visited 15 schools and educated 2,500 children

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Growth fund industrial projects nearing completion

Beyond the call of duty

How many extra hours are you working, without pay?

The average Shropshire employee puts in 9.2 hours of unpaid overtime every week, according to latest research – that's around 70 days of work each year, for a grand total of nothing.

The figures are revealed by totallymoney.com, which found that for many people, working overtime isn't an occasional effort, but an accepted and regular aspect of working life.

To be fair, the West Midlands emerges as the best region in the country for paying staff any entitled overtime – but even here, 53% of bosses don't cough up.

The survey reveals: "Almost 65% of people surveyed aren't being paid for overtime worked. The reason most often given for working overtime was having an excessive workload."

"Only a third of British workers said they typically leave work on time – and four out of five workers also said they work through their lunch break each day."

"Almost 60% of people surveyed feel that they don't have a good work/life balance, and only 13% of people surveyed do overtime for the love of their job."

According to the research, teachers work an average of 6.5 hours overtime each week, with eight out of ten not being paid.

In the healthcare sector, workers are putting in an extra 7.7 hours of overtime each week, with 55% not being paid for these hours. The most frequent reason given for working these overtime hours is feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work.

The research also found that pay differences between the genders can be found in overtime pay as well.

While 43% of men said they were paid for their overtime, only 30% of women are financially compensated for their extra working hours.

Conversely, 24% of women feel pressured to work overtime in order to progress their career whereas only 11% men feel the same way.

Women are more likely to carry out work-related duties while on holiday. Only 13% of men said they worked while on holiday, as opposed to 24% of women.

• Are you putting in a huge number of hours in unpaid overtime?
Or are you a company boss which makes a point of compensating staff for all the extra work they do? Tell us your stories – editor@shropshirebiz.com

TotallyMoney.com
UK OVERTIME 2017



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Guest speaker Sadi Khan, Nathan Buckley and Youthbuild UK President Baroness Smith of Basildon

Creating a highly skilled workforce for the nation

By Chris Austin

Think you know about apprenticeships? Well think again . . .

Former Dragons' Den star, entrepreneur and educator Doug Richard is the man to blame! He was commissioned by the government to give the system a major overhaul.

Known as 'The Richard Review', his recommendations were accepted with the emphasis on increasing the quality of apprenticeships and focusing them on the needs of employers.

Apprentices can be any age, but are usually aged 16-18 or 19-24, and they're being relied upon to create a new, highly-skilled workforce for Britain with one eye on Brexit.

'The Richard Review' made four main recommendations:

- Put employers in the driving seat
- Simplify the system
- Increase the quality of apprenticeships
- Give employers purchasing power

And these changes have now come into effect, redefining apprenticeships as training for a new job or role, rather than improving the skills of a worker who has been in the job for some time.

They also now focus on what an apprentice can do when they complete their training, and freeing up the process by which they get there. With trusted independent assessment being key.



Nick Damerum, English Construction carpentry apprentice

Recognised industry standards should form the basis of every apprenticeship, and all apprentices should reach a good level of English and maths before they can complete their programme.

From now on, any company with a payroll of over £3 million will have to pay a 0.5% levy via the HMRC. In Shropshire, these employers include the likes of local authorities, the NHS and local colleges.

The money will accrue each month in a digital voucher and these businesses can either choose to spend it on apprenticeships – or lose it.

For the 97% of the businesses in Shropshire who won't have to pay the levy, funding is changing over the next

15 months - in their favour. Currently, the Government pays 50% of the funding value for 19-year-old apprentices and older.

From May, they increased this to 90%, and for businesses with less than 50 employees, additional incentives for recruiting 16-18 year olds include fully funded programmes and bonus payments.

Training providers now have their work cut out to keep up with the demand for apprentices and ensure their training is tailor-made and fit-for purpose. The former frameworks for apprenticeships are being phased out, with more emphasis placed on job roles, with the employers benefitting from a more tailored, flexible approach to meet their unique business needs.



Nathan Buckley and Nick Damerum – carpentry apprentices

Shrewsbury Colleges Group, the merged Shrewsbury College and Shrewsbury Sixth Form College, will be paying the levy itself and in turn increasing its own intake of apprentices.

It has established a dedicated department, Business Solutions, to help guide employers and prospective apprentices through this period of change.

Apprenticeship manager Tracey Linforth and business development manager Corinne Brown are forging relationships with many county businesses, advising them of the implications.

"The changes are designed to put employers in the driving seat," says Corinne. "I have worked in education for 26 years and I have never seen change like this."

"It's a very fast moving picture at the moment and it's in everyone's interest to keep up. The Government want to raise the profile of Apprenticeships, similar to the status in Germany, where being an apprentice is viewed as equal to going to university."

"Colleges and training providers will no longer dictate what apprenticeships look like – it's in the hands of the businesses to create the model fit for their future workforce and we need to alter our training to suit."

"And with external testing, monitored by the new 'Institute of Apprenticeships', employers can be reassured that quality is at the heart of these changes."

Nathan Buckley, site manager at English Construction, did an apprenticeship through Shrewsbury College in 2009. He now manages a team of 16, including three apprentices, and has completed a degree level qualification in site management.

He was the Federation of Master Builders Apprentice of the Year and in 2015 was crowned the runner-up in the national Youth Build Young Builder of the Year competition.

He says: "I'm glad I chose the apprenticeship route. It's a myth that apprentices aren't academically clever. I was good at school and got As and Bs, but I always enjoyed being more hands-on. It's a fantastic alternative to university, learning and earning money. I left home at 16 and wanted to get a trade that would last for life."

"I don't think I could have got to this level at my age without doing my apprenticeship. My day to day job involves managing people and multi-million pound projects, but I now know a lot about a range of trades, plastering, plumbing, electrics, carpentry and have many certificates and qualifications."

Current apprentice with English Construction, Nick Damerum, adds: "I'm gaining experience in a trade which I would not have been able to do if I just went to college."

"I have also been able to learn about plumbing and other trades whilst being at work and this would not have been possible without my Apprenticeship."

Corinne Brown says: "There has never been a better time to become an apprentice, or get one. We simply can't afford to ignore these changes."

"There needs to be better careers advice for young people about the great opportunities out there. University is not the only route to landing a great job, in fact by doing an apprenticeship, you could be getting a very skilled career and start earning from a much younger age, all with no debts."

"And for the employer, they can expect to see a far greater choice, tailored for their specific job roles."



Nick Damerum has acquired many skills



Gathering experience – Nick Damerum

Apprenticeships: The facts

- Any company with a payroll of over £3million will have to pay a 0.5% levy via the HMRC
- They will have two years to spend this money – or lose it.
- A levy calculator is available on the gov.uk site - estimate-my-apprenticeship-funding.sfa.bis.gov.uk
- Smaller businesses (less than 50 employees) will be able to train a 16-18 year old apprentice for free and have to pay considerably less for a 19+ apprenticeship
- Job specific Apprenticeships created rather than the general sectors of the past, so more tailored to business needs
- Independent, rigorous end testing to ensure the apprentice is fit-for-purpose
- For anyone interested in becoming an apprentice, you will need an employer first. You can promote yourself to employers as well as looking on the National Apprenticeship Service website for vacancies.

Partner is appointed

Accountancy firm Whittingham Riddell, which has offices in Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Newtown and Wrexham, has appointed a new partner.

Jacki Pugh joined the firm nearly 30 years ago, beginning her career at the company's Shrewsbury office, working with commercial and audit clients.

In 2004, Jacki transferred to the office in Newtown, based on St Giles Business Park, to help Graham Bennett and Graham Murphy with the planned expansion into the Mid Wales area.

Now, Jacki has been promoted to the position of partner, specialising in small limited companies, sole traders and partnerships, as well as charity clients.

Following the retirement of Graham Bennett and Graham Murphy in March, Jacki now oversees the Newtown office with partner John Fletcher, and director Colin Jones.

Managing partner Phil Lane said: "Jacki has been a trusted advisor since she arrived as an account senior in 1987.



John Fletcher, Jacki Pugh, and Colin Jones

In recent years, Jacki has worked closely with the two Grahams to build strong relationships with our clients which I know she will continue to develop.

"I look forward to working with Jacki, and her being part of the continued development of our firm."

Jacki said: "I was overwhelmed to be asked to join the partnership, and it is still sinking in. Over the last 15 years, the firm has grown, relocated and built up a strong team in Newtown to support clients throughout Wales and the borders. I look forward to what the future will hold."

Takeover bid is a real **HOT** topic

A fire safety expert in Shropshire has criticised the Police and Crime Commissioner's plans to take control of the fire service in the region.

West Mercia's PCC John Campion has launched a consultation on the proposal, which he says would improve the 'effectiveness and efficiency' of the two bodies, saving £4 million a year.

But Martin Timmis, who now runs Mr Fire Safety based in Shrewsbury and who worked in the county's fire service for more than 30 years, believes the proposals are seriously flawed.

He said: "Mr Campion says he wants to run the fire service in Shropshire, but I don't think he has any idea of what that would entail.

"The Chief Fire Officer and his senior management team have been subject to huge financial pressures and run an excellent service.

"There are fewer fire deaths, less business fires and better operational procedures than ever before.

The costs of any amalgamation with neighbouring services are prohibitive.

I simply don't see what value the PCC can add."

He added due to the rural nature of the county, there were a number of retained fire crews based locally to supplement the full-time firefighters based in Telford and Shrewsbury.

"There has been a significant reduction in the number of police stations in the county in recent years due to cuts, what would happen to the retained fire crews in towns and villages in Shropshire?"

"Our Fire Authorities have laid some good foundations, but it's clear to me that our communities are not getting the most effective, efficient services they could. That can only be achieved by making this change - John Campion"

Mr Campion has said the changes would not directly affect frontline services, and that 'most things would stay exactly the same at first'.

But Mr Timmis said: "The salary for the West Mercia PCC is about £75,000 a year.

Well, that's about the same as the cost of running each of the part-time fire stations in Shropshire. Which do you keep? We all know which can save a life."

Local politicians have also raised questions over Mr Campion's proposal, with Shropshire Council leader Peter Nutting suggesting it is 'empire building' while Telford & Wrekin Council leader Shaun Davies describe it as a 'power grab', both of which he denies.

Mr Campion said: "Our fire authorities have laid some good foundations, but it's clear to me that our communities are not getting the most effective, efficient services they could. That can only be achieved by making this change."

But Mr Timmis said: "There is no mention in the consultation document of the structure of the fire service in Shropshire and the part-time fire stations. He says independent business consultants have assessed the issue, but there is nothing to detail their experience in the unique world of fire safety."

A public consultation is now set to be held on the proposals which would come into effect in 2020 with the election of a Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, with people invited to comment before September 11.



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Is it a marriage of inconvenience?

By Carl Jones

There we were, in a meeting room full of company bosses, owners and directors, talking about the need for continuity and certainty over the coming months to keep the Shropshire economy on a firm footing.

Yet here we are, just weeks later, staring at a weakened British government at the very time when we need it to be at its strongest, so that we can chart the UK's best possible course through the Brexit negotiations.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, of course, and as we sit back now and pick through the ashes of the 2017 general election campaign we can say without doubt that Theresa May's decision to go to the polls was a huge gamble that massively backfired.

Who knows whether she will still be Prime Minister by the time the year is out? You get the feeling that the lady's not for turning, for the time being at least.

Stuart Rea, head of the corporate team at county law firm FBC Manby Bowdler, echoed the feelings of the majority of local companies when the result began to emerge, saying: "A hung parliament, whilst not catastrophic, is not welcome news for many companies.

"Those that I have spoken with recently are primarily focused on getting on with running and growing their businesses and, simply, a hung parliament brings with it a certain level of continued uncertainty that could affect this.

"Added to this, is the impact that a hung parliament could have on the Brexit negotiations.

"Those who last year voted to remain within the EU will view the general election outcome as a vote of no-confidence in a hard Brexit and, therefore, undermine the Conservative plans. This again will create uncertainty and lead to a dip in overall business confidence."

Richard Sheehan, chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, was in agreement with the British Chambers of Commerce, which delivered this verdict on the morning after the Tories lost their majority.

"After two long years of elections, referenda and wider uncertainty, many businesses were doing their best to ignore the noise of politics – up until this," said director general Dr Adam Marshall

"The electorate's split decision generates further uncertainty



Ignore the noise of politics – director general, Dr Adam Marshall

for business communities, who are already grappling with currency fluctuations, rising costs, and the potential impacts of Brexit.

"Whilst companies have for many months done their best to screen out political noise in order to focus on their own operations, this result will prove much harder for UK businesses to ignore.

"The swift formation of a functioning government is essential to business confidence and our wider economic prospects.

"Businesses are adept at forming alliances and coalitions when important interests are at stake. We should expect the same of our politicians."

Well, the alliance with the Northern Irish DUP members is now in place – at a price to the taxpayer of some £1 billion - and time will tell whether this is sufficient to create a fully functioning UK Government which can hold firm for the full five-year term.

Christopher Greenough, commercial director for Salop Design & Engineering, in Shrewsbury and president of Made In The Midlands, wants the new Government to produce a clear plan of how they look to support business - particularly manufacturing.



Christopher Greenough from Salop Design & Engineering

"We need to look to boost competitiveness, reduce energy costs and invest now in renewable and greener energies," he says. "We need to explore how autonomous travel, connectivity and new processes can be brought to the fore.

"The UK can say we truly started the first industrial revolution, so let us take the lead in the next."

Record numbers of younger people turned out to cast their vote this time, yet these voters who are attributed to be the driving force behind Jeremy Corbyn's better than predicted performance could be placing their financial future in jeopardy with a carefree attitude to spending.

That's the view of financial expert Steve Graves, from Newport based Robert Nicholas Financial Advisers.

His comments come in the wake of new figures which claim that more than four in 10 Britons in their 30s and 40s – from the so-called You Only Live Once generation– are halting any future saving, in favour of spending their cash.

More than a third of 35-49 year olds admit in the Scottish Widows Savings Survey that they didn't save a penny in the last 12 months. And this, says Steve, is alarming.

"As the overall number of people saving has risen – up nine percentage points in the last five years to almost four in ten – those aged 35 to 49 are lagging behind in the savings stakes as their younger counterparts become more switched on to the need to save for the future.

"The 'YOLO' mentality may occur because, when faced with the prospect of never owning a house, record low interest rates and the reality of working beyond state retirement age, 35 to 49-year-olds think they have no incentive to save.

"It may also be the case that while a number of the new 'YOLO' generation appear to be carefree, not saving could also be borne out of necessity rather than choice for many.

"Half say they simply cannot afford to save for the long term, and those living in rented accommodation also face higher-than-average rent costs, forking out £495 a month which is above the UK average of £475."

Although the prospect of saving for tomorrow may feel too distant for some, Steve says he's in no doubt about one thing . . . attitudes need to change.



Steve Graves of Newport-based Robert Nicholas Financial Advisers



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Expansion – an aerial view of the fast-growing Salop Leisure site at Emstrey, on the outskirts of Shrewsbury

Experience joys of the staycation

Booming caravan and motorhome sales are being fuelled by the growing popularity of staycationing, according to a dealership which is ploughing millions of pounds into expanding its Shropshire headquarters.

Salop Leisure attracted nearly 19,000 to its annual West Midlands Caravan and Motorhome Spring Show in Shrewsbury, 18 per cent up on last year. Sales across the business increased by between 15 and 20 per cent.

"We are attracting a mixture of existing owners and first time buyers, which is very pleasing," says chairman Tony Bywater. "The first-time buyers are mainly for touring caravans and motorhomes because they love the idea of staycationing.

"Some people still want to go abroad on holiday for a week or fortnight every year, but also want to make the most of their leisure time by owning a caravan holiday home, touring caravan, motorhome or campervan.

"Whether they are working or retired, their leisure time is becoming more important to their health and wellbeing. That's why caravans and motorhomes are so popular: they offer the freedom to enjoy a break in different locations, whether it's for a week or a couple of days."

Around 250 new and pre-owned touring caravans, static holiday homes and luxury lodges, motorhomes and campervan conversions were on display at the show.

It comes as Salop Leisure presses



In need of more space – Salop Leisure's managing director Mark Bebb

ahead with a multi-million pound expansion of its site at Emstrey, on the outskirts of Shrewsbury.

Up to a dozen new jobs are to be created as part of a plan which includes extra storage pitches, a building extension to provide more display space for motorhomes and campervans and expansion of the Love Coffee restaurant to create an outdoor seating area, gardens and a large children's play area.

"To continue to take the business forward and to meet increasing demand for the services we offer, we need additional space," says Salop Leisure's managing director Mark Bebb.

"The expansion will allow the company to extend the business to cater for anticipated significant growth in domestic tourism, particularly caravan, lodge and

motorhome ownership and increase the diversity of products that we offer to the leisure market.

"This is a very significant development for the company with future growth of the UK leisure industry in mind and is good news for Shrewsbury's economy as we aim to attract even more visitors to the town and create more employment for local people."

The plans have been announced as work on a new £4 million touring and glamping resort, Love2Stay, on land alongside Salop Leisure's headquarters, makes steady progress.

The resort will have 120 fully serviced touring caravan pitches, 22 luxury glamping tents, a BIOTOP natural swimming pool, spa facilities with hot tubs, a pilates and yoga studio and a well-equipped indoor fitness suite.



Graham Wynn with Paul Hinkins



Networking –The International Centre

Speakers Graham Wynn, Teresa Heath-Wareing, Tim Luft and Deborah Mitchell

The Business Event, Telford

Nearly 200 businesspeople attended 'The Business Event' at Telford's International Centre – a joint venture between the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership and its Growth Hubs, plus the Federation of Small Businesses, and Shropshire Chamber of Commerce.

The event kicked off with a well-attended Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Shropshire FSB express networking breakfast.

The morning session included presentations from hearing from three local entrepreneurs, beauty guru and innovator Deborah Mitchell of Heaven Skincare, social media expert and author Teresa Heath-Wareing and digital media entrepreneur Tim Luft from Woote.

The event also marked the release of the LEP's annual report, and chairman Graham Wynn said it was working hard to remove the barriers to business growth – improving skills, speeding up connections to superfast broadband, opening up development land for investment and promoting growth in housing.

"We are delivering on our promise of growth and investment, deciding on what the priorities for funding are based on what you are telling us, and rolling out a schedule of work which in the coming years will see the creation of 70,000 homes and 40,000 jobs.

"Nearly £800,000 has been received by businesses in grant funding and hundreds more have received expert support to develop new products, access new supply chains and export overseas."

The event was also a chance for businesses to meet with specialist advisors to discuss support available, including new grant funding schemes.

LEP director Gill Hamer said: "We were delighted to see so many businesses taking advantage not only of the chance to expand their network with the breakfast event, but also the numbers seeking advice from our business advisors in the Business Support Zone.

"Our speakers were great, and the panel session at the end really gave the audience an insight into the lessons learned when building a business and the fantastic opportunities offered by working with universities and colleges, trading overseas and by social media."



Delegates networking at the Express Breakfast organised by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and FSB Shropshire



Express networking in action at the popular event



University of Wolverhampton Racing, based at the Telford campus was represented



Tim Luft of Woote explains why Shropshire is such a good place to do business



Teresa Heath-Wareing and Deborah Mitchell during The Business Event Question & Answer session



Rachael Tyrrell of the FSB, pictured with Richard Sheehan from the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, and Amy Farley of the Growth Hub



Gill Hamer pictured with the LEP's annual report



The express networking breakfast



Q&A with the guest speakers



Steve Oliver and Jan Minihane



The express networking breakfast event at Telford International Centre attracted more than 100 businesspeople



Organisations represented by Ray Hickinbottom, Paul Hinkins, Gill Hamer and Richard Sheehan

Shropshire pie is choice for upper crust

A Shropshire pork pie has been voted the tastiest in the country by celebrity chef Jamie Oliver.

The pie, by Eley's of Ironbridge, was voted number one in a blind taste test for Jamie's magazine – bumping patented Melton Mowbray pork pie makers Dickinson & Morris into second place.

Richard Eley said: "Many, many outlets were invited to take part in the initial taste test and we thought 'let's do it' – we believe our pies are fantastic."

"When we heard we had made the top 10 shortlist nationally we thought wow, what a fab result. To not only make the top three but be judged to be the best is amazing."

"We are totally honoured and delighted that our hard work over the years and traditional family recipe has been recognised."

Richard's brother Tom Eley was responsible for making the two pies sent in to judges for final taste tests.

"I just made them exactly as I make all of our pies as it was important to us that the judges tasted what we make day in day out," said Tom.

World famous Eley's of Ironbridge have been making their hand-raised pork pies to a secret family recipe for 50 years. The pastry is balled by hand then the pie is raised around a traditional dolly.



Building a strong future with firms

Plans for growth and investment have been announced by one of Shropshire's leading family-owned building companies.

Shrewsbury-based Galliers Homes, with its sister company Cameron Homes, which has its head office in Staffordshire, is set to increase total turnover to £70 million this year.

Around 100 members of staff from both businesses gathered at Weston Park for their annual conference to hear the plans for expansion.

Managing director Ian Burns told his team that growth had been exceptional over the last 12 months, with around 25 new jobs being created, and this was set to continue throughout this year.

"Our operating area is widening throughout Shropshire, with new sites opening this year in Baschurch and Newport."

He said that as well as the companies completing 228 properties in 2017, there would be major investment in staff and infrastructure.

"We will be investing heavily in the training and development of our people and a new IT system is being introduced, starting from this year, which will improve efficiency and speed of operation throughout the firm."

"One of our most exciting plans is the launch of a new core house type range



Around 100 members of staff from Galliers and Cameron Homes gathered at Weston Park which is currently being developed, with our own specialists working with a firm of architects. This will be unveiled in the near future.

"A new Galliers head office is also set to open shortly in Shrewsbury and a new managing director is being appointed so the future is looking very bright for the company."

"Importantly, we are also aiming to gain five star rating in the Home Builders' Federation customer satisfaction survey which monitors the overall experience of our purchasers," he said.

Galliers is currently looking to recruit across a wide range of disciplines to strengthen its team.

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"Creativity isn't about who has the best computer software, the latest gimmick effect or dubious methods of increasing Google rankings" – Mark Allsop

Design for life



It's almost 35 years since I graduated from the University of Reading and began my career in media and marketing. Stints in London advertising agencies back in the mid eighties were followed by 11 years in national media.

Twenty-one years back I founded Yarrington, building the company up into a truly integrated marketing solutions company encompassing graphic design, digital marketing, corporate event production and video.

We work with some great clients locally and nationally on a huge range of solutions, we've won countless awards for our work and find ourselves becoming expert in technologies that weren't around when we started. Take the Internet for instance: when Yarrington launched, most companies didn't have a website, emails weren't the universal communication tool they are today and social media wasn't even on the horizon.

The pace of change has affected the creative world far more than other

industries. We've had to adapt, learn new skills and develop strategies that reflect the changing tools at our disposal.

Similarly the perceived democratisation of design that these technologies allow directly impacts on some of the traditional services that we used to offer. Many clients shy away from professional photography and video production, for example, when basic shoots and edits can be produced on any mid range smart phone.

Back at Reading I studied typography and graphic communication, a somewhat niche backwater of design but the course was, and still is, highly regarded around the world. Design was always going to be my occupation but personally I always felt that design was much more than a career choice. It was more akin to a calling.

Creativity isn't about who has the best computer software, the latest gimmick effect or dubious methods of increasing Google rankings. It is, however, a way of looking at the world, helping to form opinion, dictate choices in music, politics, fashion, even the furniture in your home.

Running a successful creative business is all well and good, but there's a catch with this. As the business grew I found that I was becoming detached from many of the creative processes that so excited me in the early years as I have concentrated on client liaison, staff management and business administration. Eighteen months ago I decided to make the time to return to the academic world and began a part time MA in Digital & Visual Communication at the University of Wolverhampton. I'm currently working on the final elements of the course and will be completing my degree in October.

My Master's degree has enabled me to reconnect with my creative aptitude and allowed me to reassess the importance of the artistic agenda in my life. I have been encouraged to investigate and develop themes through both formal academic study and self-directed creative work. I've created sculptures in stone and plastics, created canvasses and films and applied old skills to emerging technologies. I have several sketch books crammed with ideas and investigations.

My final project considers and explores the human cost of the Irish Troubles of 1968-1998, analysing the historical context of the conflict and the impact on lives that continues to this day. This has been achieved through the examination of documentation, imagery and audio presented in the form of an installation.

A soundscape of historical and contemporary dialogue is interwoven with an original score and set against video, photography, graphic and typographic imagery. The installation creates a reflective narrative that considers themes of memorial, documentary, understanding and reconciliation.

The workload has, at times, been intense but the benefits immeasurable. Sometimes we can all be guilty of focusing on the bottom line at the expense of the enjoyment of our careers. Through undertaking this course I have been able to reaffirm and reconsider creativity and bring these re-established principals to bear into my professional life.

● *Mark Allsop is managing director of Yarrington Limited, based at Frankwell in Shrewsbury*



Will Watkins is the man at the helm of Radnor Hills, the water and soft drinks firm situated on the south Shropshire border

In the first of a series looking at Shropshire companies whose commercial operation extends far beyond the county boundaries, **Henry Carpenter** talks to the founder of a business supplying water and soft drinks to supermarkets, schools and other markets all over the country

Will Watkins is in a particularly good mood. As the man at the helm of Radnor Hills, the water and soft drinks firm on the south Shropshire border which has become one of the country's most successful in the sector, Will could barely wish for better news.

It is one of the hottest days of the year, there has been something of a drought and with orders for thirst-quenching drinks coming from all angles, news has just filtered through to Will that rain is forecast for a few days later.

Bottling lines are whirring, delivery vans are getting into position and overcoated workers exchange greetings as they pass each other between their posts. The operation is buzzing and to say that business appears brisk would be a gross understatement.

While the hustle and bustle of the operation, and the good humour running through the site, certainly do much to tell a story, the facts do even more to illustrate where Radnor Hills is at as a business.

Will expects this year's figures to reveal a turnover of a shade over £40 million. Current staffing levels are at 190, with many



Current staffing levels are at 190, many commuting daily from nearby Knighton

of the workers making their daily trip from nearby Knighton.

Following the introduction of its latest bottling line, Radnor Hills is currently producing 400 million bottles of water and flavoured drinks a year, half of which are for the notoriously tricky supermarket trade.

No wonder the mood at Radnor Hills is so good.

How times have changed since the mid 1980s. Back then the site was a 700-

acre livestock farm run by Will's father. Geographically, at the bottom of the Welsh hills and with a vast aquifer buried beneath the farm, there was a ready supply of that most precious of materials: water.

"My father installed the first bore hole in 1984, really for the livestock," explains Will. "When I returned from university, where I studied agriculture and food marketing, I really didn't know what to do as I didn't want to follow a conventional farming route, it just wasn't for me."

"My father suggested I try selling the water which, because I had done a dissertation on the mineral water market at university, wasn't such an alien concept for me. In many ways I had done the research."

"What was needed was some financial backing and that came in the form of a government grant which was available at the time which would match-fund up to £50,000 of any start-up business."

"So, we resolved to spend £25,000 converting an old farm building into a suitable working space, and the other half on equipment to produce small cups with lids of foil which could be peeled off."

Thus Radnor Hills as we know it now was born. The workforce amounted to precisely one - Will - who would pack the cups into boxes, load up his Vauxhall Cavalier, travel around cities and try and persuade business to buy them. Slowly the customer list started to swell and in its first year Will estimates that the business sold around 350,000 cups, resulting in a year one turnover of just under £50,000.



Bottling lines are whirring at the drinks specialist



Perhaps the most luxurious of the brands is Heartsease Farm

Then Will secured his first really big client - fast food giant McDonalds - after he approached them in the knowledge that they were looking to sell cupped water.

By this time, the team was slowly expanding with two more members of staff helping will with packing and administration.

He recalls: "We kept this contract until the end of the year 2000 - it was a bit of a blow when it came to an end because it provided us with about 50 per cent of our turnover, and 70 per cent of our profit."

"However, in the mid 1990s we had installed a bottling line at a time which coincided with the advent of a market for clear flavoured drinks. So, we started to add ingredients to our water."

"When we lost the McDonalds contract we took a huge decision to throw all our resources at upscaling, adding further

bottling lines - probably one every other year - which allowed for a much speedier operation and maximum economies of scale.

"The expansion of the operation after McDonalds saw us producing around 50 million bottles of water and flavoured water and seeing a turnover of about £5 million. Our main customers at this point were the supermarkets, Morrisons in particular, but we also supplied wholesale to the food and drink sector."

During the latter stages of the 2000s, Radnor Hills was able to take advantage of some external conditions which gave the company its next huge lift.

The first was the opportunity to get a really good supply of electricity from the grid which meant that they were able to make their own bottles on site.

The second, surprisingly, came in the form of the financial crisis in 2008. This meant that shoppers changed their habits and switched their allegiances from upmarket brands to own-label varieties . . . as Will admits, "we were in the right place at the right time".

The orders kept flooding in and Will kept on investing on plastic blowing machines and other hi-tech equipment to keep pace with the demand.

Then there was the Jamie Oliver effect. Following the chef's well-publicised campaign for schools to improve what they were providing children in terms of food and drink, Radnor Hills was able to take advantage of the fact that the vast majority of their products and brands are either low or zero calorie.

Parameters were put in place for



The latest big move has been into Tetra packs – portion controlled



Quality is key to the Radnor Hills business model

school-compliant drinks and Radnor Hills was, again, able to respond the market. It is now the UK's largest supplier of drinks to secondary schools.

These external factors have resulted in Radnor Hills - which now has 12 boreholes in operation -more than tripling its turnover over the last 10 years and there is no doubt it is one of the major players in the soft drinks market nationwide. Supermarkets still account for 50 per cent of its business, with the other half sold under its own brands.

An astute businessman with the modesty to admit that he has benefited from a slice or two of luck, Will is also conscious that the business would not be where it is without an underlying quality of product.

"The water here, which we intercept after it has fallen on the Welsh hills, is genuinely delicious and almost always comes out top in a blind tasting," he says. "It is really consistent and a fabulous resource."

"It also provides a very good base to use for flavoured soft drinks - it is a good canvas to paint on."

Perhaps the most luxurious of the brands is the relatively new Heartsease, and it is here that we see Will's one concession to upping the sugar content of his drinks.

He explains: "Heartsease - a relatively small brand for us - is a really beautiful range of pressés, the whole point of which is indulgence."


"It is glass bottled, aimed at the older consumer and we are not going to reformulate it, even if it does have a relatively high sugar content compared to our other brands."

And what of the future? Time to slow down and perhaps consolidate? Not a bit of it.

"We have about 70 products lines right now and we are constantly looking to add to them," says Will.

"Our latest big move has been into Tetra packs which are portion controlled and excellent for schools, airlines and so forth, and I can see us driving this forward as much as possible over the next year or two."

"In five years' time I would like to have completed developing this site as far as I can take it. We want to keep developing our brands, and also look at other areas, perhaps acquisitions."

Given the Radnor Hills story so far - a true, organically grown success story - nothing should surprise us when we hear the extent of its owner's ambitions and what it is capable of achieving. 



Will attributes the neighbouring Welsh hills for the success of the water business



Familiar sight on the roads - loading up a Radnor Hills van for delivery



Following the introduction of its latest bottling line, Radnor Hills is now producing 400 million bottles of water and flavoured drinks a year





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Feeling the squeeze

The growing squeeze on household budgets from Brexit-linked inflation and weaker wage growth is beginning to take its toll on retailers, new figures show.

Figures released by the Office for National Statistics showed retail sales falling by 1.2% during May, compared to the previous month.

And when you take petrol and diesel out of the equation, the size of the fall grows to 1.6%.

So what does this all mean? John Pitchford, head of corporate banking for Barclays in Shropshire, says: "After a stronger than anticipated April, a more modest May was expected by most of the



John Pitchford of Barclays

industry. The run up to a general election often provides a bit of a slowdown for the retail sector, with consumers less willing to

commit to large purchases, but the reasons for the softer result this time are more complex.

"Inflation is really starting to kick in, with prices in the sector increasing at the highest rate for more than five years and expected to rise further.

"Coupled with lower wage growth, it's likely that consumer spending power will continue to weaken and it appears that retailers are going to have to navigate some choppy waters in the coming months.

"There are no easy solutions.

"With persisting currency challenges and rising supply chain costs, many retailers simply have to pass on some of this to their customers through price increases.

"Striking the right balance on price point between what is viable from a cost perspective and what is acceptable to the consumer is now the crucial strategic decision for retail heads to consider."

The only way is up



Lyreco's vertical storage has increased productivity and efficiency

A £250,000 storage system overhaul has increased capacity, improved accuracy and boosted productivity by up to 25 per cent at a Shropshire distribution centre.

Lyreco, the workplace supplies company which serves customers across the UK from its 50,000 sq metre warehouse in Telford, can now hold three times as many product lines within the equivalent footprint, thanks to its new vertical storage system.

The automated system involves three towering Kardex XP500 machines, reaching up to 12m in height, allowing storage in vertical space that was not previously utilised.

It features 300 trays, measuring 2850mm x 864mm, which can cope with loads of up to 360kg that are picked

and delivered directly to the operator at an ergonomic height and dramatically reducing walking distances.

Richard Taylor, manager of the National Distribution Centre, explained: "We were looking for a solution that would let us increase our capacity whilst allowing us to maintain the very high service levels we already offer to our customers.

"We are very proud of our picking accuracy rates and ability to deliver 'on time, in full' and this investment allows us to hold more product lines without compromise.

"Efficiency has been improved, and the reduction in walking distances and delivery of the product to the operator at waist height, has improved the working environment for our employees."



Nikki Raine receives her award from Dave Parker

Raine shines at awards

Shropshire-born businesswoman Nikki Raine won Start Up Business of the Year with her baking brand Marvellous Mixes at The Tamworth, Lichfield and Sutton Coldfield Business Networking Awards.

In its fifth year, competition recognises the outstanding achievements of small to medium sized businesses in the area who are members of networking groups.

Nikki, from Farlow, who launched Marvellous Mixes in June 2015, says: "We were up against some stiff competition and I still can't quite believe we won!

"Winning the award means so much to us. Getting this recognition is a brilliant boost moving forward as we continue to grow the business. Watch this space – there are more Marvellous Mixes to come!"

Dave Parker, awards founder, said: "The judges were impressed by Nikki's commitment to her customers working through the night to get orders out on time; changing ingredients to suit those with dietary requirements; the subscription idea of the business; and moving into wholesale distribution."

Nikki gave up a successful career in finance to combine her entrepreneurial ambition and love of baking in a baking-mixes business.

Selling online and through select retailers, Nikki has also been a familiar face at markets, food festivals – including Ludlow Food Festival – corporate events, and exhibited at the Good Food Show. The Marvellous Mixes range currently consists of seven cookie mixes and five flapjack mixes. A gluten-free mix will soon be added.



The November 'extravaganza' has attracted some top-name speakers

Women-only networking groups – is there a need?

Women-only networking may sound divisive, or even anti-equal rights. Yet women's network groups are very much alive and well across our entrepreneurial county of Shropshire.

Network with Style, Ladies in Business and local Women in Rural Enterprise groups are three well attended examples.

Network with Style, now in its 10th year and run on a voluntary basis by four local businesswomen, frequently attracts over 50 business women from across Shropshire to its monthly, pay-as-you-go meetings.

"The aim of our group has always been to provide affordable networking, learning and access to relevant business information," explains leader, Rosie Beswick.

"We help women who are in established businesses as well as those just starting out – over time, we've seen some great business collaborations come about because of the support and networking opportunities we provide."

Network with Style has also attracted an impressive list of guest speakers including Steven and Tracy Smith (founders of Poundland), a Dragons' Den star, as



Sam Warner chats to Kim Gilmour

well as TV and radio presenters. It has also supported a number of local charities including Shrewsbury Ark, CRY for Matthew and The Georgia Williams Trust.

Kay Heald, the newest member of the Network with Style leadership team, thinks the high demand for women's networking in Shropshire is linked to the large number of female start-ups.

"As a female, setting up a business on your own can be scary and lonely. Our regular members have told us that we've not only helped them find new clients, suppliers and business associates, but we help build their confidence too!

"We've found that women network very differently to men – they tend to spend more



Speed networking, NWS style

time finding out about a person and are keen to lend support to others – this is a great benefit to those who work on their own or are based in more rural communities".

Rosie adds: "Many women feel more comfortable networking with other women in more nurturing environments. We've worked hard to make our meetings supportive and relaxed, but business-driven too – I think that's more difficult to achieve in mixed gender networking groups.

"However, there are lots of different networking groups to choose from and women-only groups are a healthy part of that mix – it's about finding ones that work for you and the only way to do that is to give them a try!"



Steven and Tracy Smith with NWS committee members Leigh Clarke, Kelly Mansell, and Kay Heald



Networking together – Clare Jenkins, pictured here with Debbie McBride and Pryce Fallon

Safety is priority

Property owners and tenants across Shropshire have been reassured that major insurers are doing all they can to keep them safe in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy.

Dozens of tower-blocks across the country have been found to contain cladding which fails to meet modern fire safety standards.

And although there are only a handful of high-rise blocks in the Telford area, and nothing above six storeys across the rest of Shropshire, Dave Williams, from Henshalls insurance brokers in Newport and Shrewsbury, said the tragic events in London had understandably made people nervous.

"The Government has announced a public inquiry into the fire at Grenfell Tower and major insurers are watching closely, delivering specific technical support and guidance wherever they can. They have said they will be working with the inquiry and doing all they can to help safeguard people and the buildings in which they live and work."



Tragedy – the Grenfell Tower block

And Mr Williams said Shropshire landlords had a vital role to play in the aftermath of such a tragedy, to avoid a similar situation at all costs.

"Landlords should review their fire risk assessments – whether the property

is a high-rise tower or not – and review evacuation and emergency plans, to ensure they are still relevant and that everyone understands the procedures.

"They should also double check that fire safety equipment and systems are in full working order, and address any problems that are found. Any relevant findings or changes must be passed on to residents and other key stakeholders, and it's the landlord's responsibility to make sure everyone is fully informed."

Mr Williams said Government guidance also required landlords to check existing buildings to review the building materials used, in particular any cladding systems in place, and to get the products tested.

"Landlords may also want to consider installing automatic sprinkler systems in the meantime, as a precautionary measure.

"Major insurers have said that if landlords discover their buildings do have similar cladding to the Grenfell Tower, they will not be withdrawing existing insurance cover immediately – but they will offer support and advice to landlords to help manage the risks for now.

"And as the inquiries continue, they will expect customers to implement any Government health and safety advice as soon as it is practicably possible in order to keep residents safe."



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Discussing matters of a sensitive nature - such as Brexit - can lead to tension in the workplace and in many cases harassment

Why equality matters



Equality Act 2010
2010 CHAPTER 15

Brexit. There, I said it. Whatever your thoughts on the outcome of the great referendum, you can't ignore it.

Add in the general election and it's fair to say it's been one of the big topics of conversation in workplaces up and down the country.

And for employers, that might not be an altogether healthy thing.

Of course, it's heartening that the biggest political decision in a generation is sparking lively debate amongst ordinary people. That's good for democracy and good for the political life of the nation.

But when that debate oversteps the mark – as it has sometimes done since the vote was taken to leave the EU – that can spell bad news for employers.

With much of the EU debate focused on topics such as immigration, nationalism and taking back control of the UK, there is plenty of scope for shop-floor disagreements to turn more serious and edge into harassment.

And it is simply not good enough for employers to turn a blind eye when that happens and pretend it's nothing to do with them.

Employers need to be aware of the risks arising from such harassment and, where possible, should try to address those risks.

For example, race-related comments which are deliberately intended to offend are likely to constitute unlawful harassment. Comments - such as innocently intended

in Act to make provision to require Ministers of ...
making strategic decisions about the ex...
the desirability of reducing...
monise equality of...
discrimin...

For unlawful racial harassment at work, the employer is liable for an employee's conduct and the victim has a valid claim against the company

observations or shop floor "banter" - which weren't intended to offend but still do, are also harassment.

That's because all that is required to make a claim of unlawful harassment is that someone must be offended or feel their dignity at work has been adversely effected.

It's easy to see how a heated Brexit debate could stray into this territory – and keep doing so day after day in certain circumstances.

What the Equality Act says is that unlawful racial harassment occurs where one employee engages in unwanted conduct related to race, nationality or national origin, and the conduct has the purpose or effect of violating another employee's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

This is a serious issue.

For unlawful racial harassment at work, the employer is liable for an employee's conduct and the victim has a valid claim against the company. Damages are also uncapped. So what can you do as an

employer to limit your exposure to such a situation?

One straightforward step is to put in place strong guidance on the limits on discussions about the Brexit vote. Tell your employees what is – and what is not – acceptable and that they must stick firmly within these boundaries.

If you have any doubts that this will keep a lid on things, you could always go a step farther and ban such discussions absolutely, especially in workplaces where the risk of causing offence is considered to be high.

It might sound a little heavy handed. After all, what harm can shop-floor banter do?

But when that banter turns to harassment, you want to be certain you did everything you could to prevent it. It's not only the right thing to do, it's also the law.

● *Ishbel Lapper, from Telford, has worked in and run human resources departments across a range of sectors over the last 20 years. She now runs HR Solutions Shropshire.*

Raising a glass to 10th anniversary of service

Legal experts at a Telford firm are celebrating 10 successful years of an initiative that is reaching clients right across the UK.

The team at Martin-Kaye Solicitors initially launched their ALPHA service – a bespoke employment law and human resources package – after intensive research and surveys involving a wide range of businesses.

Senior partner Graham Davies said: "We wanted to measure how satisfied local firms were with their HR advisors, as companies were telling us they were becoming increasingly frustrated.

"Our survey work showed the support was patchy at best, with the so-called advice delivered over the phone by 'consultants'. They also felt the advice was tailored to meet insurance company requirements and wasn't robust enough – they found they were tied into restrictive deals for three to five years too.

"We identified a real gap in the market, so we spent a year putting together www.alpha-hr.co.uk, which is celebrating



Graham Davies, Emma Palmer and John Mehtam celebrate the 10th anniversary of the ALPHA scheme at Martin-Kaye Solicitors

its 10th anniversary. From a standing start, hundreds of businesses have signed up to become members, with many here in Shropshire, but an increasing number from further afield and we now have clients from all over the UK.

"It's even more satisfying to see that many clients who have been with us from the start of Alpha sign up year-on-year for an ongoing service."

The ALPHA service is led by John Mehtam, Martin-Kaye's employment law

specialist, supported by a team of qualified lawyers.

"We're not afraid to make tough and difficult decisions when required," he said.

"We work closely with each business to achieve the very best results for their individual circumstances.

"We can offer a wide range of support – from a relatively inexpensive package, to setting up a sophisticated virtual HR team, and that is all without lengthy tie-in agreements."

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Dream homes



Johnson Design Partnership has been appointed by global property specialists Elemento Group to oversee designs for a 'Passive House'

A Bridgnorth-based architect practice has been chosen to deliver a landmark Grand Designs-style project, hundreds of miles from the county.

Johnson Design Partnership has been appointed by global property specialists Elemento Group to oversee final designs for a 'Passive House' in the south east of England.

The concept is a 'fabric first' approach to the delivery of a low energy building, where

the requirement for space heating and cooling is minimised to an absolute.

JDP beat off international competition to win the contract and now has its team, including three senior architects, evolving the original planning application and design work of Seymour Smith Architects.

They have to ensure the construction detailing is stringent and meets the air tightness and thermal bridging required to deliver the expected energy performance.

"This is a real coup for our practice and shows that small architects with an eye for design and the passion to push the boundaries of innovation can compete and win some of the most exciting projects in

the world," explained founder Vic Johnson.

"Elemento Group is a visionary developer and bought into how we would complete the challenging final designs and ensure that they are then project managed throughout the construction so that they deliver the energy requirements of a passive house, but also a property that offers the best in luxury living."

He continued: "Our reputation with 'Grand Designs' was definitely a reason why we've been selected, with the RIBA recognised transformation of Old Wynd Cottage on a World Heritage Site and other exciting schemes proving to be the difference."

Standing proud

Shrewsbury Town Football Club is aiming to become the first English team with an all-seater stadium to bring in 'safe standing' zones.

The club wants to fit around 500 so-called railseats at the back of the South Stand, potentially as early as the end of the upcoming season.

And if the plans are approved, it could be fantastic news for a nearby company – because one of the leading suppliers is Ferco Seating Systems, based on the Atcham Business Park.

For the last 30 years, the company has specialised in designing and manufacturing spectator seating for venues across the world. The product range services the sports/stadium, cinema, education and auditorium sectors.

The football club has submitted plans to the Sports Group Safety Authority to install rail seats, fitted and in use in one stand at the stadium before the end of the 2017/18 season.

Shrewsbury's Greenhouse Meadow is 10 years old so is not governed by the all-seater stadiums legislation which permits clubs in Leagues One and Two to keep terraces that existed before 1994.

Standing has been banned in England's top two divisions since then.

New girl on the block

Working for a block-making company wasn't necessarily Jade Homer's intended career path, but the psychology graduate could not be any happier.

The 23-year-old started at Telford-based concrete block manufacturer Besblock in September last year, having graduated from Aston University a year earlier.

And her secret to success for a young female in the traditionally male-dominated construction industry?

"You need your wits about you and you need to take a joke – we enjoy a harmless laugh and a joke sometimes, which I think underlines the strength and morale of the company."

"I was a bit nervous when I joined as I was the youngest and coming into a male environment."

"I'd been for other jobs before I joined Besblock. I graduated in 2015 so I'd been looking for a while. I was offered a job in the civil service, which didn't really appeal. I worked in retail for a bit too."

"I never thought 'I know, I'll go into block making' but when I came for the interview it seemed like a nice company to work for."



Jade Homer



Mr and Mrs Lewis, with David Randall and Heritage general sales manager Jason Richards, pictured marking the company's 11,000th customer

Customers mark firm's milestone

A long-standing glazing firm has made presentations to its 11,000th customer as it continues to expand.

Heritage Glass Group, based at Monkmoor, in Shrewsbury, has

been in business for over 18 years and following recent rebranding and showroom expansion, presented champagne, flowers and extended guarantees to lucky number customers David and Joy Lewis, of Belvidere.

The company has launched a new maintenance division, and announced record sales figures for the first quarter of the current year.

In brief...

- Emma Burton, director of My Soul Space yoga studio in Shrewsbury, has launched the world's first ever Elevating Yoga & Energy Editing course, called 'My Soul's Purpose'. The course is available to download. "So many people lose their way in the hustle and bustle of today's hectic world. This course will put them back on track," she says.

- Property, business and planning firm Berrys has moved to a new, larger office building on Shrewsbury Business Park as it says demand for services continues to grow. The new 10,000 sq ft building is on Anchorage Avenue next to the new Co-op food store and Greggs.

- A Shrewsbury taxi firm has its highest ever number of drivers in the town as it expands to meet record-breaking demand. Managers at Go Carz say a recruitment drive has been such a success that the firm now has 140 drivers working in the Shrewsbury area. Carl Wilday, managing director, said demand for its taxis was at an all-time high.

- One of Telford & Wrekin Council's bright young talents has scooped a major award from the Institution of Civil Engineering. Gareth Rushton, 24, was nominated to receive the ICE West Midlands Technicians Award for his excellent performance in the final year of his Civil Engineering Higher National Certificate.

- A new skate lifestyle store has opened in Castle Gates, Shrewsbury, in a letting completed by local agency Pooks. William Dean, of Morale, said: "We sell all items that relate to skate culture including footwear, clothing and skate hardware." The store has a 453 sq ft sales area, plus basement.



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The gardens of Eden



Telford-based Unique Copiers will be providing equipment, maintenance and repair for Hoar Cross Hall in Staffordshire

A Shropshire company has secured an exclusive contract to work with a group of luxury hotel and spa resorts across the UK.

Unique Copiers, in St Georges, Telford, will supply, fit and install a photocopy and print machines across three resorts, along with the head office in Oxfordshire owned by The Barons Eden Group Ltd.

Bosses at the firm said this contract would see Unique Copiers work alongside Toshiba to provide the Barons Eden group with a carbon zero print solution.

The Telford company will be providing equipment, maintenance and repair for Hoar Cross Hall in Staffordshire, Eden Hall in Newark-on-Trent and Huxleys in Gloucestershire.

Regional sales manager at Unique Copiers, Adam Wagstaff, said: "We have been working with The Barons Eden Group for a number of years but in this new contract, we thought it would be prudent to offer a solution that would keep up with environmental practices and improve their corporate social responsibility.

"It means CO2 emissions are combatted through the offsetting of all Toshiba products from procurement to delivery and beyond."

It is estimated that the photocopier is

likely to be the highest single energy-using piece of equipment in an office.

They use between 40-70 watts during standby and 1,400-1,600 watts when operating - the equivalent of using an electric heater for four hours.

The Barons Eden Group is just one of a number of contracts recently won by Unique Copiers.

The firm will also provide equipment to businesses across our county such as Shropshire Gas in Wellington, and Kiyokuni Europe, based on Holyhead Road, Priorslee.

Unique Copiers managing director Adrian Casey said: "We are experiencing a good start to 2017 so far."



Members of the Terry Jones wills and probate team, from left, Nyrée Grevett, Eileen Sereni, Jeremy Charlton, Sinéad Rickard, Michelle Simmonds

Meeting the criteria

Law firm Terry Jones Solicitors, which has offices in Shrewsbury, Telford, Newport and Bridgnorth, has become an accredited member of The Law Society's Wills and Inheritance Quality Scheme.

To qualify for the standard, firms must meet strict criteria in their preparation of wills, probate and estate administration. All members of a company's wills and probate department are required to complete mandatory training.

Jeremy Charlton, head of

department at the firm's Shrewsbury office, said: "We are delighted. This demonstrates to our clients that we offer the best possible service at all times."

The company said its wills and probate team sought to help clients understand their options, without making any misleading claims about the advantages of making a will, or putting people under any pressure to obtain more complex advice - which is often either unnecessary or not in their best interests.

Credit union surveys vast product range

Shropshire's Just Credit Union, based at Castle Gates in Shrewsbury, is having its loan products surveyed as part of its policy to improve the financial wellbeing of its customers.

The members-only, local financial co-operative has successfully applied to The Fairbanking Foundation for the survey with the aim of achieving a five star quality marquee.

The £10,000 survey, of 200 Just Credit Union customers, is being funded by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, an independent charitable foundation committed to bringing about socially just change.

Just Credit Union's manager Karen Farrow said: "This is a new initiative which we are hoping will result in us obtaining a five star quality marquee which we can use on literature, the website and publicity.

"The idea is to improve the financial capability of borrowers and encourage them to save for things they want rather than always borrow," she added.

"The process will assist us to help people change their habits and become savers as opposed to just borrowers.

"We want to encourage more people to save so that when they finish paying off their loan they actually have savings too.

Thinking big helps small firms thrive

New technology being rolled out across rural Shropshire is helping small businesses to grab a bigger share of overseas markets.

According to Martyn Rowlands, managing director and founder of Pipekit Ltd, upgrading to superfast broadband has transformed the way they do business and catapulted them onto the world stage.

Over the past 12 months, the family-run firm, based in Annscroft, near Shrewsbury, has seen its turnover increase significantly - with superfast broadband seen as a key driver.

The technology has enabled the plastic pipework and drainage distributor, which employs nine people, to expand its already well-established online presence.

Martyn said: "We still have a traditional trade counter, but our website quickly became our new window on the world, helping us to showcase our products around the country and around the world. I realised when I set up the business in a rural area in a rural county that we needed to sell nationally and online was the way to do it.

"Now with superfast fibre broadband - through our provider, Shrewsbury-based Pure Telecom - we get download speeds of 70 megabits per second over Openreach's network - which means we can update our website as often as we need to, without having to wait for pages and pictures to load.

"We can also stay in touch with our customers and suppliers more easily and quickly through emails and online chats. All our ordering and deliveries are done online too.

"Superfast broadband has helped us to expand in ways we could not have imagined before. The fact we're in rural Shropshire doesn't matter. We're adapting to the technology that is available to us.

"As a result, we're first choice for customers as far apart as Scotland and Singapore, with international sales now making up more than 10 per cent of our business. We've also seen an increase in orders from some of the more remote parts of the UK, including the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, who, like us, seem to be adapting to this new way of doing business."

More than 198,000 businesses and homes across Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin now have access to faster fibre broadband as a result of BT's multi-million pound commercial roll-out and the company's partnerships with the public sector.

Steve Haines, managing director for Openreach, the local network business which is part of BT Group, said: "Fibre broadband is no longer a nice to have for business. It is a need to have. High-speed access breaks down the barriers to doing business in the digital world like online trading, which helps to empower our small businesses.

"I would encourage those who can already access fibre-based broadband to contact their service provider to arrange an upgrade. It's an 'opt in' service, but because the Openreach network is 'open', there is a wide choice of fibre broadband providers."



Martyn Rowlands

Victoria James the second

From a trade stand in the thoroughfare of Telford Town Centre, to two thriving shops in six years, it has been a dream start in retail for one Shropshire couple.

Michael and Ann Haines established their business in 2011, starting out with a retail merchandising unit in the walkways of Telford's bustling shopping centre.

That evolved in to a small store in the square opposite Debenhams, eventually developing the business to fill a larger site.

And now the ambitious pair have opened a second branch of their gift shop Victoria James in Shrewsbury's Pride Hill Shopping Centre.

"The Shrewsbury idea came about in March," said Michael. Just three months later and the second branch opened to an enthusiastic flurry of shoppers.

"It's been a fabulous start here in Shrewsbury," said Ann. "We have had a lot of interest in our retro-style record players and the Jellycat soft toys are proving popular too."

Quirky oversized wall clocks, coasters and novelty signs also sell well at the stores and shoppers from further afield can also buy online.

Both stores are open seven days a week and stock changes on a regular basis, with the majority of stock from UK suppliers - including items from Shropshire craftsmen and women.



Michael and Ann Haines of Victoria James

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Property is running in the family

Broseley estate agent Patrick Smitheman has fulfilled a long-held ambition – to buy the office which was built by his great great grandfather more than 100 years ago.

Patrick, the boss of Harwoods, is now the proud owner of the premises at The Square, as he approaches his 20th anniversary in business.

“The office is very well known in Broseley and forms part of the resplendent Instones Building which was built in 1900 by my great-great-grandfather Richard Alfred Instone,” Patrick says.

When he came to Broseley as a young trainee estate agent nearly 20 years ago, the family’s history was unbeknown to him. But as he began to meet local characters he learnt of his ancestral past.

“I knew then that I would be here for many years to come and set sail on my mission to buy back my great great grandfather’s building.

“Sadly, at this stage, I haven’t been able to obtain the whole of the large, two storey building, which has been sold on to property investors who are known to me.

“I have made it clear to the investors that within the next 20 years my aim – and next ambition – is to achieve full ownership of this wonderful landmarked building in the town.”



Family connection - Patrick Smitheman at his Broseley office

You won't go far wrong if you stick to the facts



Why do we trust and live by fiction so much? Do we believe out of a lack of alternative information, a wish for something to be true, or simply through lethargy?

Proof that fiction is not a wise choice can be seen in such things as the pre-election and pre-referendum polls; predictions that often tell a story which is far from the truth of the eventual outcome.

Businesses are run by humans, and humans all have an individual personalised view of the world, coloured by differing degrees of fiction.

In business, it is not uncommon to see marketing, sales and even business strategy based on fiction, a strong singular personal view, repetitive methodology or out of date facts. Even with the best intentions, assumption, is just that . . . assumption. Businesses need to grasp the facts and use those facts to move their businesses forward.

Keeping to the facts and refreshing understanding will stop companies stagnating or declining, as they will be able to flex to market fluctuations, consumer trends and keep their offer fresh. It takes away the danger of too much personal influence, especially if those ideas are perhaps from another era of the business, however recent.

The bonus of knowing the facts is that you learn about the consumer, the opportunities for competitive advantage and more about your business.

There are many ways to gather facts, and these should include your workforce; not just as conduits for customer feedback but understanding their own view of the company from a customer viewpoint.

Obtaining the facts is good but you must have the skill to decipher the facts and be able to work out what is credible. It is important only to base decisions on statistics when you have a large number to

ask and who are asked in a very structured way, using clear questions.

Qualitative answers can provide the golden nuggets, and yet so often it is survey stats that are looked at, whilst all else is ignored.

Spending time to really get to know your current customers' needs, through emotionally intelligent discussion, will give you far more of an insight than many other methods.

Results are sometimes hard to swallow, but they can often be the jigsaw piece that gains the company competitive advantage.

Seeing a business as a separate entity, rather than personally, can help you make more considered business-focused decisions. Facts will help smaller businesses especially to see what is best for the business.

However, the caveat is that facts badly gathered - be it too often, wrong questions or the wrong interviewees - are probably as bad as relying on fiction.

Assumption is a luxury only for those with bottomless marketing and strategy budgets!

● *Rosie Beswick is managing consultant at Rosie Consulting, based near Shrewsbury, and acting policy officer at Shropshire Chamber of Commerce*

Helping you trade on a global stage

By Chris Austin

In an office on an unassuming Telford industrial estate, there is talk of China and New Zealand, Australia and the USA. Not plans for future holidays . . . but the day-to-day exchanges between a team of shipping experts.

Last year, from that office and warehouse in Halesfield, Global Freight masterminded the movement of more than £24 million worth of shipments across the globe, the majority of which never even touched our shores.

So how does a business firmly rooted in the biggest land-locked county in England rise to become one of the region's leading freight forwarders?

The answer is Nicole Gunter. Just a few minutes in conversation with her and you see the quiet determination that has helped her build Global Freight to the success it is today.

“I want to be recognised for being a leader in my field, regardless of gender”

It's been 21 years since a young Nicole, armed only with a telephone and a fax machine, began the business. Even how she got to that point says a lot about her character.

“I'd been working for my dad's manufacturing company in accounts and it was pretty clear that it wasn't for me,” she explains. “I didn't know what I wanted to do but our neighbour had a freight business and gave me a couple of weeks work experience and I loved it.

“There's something about the fast paced nature of the business, the negotiation, the organisation, that just felt like the right fit for me. I was so keen to get experience I offered to work for free for one of the biggest freight companies in the world.

“After three months, they offered me a job and I spent 18 months learning the trade before starting out on my own. All I had was a desk, phone, and fax machine. I literally spent every day, making call after call after call to get some business.

“I can still remember the first load I moved. It was a pallet for British Sugar, which was then based at Allscott near Telford, that was going to France.”

In the early days, Nicole was a jack-of-all-trades including delivery driver, forklift operator, accounts clerk, and freight co-ordinator.

“For the first 10 years, no-one had any



Nicole Gunter started her business 21 years ago, armed only with a telephone and a fax

idea I was the boss!” she laughs. “I'd literally be taking the booking, jumping onto the forklift to load a delivery and then into a van to get it out.

“Because I was a woman, most people assumed I couldn't be the managing director.

“Freight has been, and still is to a large extent, such a male dominated world and I never bothered to correct anyone when they presumed I was the ‘office girl’.”

The fact that she's a woman in a male-dominated industry has, unsurprisingly, never fazed Nicole. She's a firm believer

that you get where you do on merit and hard work.

“I don't believe women should be given roles based on their gender. It should never be a box-ticking exercise but based on achievement. I never set out to be an advocate for women in business and it rarely occurs to me, if I'm honest.

“The only time recently was when I went to an awards ceremony of 800 people and 98 per cent of them were men! If I am, unintentionally, a role model that's great - but I want to be recognised for being a leader in my field, regardless of gender.” ►



Anton and Nicole on their wedding day. The married couple work together from the company base at Halesfield 23.

Personal accolades have included being named as one of the top three female directors in the UK logistics industry, and a feature in the Who's Who of Britain's Business Elite.

While Nicole's reputation as one of the country's leading international freight experts has grown, so too indeed has the business.

It specialises in shipping delicate, and sometimes extremely heavy, artwork across the globe but is equally at home arranging the transportation of just one box.

Cautious by nature, Nicole has nurtured her business to maturity through organic growth.

"We are very cash stable and I have deliberately not taken risks.

"I've seen too many businesses boom and bust over the years. I've focused on helping my own customers grow through import and export.

"We work a lot with SMEs, many of which are taking their first steps into international trade.

"Helping them to increase that side of their business reaps the benefits for us.

"Technology has been the biggest game-changer for us.

"We have invested in digital technology that has allowed us to increase our turnover but not our outgoings.

"We employ the same number of people now as we did when our turnover was a quarter what it is today," she said.



The Flinders statue shipped to Australia by Shropshire-based Global Freight



Telford is where the heart is – the Global Freight team pictured at the company's 20-year celebrations

It's a small close-knit team at Global Freight, many of whom are long-term employees, complete with roaming office dogs. That family feeling became reality when Nicole's husband Anton joined the team several years ago.

The South African needed no persuasion to take up a new role as national sales manager with his background in international logistics and relocations. But he freely admits his wife needed more encouragement!

"I knew my experience could bring another dimension to Global Freight but Nicole was understandably cautious," he says. "For the first time, it was about making a business-related decision that would impact on her personal life, and I understood that.

"But there had never been anyone working in a specific sales capacity, so I knew I could add real value. I respected the fact it was very much Nicole's business and had no concerns about working for her."

As any married couple that works together will tell you, finding a happy medium in the work/life balance can be difficult.

"I think I was sacked twice and resigned three times in the first week," jokes Anton.

"There was a period of adjustment as we found the middle ground that worked for us. We tried not talking about work at home but that wasn't very successful and it was hard for Nicole not to take things personally

when I suggested changes. In the end we made a decision to listen to each other as much as we talked and we haven't looked back.

"The international personal effects service we launched a couple of years has really taken off with a large proportion of our business coming from London, which is where I spent a lot of my career."

It's easy to see why the dynamic between them works.

Nicole is the more measured and thoughtful while effervescent Anton could sell coal to Newcastle.

It's a combination that will come into its own as the export industry faces up to the challenge that Brexit will bring.

Although both were personally in the Remain camp, they are embracing the opportunities our departure from the EU will offer.

"It's actually a real gem of an opportunity for businesses," says Nicole.

"A lot of our work is already done outside the EU and we have a trusted network of agents built up over the past 21 years.

"Many people may be worried about taking those first steps into export but now is the time to explore new markets. We don't expect our customers to be experts in international trade. That's our job.

"They shouldn't notice any difference, as we will be the people dealing with the changes it brings.

"If businesses had been focusing on doing business with EU member states, now is the time to explore markets further afield.

"Thanks to the progress in digital technology, it's actually a small world. There are 195 countries out there and only 28 in the European Union – that's a lot of opportunity."

While a day in the life of Global Freight might include co-ordinating a cross trade between the US and China, shipping half a million pounds worth of furniture to Kazakhstan and, on one memorable occasion, arranging air freight for a stuffed moose head, Nicole's heart is very much close to home.

She is committed to supporting local charities and organisations including Telford Tigers, and helping students from her former school, Idsall in Shifnal, to enter a business challenge.

Nicole is also a director of Shropshire Chamber and has recently adopted the Georgia Williams Trust as a full member of the business network.

She says: "Telford's a great location for us and we love being based here. There's a huge diversity of business but actually our geographical location is fairly irrelevant as we can arrange transport from anywhere in the country to anywhere in the world at the touch of a button. But this is where we're staying. Shropshire has, and will always be, home to Global Freight."

Exports thrive with weak pound

The weak pound is providing major export opportunities for food and drink producers across Shropshire.

Exports of British food and drink reached record levels in the first quarter of 2017, partly thanks to the post-referendum drop in the value of the pound.

Sterling has fallen over 15% against the dollar in the year since last year's vote, meaning British exports are cheaper for overseas customers.

Overall food and drinks exports went up 8.3% in the first three months of 2017 compared to the same period in 2016 to reach a total value of just under £5 billion.

Brexiters will be cheered by the growth in new non-EU markets such as South Korea - where sales rose by 40%.

But Ireland remains by far the UK's most important trading partner for food and drink, accounting for £854 million of UK business for the quarter.



Sales have grown by 40% in South Korea as a result of Brexit

Subsidiary to UK firm is based in Shanghai

Filtermist International has established a subsidiary business in Shanghai, China.

The firm, based on the Telford 54 business park, has exported its UK manufactured oil mist collectors to China for more than 20 years through Beijing based En-Creative.

Growing customer demand resulted in the appointment of a dedicated business development manager, Carl Yu, in 2014 and since then a number of sub-distributors have also been appointed.

China's booming manufacturing sector offers huge potential for Filtermist as awareness about the importance of air quality continues to top the national agenda.

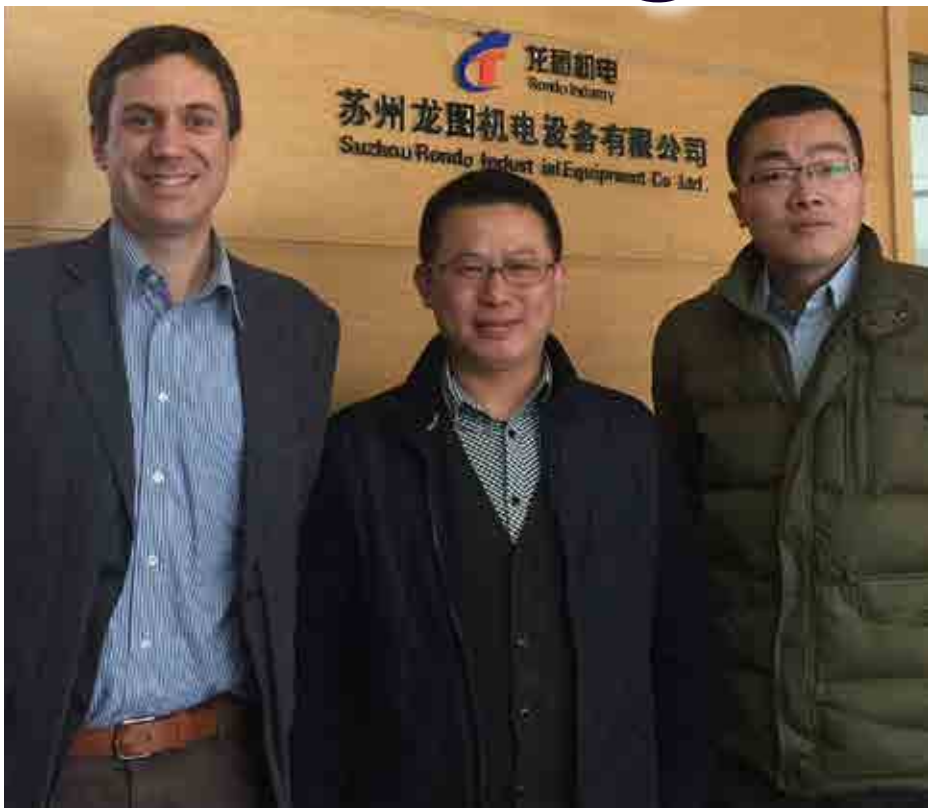
Managing director James Stansfield says: "Filtermist units are trusted by leading manufacturers around the world to effectively remove oil mist, fume and vapour from workplace air."

"Whilst debate in China is mainly centred around external pollution, there is also a growing awareness about the quality of internal environments - particularly amongst younger people."

"Sales of Filtermist units in China have continued to grow year on year with sales in 2016 up by 54% on 2015."

This has been attributed to three key factors - increased awareness of the importance of clean air, working with a proactive distributor and our investment in additional resources focusing purely on sales in China.

"Having a licensed business will enable us to build on the strong foundations already in place to ensure as many people as possible employed in China's manufacturing industry benefit from clean working environments and air which is safe



James Stansfield is pictured with Mr Zhang and Carl Yu during his visit to China

to breathe," says James, who visited China earlier this year where he met with Carl Yu, En-Creative and some of En-Creative's customers.

They told him first hand of the growth their own businesses have seen since they began selling Filtermist oil mist collectors.

"Longtu Mechanical Company was established in Suzhou in the Jiangsu Province of China 10 years ago," says James.

"The company was appointed as an En-Creative distributor in 2015 and has since grown to eight employees, including three engineers recruited specifically to install and service Filtermist oil mist collectors."

"We have invested significant resource into raising awareness of the Filtermist brand in China and we are confident that this latest development will help to strengthen our presence in this key growth market."

Collaboration brings so many possibilities

One of the county's top independent schools has signed a deal which will bring a taste of British education to Malaysia.

Ellesmere College has formed a partnership with Matrix Global Schools to introduce a new sixth form at the school - in what is hoped to become the first of many international partnerships.

Matrix wants to provide a full school experience from pre-school through to A-levels. Chief executive Felix Lee says: "Our collaboration with Ellesmere College is in line with our Learning Beyond Boundaries philosophy, as it will support our 'east meets west' approach in quite a literal way."

"Our students at Matrix will be able to experience the rich and experiential learning methods at Ellesmere College, which will be replicated in the Ellesmere Malaysia Sixth Form programme."

"Both institutions share a deep belief that the main aim of education is to encourage every child to reach his or her full human potential."

"It is always the journey that matters and what they make out of the journey. It is this common belief, shared between myself and Brendan Wignall, headmaster of Ellesmere College, that saw the fruition of this collaboration."

The North Shropshire School received an Education Business Award last year for its commitment to sport and was awarded Platinum status by Arts Council England.

Income from the outpost in Asia, set to open this September, will help fund new buildings, bursaries and scholarships at the original college, founded in 1884.

There will also be the opportunity of student exchanges, both for short-term and long-term placements, cultural and sporting exchanges, and exciting gap year placements for Ellesmere College UK students in Malaysia.



Felix Lee and Brendan Wignall celebrate the union between the two schools

Headmaster Brendan Wignall says: "Ellesmere is by no means the first British independent school to establish a branch overseas, although the numbers remain small."

"What is special about this relationship - and future Ellesmere International

Schools that are planned - is that it is not just a matter of a name exchange in return for finance, but a genuine partnership which will see the strengths and ethos of Ellesmere College UK replicated overseas, appropriately adapted for local circumstances."

Grasp the opportunity of learning languages

Shropshire businesses urgently need to prioritise language skills if they are to avoid a competitive disadvantage from Brexit, says the Institute of Translation and Interpreting.

The UK has traditionally lagged behind many countries in the ability of its citizens to speak other languages, the institute says.

ITI chairman Sarah Griffin-Mason says: "It's important to remember that competence in another language is not just about knowing the words, it's about cultural awareness and empathy too."

"Whether through a better trained workforce or use of appropriately qualified translators and interpreters, businesses need to put themselves in a strong position to build important new relationships and sustain existing ones in very different trading conditions."

Lord Harrison pointed out during the parliamentary Brexit debates: "Our ignorance of continental languages, people, customs, habits and especially markets has made us carelessly complacent."

"And sadly, we idly rely on speaking

English fortissimo in brokering trade deals."

And Brexit will bring new challenges. If the UK removes itself from common EU rules, practices and reciprocal arrangements, it is likely there will be a need to produce a higher volume of bespoke trade, contractual and legal documentation, says the ITI.

It continues: "While the English language will continue to play a very important role in the EU, it is also likely that 'doing everything in English' will no longer be a given."



Genvolt's products are sold all over the world



Managing director Stuart Morgan



Genvolt has been able to take on more staff

European funds producing jobs

Power supplies company Genvolt, based in Highley, is creating new jobs and targeting overseas expansion after securing financial backing from the European Regional Development Fund.

The company is being backed by the Business Growth Programme, which offers help to SMEs across the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership area, and other parts of the West Midlands.

Genvolt designs and manufactures high voltage power supplies. It currently employs 19 members of staff and exports its products all over the world, including India, China, the States and Europe.

The company said it became aware of the opportunity for funding through the Marches Growth Hub. Delia Yapp, business development manager in Shropshire Council's economic growth team, helped the team throughout the process.

For the first part of their project, the company were looking to install mezzanine flooring to provide more space for their operations.

Managing director Stuart Morgan, explains: "Our business is growing rapidly and we were outgrowing our current premises. We wanted to stay in Highley and needed to retain the fantastic staff and skills base that we have locally.

"This grant has enabled us to expand our current workspace, take on more staff and meet the growing demand for our products."

The second part of their project involved the update of Genvolt's IT systems and an investment in capital equipment, again helping the company to bid for contracts and fulfil demand. Mr Morgan adds: "Overall, the investment has enabled us to



The new mezzanine floor at the Highley offices of Genvolt

sustain our intended growth and allowed us further business development and sales generation."

Wendy Cox, Genvolt's office manager, says the application process for the Business Growth Fund programme was very straightforward and well supported by the grant scheme team.

"It was refreshing to have such a simple process, and we were able to complete the application paperwork in just a short space of time."

Gemma Davies, Shropshire Council's head of economic growth, says: "Shropshire Council is delighted at Genvolt's success.

"Businesses in Shropshire have benefitted greatly from this programme

and we are delighted that Genvolt could capitalise on this opportunity."

Genvolt's staff are fluent in French and Mandarin Chinese. Its products have output voltages starting from a few hundred volts and extending to over three hundred kilovolts and power levels stretching from a few Watts to over 50kW.

The company's products are found across a wide range of industries, including analytical and x-ray equipment, alongside industrial, military, capacitor chargers and laboratory use.

● Could your business qualify for an ERDF grant? For further information contact the Marches Growth Hub online at www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk or telephone 0345 6000 727.



Ill-informed decisions and compromised deals could lead to problems or 'unintended consequences' in the national economy following Brexit

Is it business as usual?



With the seemingly never-ending procession of debates, referendums and elections over recent months, you were probably looking forward to getting on with your lives and business while leaving the politicians and policy makers to get on with their affairs too.

Trouble is, there is still a great deal of uncertainty about our economic future.

The general election served to highlight, once again, that we are entering a new and potentially challenging era of rather more polarised views and politics. Which is interesting given the many years of 'can't separate them with a sheet of paper' party politics.

It seems to me that, when presented with quite different choices rather than 'me too' proposals, the public has been roughly

evenly split. They were on whether to be 'in' or 'out' of the EU – it was near enough a fifty-fifty split. So it has proved to be when asked whether to support more overtly left or right wing proposals. Equally interesting to me, and in many ways satisfying, is that so many more young people have cast their vote and re-engaged in the democratic process, much to the surprise of media commentators and politicians alike!

I think that the biggest challenge now is to deliver the certainty and confidence necessary for individuals and businesses to get on with whatever they need to do to thrive and prosper. At the moment we are some way away from that.

Whoever's calling the shots and however they go about it, their mantra should be business, business, business!

Instead there's the potential for compromise and fudge, dodgy deals and half solutions and reluctance to take the tough decisions necessary to steer the country through Brexit and deliver the 'global trading nation' dream.

Ill-informed decisions and compromised deals could lead to problems, or 'unintended consequences' in the national economy. National problems quickly become local problems. Plus, because smaller businesses are impacted disproportionately – that is, we are less well-resourced to withstand the negative impact of poorly

thought through decisions – it makes it all the more important that our voice is heard and acted upon.

Looking beyond the many challenges that Brexit poses on the international stage, at a domestic level I am concerned that potential rises in National Insurance and business rates remain key issues that we need to be alert to. Same with the slow progress on simplifying the tax system. Same with late payment. Same with soaring employment and energy costs.

These are all areas where governments and policymakers of all political persuasions have made life more difficult for businesses in the past. Not necessarily because they intended to. Rather, because they didn't fully realise the unintended consequences of their actions.

So, far from 'burying our heads in the sand' and leaving others to sort the politics, we must remain alert and pro-active on all the issues that could provide challenges – and opportunities – for small business growth.

Now, more than ever, the voice of business needs to be strong, unified and purposeful. Businesses generate wealth. Businesses create employment. Businesses provide the services we need and the products we want.

So, whoever's calling the shots and however they go about it, their mantra should be business, business, business!

● Ray Hickinbottom is the chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses in Shropshire

Meadow is a field of dreams in many more ways than one



The Rod Stewart concert in Shrewsbury required meticulous health and safety planning. (Picture: AMA Photo Agency)

It's been a busy academic year for BSc Sport Management students at University Centre Shrewsbury.

The course combines aspects of a traditional business management degree with a steer towards careers in the sports and leisure industry.

"We've been lucky enough to make some great connections over the year," explains senior lecturer Ross Frisby, former director of the school of business and manager of the sports department at Lincoln College.

"Our visit to West Bromwich Albion's Albion Foundation gave students the chance to see the real work football clubs can do in bringing about positive change within their communities."

Closer to home, students also met Mac Bardsley of the Wenlock Olympian Society. "Some of the students were astounded to discover that the modern-day Games were revived just 10 miles down the road from UCS," says Ross.

The highlight of the year was a visit to Wembley Stadium to the Sports Management Worldwide Careers Conference, scheduled to coincide with a visit from American NFL teams Cincinnati Bengals and the Washington Redskins.

Ross recalls: "The students were able to access the industry from an insider's point of view. Current industry experts were fielding tricky questions and getting down to the nitty gritty of sports management, and I think it opened their eyes to some of the realities of the sports business."



Ross Frisby and Zara Morris play the media game at the Hawthorns

Part of the course involves a work placement, and the close relationship UCS enjoys with county sports partnership Energize means the opportunity to take up both internships and work placements.

Student Zara Morris was also selected by local consultancy firm Wellmeadow for a work placement.

"I learned so much – it was a massive stepping stone for me," says Zara. "I formulated a client report which is being taken forward, so it was good to feel I was doing something meaningful that had benefits for the company."

This need for attention to detail was also in evidence when students met Alan Roberts, Shrewsbury Town Football Club's safety officer, who explained how requirements vary dramatically according



Students Steve Goodier, Oliver Hill-Magill, Connor Parry and Joshua Harris at the club

to whether the venue is staging a regular football fixture or a concert, such as the Rod Stewart gig which saw 15,000 flock to the Greenhouse Meadow.

"Alan was very frank about the need to be aware of the lessons learned at Hillsborough, and the increased need for security across the board," says Ross.

Later this year, the Sport Management students will take on a new challenge – they'll be heavily involved in the National Wheelchair Tennis Championships at The Shrewsbury Club, in November.

"It's going to be a fantastic, but logistically highly complex event," says Ross. "So it will be a real test of how the students can respond to real-life challenges to ensure everything goes according to plan!"

One common aim

A family-owned Shropshire business has joined forces with a local college to boost the skills of future international athletes.

Tudor Griffiths Group has joined forces with the shooting academy at Ellesmere College to enable students to benefit from Olympic standard equipment and hone their competitive edge.

The company is supporting the team to create a facility that will allow students to train in all Olympic clay target disciplines, including trap and double trap.

Managing director Tudor Griffiths said: "Ellesmere College is known nationally for the quality of its shooting team and this support will help towards developing their clay target provision, which in turn will hopefully see it reach the same level as the rifle shooting."

"But it's not just about supporting a local school – it's also about supporting the local community and those who are interested in target shooting will also be able to benefit from the sponsorship."

Ellesmere College has consistently finished in the top five teams at the Ashburton Shield, and took the national



Tudor Griffiths (fourth from left in the back row) with the Ellesmere College shooting academy

title in 2015. The academy has recently produced nine international shooters, including two selected for England and a number for Wales at junior level.

Shooting coach Tom Ryland said: "We thank Tudor Griffiths Group for their investment and, along with the electronic targets purchased with the support of the parents' society and the Enhance Ellesmere project, we can provide the school with probably one of the best facilities in the country."

"Our facilities are already used by the

local community through our links with Pentathlon GB, and our weekly modern pentathlon training attracts a number of children from the local area."

Tudor Griffiths Group, based in Ellesmere, employs more than 250 people working in Shropshire, Cheshire, Worcestershire, and mid and north Wales.

It operates a network of eight builders' merchants, 12 ready mixed concrete plants, two sand and gravel quarries, a sea-dredged sand operation, recycling services and skip hire.

'Happiness is not the absence of problems but the ability to deal with them'

Anonymous

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Clare Aspinall with Julie Nutting and Peter Nutting



Paul Norman, Davina Aplin and Sarah Norman at the event

Michael Stoddart, president of SYST, Sir John Timpson, guest speaker, Robert Bland, chairman of SYST, and Clive Knowles, founder and owner of British Ironwork Centre

Shropshire Youth Support Trust

Approximately 100 people from the county's business community gathered at the British Ironwork Centre, near Oswestry, for the official launch of Shropshire Youth Support Trust's new facility in the area.

Shoe repair tycoon Sir John Timpson was the guest speaker at the event which marked the opening of SYST's second centre, following its forerunner in Telford, for the use of budding entrepreneurs from Oswestry and North Shropshire.

The charity was setup to help people launch their career by offering subsidised accommodation, advice and mentorship.

"Thanks to the support of a few committed and established Shropshire based companies we can also announce the establishment of a new SYST Business Development Fund," said SYST's chairman, Robert Bland.

"This fund will enable 'SYST Assysted Businesses' to apply for grants ranging from £500 to £1,000 that can make a real difference to the prospects of the business."

One of the charity's success stories, Gemma Allies, who founded Skin Sincere, gave a presentation on how she set up her skincare business and the part the SYST played in helping her on her professional path.



Jemma Davies, Sarah Offland, Helen Ball and Pam Moseley



Robert Bland, Rob Whitmore and Rupert Kenyon-Slaney



Gemma Allies, Rosemary Nutting and Cathy Addison raise a glass at The British Ironwork Centre



Andrew Walpole, Dr Peter Starbuck, Steve Charmley and Nick Bardsley.



Louise Welsby, Clare Fildes and Johnny Themans



Tony Ransons, Jane Mackenzie and Clive Knowles



Richard Nutall, John Rainford and Barbara Rainford



Christina Gough, Mark North and Lindsay Rutherford



Ben Knowles, George Hounsell and Sophie Knowles



Robert Bland, Celia Jenkins and Nick Jenkins



Tracy Leonard, Dena Evans and Dave Lee-Birch



Becky Nuttall, Mayor Vince Hunt and Amber Hunt



Kate Thomas, Mark Jones, Catherine Bright and Alison Dixon

So, is your manufacturing business



Carl Jarvis, author of *Marketing for Manufacturers*, estimates that around 80% of small to mid-size manufacturers mismanage their sales and marketing practices, creating at least an average 20% shortfall in revenue generation

Marketing in a

By Carl Jones

You've probably heard the saying: "Nothing happens until a sale takes place!" Well, the best way to make sure a sale takes place is to generate more leads. And the secret? Better marketing!

So says West Midlands author and marketing advisor, Carl Jarvis, in his new book *'Marketing for Manufacturers – Why 80% of small to mid-size manufacturers mismanage their marketing and what to do about it!'*

He's on a mission to improve the growth of SME manufacturers, create jobs, and show business owners how to build predictable, profitable and sustainable platforms for growth, through better marketing.

Across the UK, according to the Office for National Statistics, there are nearly 24,000 small manufacturers (10-49 employees) and 6,000 mid-size manufacturers (50-249 employees) with estimated revenues of at least £151 billion per annum, directly employing over 1.1 million people. And Shropshire has a much

higher than average percentage of small firms.

Yet, in his book Carl says: "Despite the fact that there's almost universal recognition that most UK small to mid-size manufacturers make and offer high-quality or even world-class products and services, there's an equally widespread acknowledgement that they are just as universally poor at marketing them."

With many muttering the immortal phrase: "Our products are the best kept secret in the market!"

"The 'Build a better mouse trap and the whole world will beat a path to your door' no longer applies."

Because of this inherent sector-wide weakness, Carl estimates that around 80% of small to mid-size manufacturers mismanage their sales and marketing practices, creating at least an average 20% shortfall in revenue generation.

These poor, inconsistent, and ineffective marketing practises, across those 80%, are invariably leading to a loss, in our economy, of £24 billion a year, he says, causing a loss of some 135,000 jobs and apprenticeship places every year.

Carl believes SME manufacturing company owners and managers are constrained by old industrial age thinking,

having personally found, with his 18 years in private marketing practice, a general underlying indifference and apathy towards embracing marketing at the right level.

In *'Marketing for Manufacturers'* he speaks of the false bias and unconscious values, beliefs and attitudes manufacturers' behaviour demonstrates, in how they view their marketing practices and investments... or lack of them.

Too many SME manufacturing business owners are running what he calls, a grossly distorted or warped business where marketing is 'a-bit-of-this and a-bit-of-that when they get around to it'.

So, they're out of balance with this huge emphasis on their product/service/production capability and hardly any emphasis on their marketing, he suggests.

The marketing pressure is now on, especially as the gap between the old marketing baseline and the new marketing requirements is now widening at an exponential pace.

So, every year that passes, where ineffective or poor marketing is still being carried out, the gap is becoming more extensive and progressively worse for each SME manufacturer that is not alive to the issue.

"What is interesting is when we hear a great deal of lip service being paid regarding marketing activities," Carl says.

"the best kept secret in the market?"



In *'Marketing for Manufacturers'* Carl Jarvis speaks of the false bias and unconscious values, beliefs and attitudes manufacturers' behaviour demonstrates, in how they view their marketing practices and investments... or lack of them

modern world

"In several of the SME feedback reports, from many business support agencies, manufacturers often point out they are interested in information about marketing, but this is not being translated in to real tangible marketing adoption or implementation. The connection between heart and head is definitely blocked.

"Perhaps too many manufacturers think they are immune to the changes in the marketing environment. In many cases, they grew up not needing to seriously consider marketing.

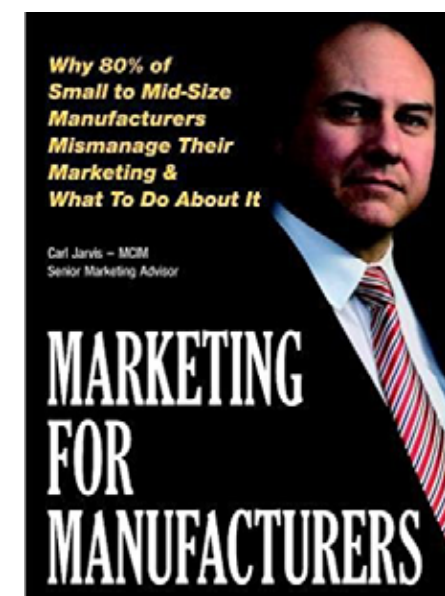
"In fact, if we go back far enough there wasn't a need for marketing. If you wanted to buy a motorbike, a bicycle, or a camera you had to buy it from the UK because we were the only place in the world that made them.

"But we cannot adopt a new marketing mind-set whilst holding on to that old mode of thinking. The 'Build a better mouse trap and the whole world will beat a path to your door' no longer applies.

"In some cases, we need to let go of the old position of pure manufacturing superiority, expressed in the phrase: 'But we make the highest quality products and offer the best service in the world'.

"Holding on to that claim is becoming more and more difficult to maintain as the cracks start to appear."

Carl suggests that today, the quality



of a manufacturer's marketing can be a decisive factor in the success or failure of the business, over and above the quality of the product or service.

Yet he says manufacturers deliver a widespread denial that something is changing.

"They think they can carry on doing the same old marketing and expect a different,

improved, result, not even entertaining the possibility of the new 21st century marketing mind-set required, especially with the rise of the new marketing environment.

"I think the emotional process of manufacturers letting go of the old marketing mind-set will be a very tough challenge, especially as it's so engrained in their general psyche."

Carl's book intends to educate and inspire SME manufacturers to value marketing and shares his thoughts and experiences about changes that clearly need to be embraced with new marketing challenges facing SME manufacturers. Especially, now, in the wake of Brexit.

He says: "Getting the new balance of marketing for manufacturers right will have a major positive impact on the UK economy and make our manufacturing base an even stronger powerhouse for job creation and prosperity, along with all the dramatic economic benefits that this would bring to our nation and our standing in the world's manufacturing economy."

● 'Marketing for Manufacturers' is now available on Amazon. Carl has also published a free Marketing Report called: 'The 7 Major Marketing Mistakes Too Many Manufacturers Make and How To Correct Them!' which you can download from www.carljarvis.com/free-report

Superfast broadband

BT is looking to hear from communities in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin that would like to work with them to bring fibre broadband to their area.

Regional manager Ian Binks says: "In recent years, a huge amount of work has taken place across the county with nearly 79 per cent of homes and businesses in Shropshire – and more than 93 per cent in Telford & Wrekin – now able to get superfast download speeds.

"But we also know there's still work to do in some areas and that there are communities which don't yet have faster fibre broadband and are not currently included in any roll-out plans for this exciting technology.

"We're having great success with a new initiative - called a Community Fibre Partnership - specifically intended to help communities not yet involved in any roll-out plans.

"A Community Fibre Partnership involves a local group working directly with us. There usually needs to be a joint funding arrangement, but we do everything we can to make it as affordable as possible.

"There's even a grant available of up to £20,000 if your local Ofsted registered school benefits from the work.

"It is well worth getting in touch and finding out more. We have a dedicated team to explain things clearly and take you through the process."



BT regional manager Ian Binks

Magical meeting

A Shrewsbury software development business has secured a £20,000 European Union innovation grant to help bring its latest product to market.

Wellmeadow Limited, a consulting firm based at Roushill, has been designing an early version of new software, which helps people to run more effective meetings, for many years.

Last year it produced its first commercially available product called Magic Minutes, and this has been adopted by a number of its consulting clients and other firms.

This new boost though will dramatically accelerate progress. The whole look and feel has been redesigned by Shrewsbury design firm The Curious Agency, and now the company can push forward with turning this in to the next version of the software.

Managing director David Parry said: "This grant is a game changer for us. We can now produce the product we have always wanted to make.

"We have had great reaction from its current users, but it has been seen as a specialist product. This will make it much easier for anyone to start using – whether you are chairing a board meeting or the local scout group planning meeting.

"The real benefit of using online software for your meetings instead of typing minutes in a word processor is the automation available. All the actions agreed to can be logged and chased up by the software.

"You can automate the preparation of the meeting by engaging people with



Magic Minutes has been adopted by a wide range of companies

reports circulated before the meeting even starts. During the meeting itself, you can even see how you are progressing against the time allowed for each agenda item – and get a prediction on when the meeting will finish."

The company has selected another local firm, Severn Solutions Limited, to help with the software development.

The company says that the challenge for this summer is now to get more people to think about using software for their

meetings for the first time, something much more common in the USA than in the UK at the moment.

A social media campaign had begun to offer Shropshire-based users a free licence. This has already sparked initial interest, and David said great feedback was being received from new users.

● These free licences are available by signing up for a trial at www.magicminutes.co.uk and then contacting the company to extend the free trial.

Fighting financial crime

Is your organisation an unwitting participant in financial crime?

Organised crime costs the UK at least £24bn a year, according to the Home Office. Tackling financial crime and 'trade-based money laundering' (TBML) – an all-encompassing term for the wide range of schemes used by criminals to disguise the origins of money and integrate it into the formal economy – is a major concern for governments globally.

Because of the magnitude of the problem, your organisation must be vigilant and report any suspicious activity, to avoid risking reputational damage and potentially facing criminal proceedings.

What's being done about it?

The UK Prime Minister recently hosted an anti-corruption summit, gathering world governments, law enforcement agencies and businesses where they announced a global plan to recover assets lost to financial crime. Although the first of its kind, the summit will reconvene each year to continue the global fight against corruption.

As well as this, a number of organisations have been set up in partnership with banks including Barclays to combat money laundering and tackle the use of the financial system for terrorist financing and other crimes. These include the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce (JMLIT).

The JMLIT has found that global corporations exporting dual-use goods – those that can be used for both civil and military purposes such as pharmaceuticals, electronics, and raw materials – are particularly vulnerable to trade-based money laundering.

If you are a tech business and you receive an order for 300 laptops from a contact in the Turkey-Syria border area, you would be right to raise your eyebrows – and indeed it is your responsibility under EU law.

But financial crime is often harder to spot than that – especially as no single activity on its own is a clear indication of illegal activity.

Put on your investigator's hat



To make sure your organisation doesn't inadvertently get caught up in this type of activity, it's vital to carry out regular reviews of who you're doing business with.

Try putting on your 'financial crime investigator's hat' for just five minutes every day. Have a look at recent business transactions and find out where they are coming from. In a normal trade transaction there's a clear connection between the payment and the buyer, so consider whether there is anything strange about the relationship. Although it's worth remembering that for genuine tax efficiency some businesses will use different parts of their business to buy goods, and may structure supply through subsidiaries, sometimes it pays to be suspicious.

What to do if you're concerned

Take a look at the National Crime Agency resources website – www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk or visit www.barclayscorporate.com for additional hints and tips.



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Partnership to help rural tenants

Nock Deighton Agricultural LLP has partnered with a Telford-based property specialist in a bid to simplify the tenancy process for landlords.

Integris Property Solutions, based at Maws Craft Centre, Jackfield, provides property inspection services.

Nock Deighton Agricultural llp helps landlords to find the right tenants, undertake stringent reference checks and prepare any tenancy agreements.

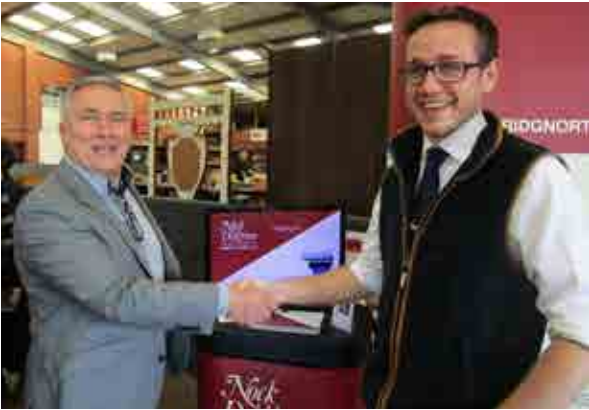
It can also commission property inventories, arrange property inspections throughout tenancies, plus collect, manage and hold tenants' deposits.

Through Nock Deighton Agricultural LLP, Integris can provide detailed and impartial inventory inspections.

Accompanied check ins can be arranged and quarterly inspections can be managed, appointed and undertaken.

John Kenny, who heads up Integris in Telford, said: "I am thrilled that Integris Property Solutions will be working with Nock Deighton Agricultural LLP to serve the wants and needs of rural and agricultural landlords.

"I look forward to providing a professional service aimed at simplifying the tenancy process."



John Kenny of Integris Property Solutions is pictured with James Neame of Nock Deighton Agricultural LLP

A solid future awaits

Concrete specialists at a Shropshire firm are celebrating after three products developed specifically for the agricultural sector have taken the industry by storm.

The TG Concrete division, part of the Tudor Griffiths Group in Ellesmere, unveiled the TG AgriCrete range after many months of research and development work.

And now, just weeks after the launch, the AgriCrete range has brought an increase in business that's 10% up on the same time last year.

General manager Dave Morris said: "We're absolutely delighted with the response to our AgriCrete range which was created as a direct result of requests from local farmers and contractors.

"In fact, the products have been so popular that the vast majority of our business in the concrete division is coming in from the agricultural sector."

TG Concrete developed the range after farmers said they were looking for hard-wearing and highly durable solutions for their yards and buildings.

"We created products that met their very specific requirements, and as a result of our research and development procedures, all three of the ready-mixed concrete products in the AgriCrete range comply with the very latest agricultural standards, and are designed to help resist abrasion, erosion and chemical damage.

"At this time of year when livestock are being turned out into the fields, farmers are now turning their thoughts to working on their yards and buildings, and we've seen a real surge in interest in the AgriCrete range in the past few weeks."

The range includes: TG YardCrete for outside areas including stock housing, tracks and access roads; TG StoreCrete for grain stores and partition walls; and TG SilageCrete for slurry and manure storage, silage and maize pits.

"Farmers have praised our products for solving a range of common everyday issues that were both frustrating and costly at the same time, and it's clear to see that the range is standing up well to the tough environmental conditions in this sector."

The TG AgriCrete range is made up of granulated blast furnace slag, called Regen – a cement substitute manufactured from a by-product of the iron-making industry. Using one tonne of Regen in concrete reduces the embodied CO2 by around 900kg compared to using one tonne of cement, and also increases durability.



TG Concrete's Dave Morris inspects a project completed with the AgriCrete range

Making improvements

Farmers are being invited to apply for environmental grants under the Countryside Stewardship scheme.

It offers funding for habitat restoration, water quality and woodland improvements, flood alleviation, protection of landscapes and providing food and shelter for pollinators, birds and other wildlife.

"Applications are now open for Mid-Tier Stewardship," said Kathryn Williams, of Davis Meade Property Consultants in Oswestry.

"This is a five year scheme that replaces Entry Level Stewardship/ Higher Level Stewardship and farmers with ELS/HLS agreements that ends before December 31 are eligible to apply as are those who are not currently in a scheme.

"A wide variety of land management options are available to choose from to allow applicants to create a scheme that fits their own

farming system. You don't have to have all of your land in the scheme but can select the most suitable areas.

"Funding will be offered to those who propose to make the best environmental improvements within their local area."

Application packs are available from Natural England by calling 0208 026 1089. Application packs will need to be requested by the end of July so that applications can be submitted by September 30.

"Allow plenty of time to develop a good application before the deadline," she advised.

Water Capital Grant items are also available and if the capital items form part of a Mid-Tier agreement there is no limit to the amount payable.

Check if you are in a priority catchment using Defra's Magic Map at <http://magic.defra.gov.uk>

Excavating £2.5m deal with big firm

Family-owned plant hirer Ridgway Rentals has cemented more than half a century of links with JCB with a £2.5 million-plus investment in a fleet of excavators.

The Oswestry-based company - originally trading as RAJ Mechanisations Ltd - was founded by the late Bob Jones in 1961 as a dealer for JCB machines.

Bob forged a strong relationship with JCB founder Joseph Cyril Bamford CBE, who personally delivered the first JCB 7 crawler excavator the company ordered in 1964.

Led by Bob's son, Tim Jones, the company changed course in 1977 to become a plant hirer and is one of JCB's longest standing customers, evolving into a successful nationwide rental company.

Tim's sons Stuart and Rob Jones are both on the board serving as managing director and director respectively.

The company's latest investment is in



The JCB Hydradig is just one of the well known company's excavators

26 high specification excavators in a deal worth over £2.5 million. They include a JCB Hydradig, JS131 and JS220 tracked excavators, supplied by dealer Gunn JCB.

Stuart Jones said: "We have a long and proud history with JCB and a strong commitment to supporting British business.

The service and support we receive from Gunn JCB is also a key factor in our decision to choose JCB.

"This latest investment sees us strengthen our excavator fleet with high spec JCB models which are always well built and provide good value.

Machinery and livestock sales

Prices up to £86,500 were paid at a farm machinery and cattle sale in South Shropshire, following a family's decision to restructure their farming business.

Prospective buyers travelled from across the UK to attend the auction at Callaughton House Farm, Much Wenlock, organised by Halls.

It combined a reduction sale for W. Milner Ltd, a range of arable equipment from Clive Millington, Criddon Hall, Bridgnorth and farm machinery from other noted local arable farmers.

Restructuring following the death of Edward Milner last July, W. Milner Ltd sold some



The four-year-old Limousin stock bull that sold for £5,000

of its arable and grassland equipment, and dispersed its entire beef suckler herd, which comprised 46 cows and heifers with either calves at foot or in-calf, three stock bulls and 28 store cattle.

Mr Millington decided to sell selected machinery as he is scaling back his arable operations to concentrate on other aspects of the business with his daughter, Georgina.

Top prices of the day were £86,500 for a 08 registered Claas Lexion 570 tracked combine harvester, while pick of the cattle prices were £5,000 for a four-year-old Limousin stock bull, and £2,190 for a two-year-old Limousin cow with one month old bull calf at foot.



Hedge laying at Aqualate Mere with the Forge Property Consultants

Consultants branch out

The Forge Property Consultants team have been learning the ancient technique of hedge laying at Aqualate Mere, Newport, working with Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

Charles Lawson of Forge Property Consultants said: "It was a fantastic team-building exercise and very physical work using traditional tools such as the Staffordshire billhook. We learnt the technique of pleaching, learning that a

Midlands hedge is laid at an angle of 33 degrees!"

"The technique involves heavy pruning of an existing hedgerow and then laying the hedge to form a livestock-proof barrier.

"The process helps to rejuvenate an ageing hedgerow by encouraging new growth and improving its overall structure and strength, providing greater weather protection for crops and wildlife."



They don't come any better than this – pedigree Shropshires on home ground

Surveyors of the land

By Chris Austin

James McIntyre is no stranger to the Shropshire countryside.

Although he crosses the border from a Leominster auctioneers and surveyors to join Much Wenlock-based chartered surveyors Madeleys, the senior rural practice surveyor is focusing on the land he loves – and where he first trained.

Brought up in North Yorkshire, where he worked on farms from a young age, James trained at Newport's Harper Adams college in 1991 in rural enterprise and management, leading to a chartered surveyor qualification.

He left the county to work in Lincolnshire for four years, then East Anglia and Scotland but moved back to Shropshire in 2002 and has been here ever since.

He now lives just outside Much Wenlock with his wife Caroline and son Thomas.

"I love the Shropshire countryside," he says. "It's beautiful and there is such a mixture from rolling hills to fields to woodland. When you have been away and come back to Shropshire, I always think 'now I'm home.'"

James has been appointed senior rural practice surveyor and associate director at Madeleys. Previously one of Brightwells' principal senior rural practice surveyors and an auctioneer with a keen interest conducting sales of property, machinery, dead stock, livestock, produce and furniture, he says farming is in his blood.

"My dad was a farm manager and I began feeding the livestock, doing all sorts of maintenance tasks and tractor



James McIntyre has a real affection for the Shropshire countryside

work as soon as I was old enough," he adds. "Dairy, pigs, poultry, beef, sheep and arable - I have done it all! If you are dealing with farmers it helps if you have a decent working background knowledge."

James also has a small holding near Much Wenlock where he keeps Pedigree Shropshires, one of the oldest recognised pure breeds.

"I have had them for about eight years but haven't shown them yet. I love looking after them and perhaps one day, I'll be ready for a show. It would be a great experience."

Madeleys Chartered Surveyors opened

its doors on Much Wenlock High Street in December 2007 with Paul Madeley at the helm.

Paul says: "James brings a wealth of knowledge to compliment the team and we know he will continue our Madeleys ethos of being a traditional firm that fully meets the needs of the agricultural community."

"We are a team of young surveyors but together boast more than 50 years of combined experience which allows us to work closely with the farming community who are now working online, but also the farmers and landowners using traditional methods."



Rural surveyor – Rebecca Green graduated from Harper Adams University in 2013

Among James' colleagues at Madeleys is Rebecca Green who, when she's not organising sheep shearing competitions, acting as the county chairman of the Shropshire Federation of Young Farmers Clubs or meeting the Queen...is a rural surveyor working with farmers and landowners across Shropshire and beyond.

Rebecca, who joined Madeleys in May, graduated from Harper Adams in 2013 after reading Rural Enterprise and Land Management for four years.

"The variety of work attracted me to be a rural surveyor, from assisting in sales of rural properties, to completing BPS applications to giving planning advice – the work you get to undertake is vast," says Rebecca.

In December last year Rebecca, who farms at Cleobury North, became a fellow of the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers, and the 26-year-old is currently working towards becoming a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

When she is not working at Madeleys there is plenty to keep her busy. Having grown up on the family dairy, beef, sheep and arable farm outside Burwarton, she has a strong agricultural background and works alongside her parents. She also organises the sheep shearing competitions which have run at Burwarton Show since 2013, and enjoys being part of the "best one day agricultural show in the country".

"I have been a member of Brown Clee Young Farmers since the age of 14 and have held various club and county roles, including Rally Secretary in 2015," says Rebecca.

"I am currently the county chairman of the Shropshire Federation of Young Farmers Clubs, and this role requires a huge amount of dedication and commitment."

"Joining YFC back in 2004 has given me a huge range of experiences and I have picked up many skills, from representing the county in stock judging competitions, to getting the opportunity to travel all across the UK."

"The range of interesting and fun people you get to meet from across the country has to be the best thing about YFC."

"I have got to meet and make friends for life from all over the UK, from Northern Ireland to the Isle of Man."

Another experience which being a member of the YFC gave Rebecca was the chance to meet the Queen earlier this year.

"Apart from the social and competitive side to YFC, all of the clubs within Shropshire also do a huge amount of charity work, both raising fund for good causes and doing manual work within their communities," she says.

"This community work was recognised when Shropshire YFC was presented with the 2017 Queen's Award for Voluntary Service – a real honour for the Federation."



Madeleys workforce – Rebecca Green, Paul Madeley and James McIntyre at Much Wenlock

Avoid pollution of watercourse



Rob Matthews of Lycetts

Farmers should make every effort to ensure their silage clamps are in good order or run the risk of polluting local watercourses with highly toxic effluent.

That is the advice of a Shropshire insurance expert and agriculture specialist, who said too many farmers took the good condition of their clamps and effluent collection facilities for granted.

Rob Matthews, of national insurance brokers Lycetts, said that almost all of the cases he had heard of relating to farmers damaging the local environment in this way were unwitting and through negligence.

"It could be an extremely expensive, stressful and time-consuming mistake to make," said Mr Matthews, who heads the Shrewsbury office of Lycetts.

"Farmers have already got their first cut in and under wraps and many are already in the process of adding their second, so it's vital that it's stored in well maintained open-sided containers, or clamps as they are known."

"Silage effluent is extraordinary toxic – some 200 times more so than untreated domestic sewage – so the damage it can cause to watercourse eco-systems is profound."

"Once the effluent is in the watercourse, it is very difficult to localise it and it can find its way into springs, wells and boreholes and other public water supplies."

"Farmers must therefore make every effort to ensure their clamps are well maintained, and that includes all pipes and tanks as well."

He added that farmers can help themselves by cutting and ensiling grass when it is as dry as possible, as wet grass is much more hazardous.

Mr Matthews also said that well-maintained silage clamps reduce the possibility of further problems arising.

He said that farmers are well advised to keep a close eye on their silage for mycotoxin contamination which can pose a threat to livestock health and performance.

"The better prepared the storage conditions, the better the silage tends to be – and it allows farmers to rest easy in the knowledge they are not polluting the environment," concluded Mr Matthews.



Jack Latham, representing Hatchers, ready to take on the 4th hole



SATH NHS Trust duo Will Savage, Andrian Houghton



Dechra Divot Diggers – CJ McKay, Barabara Zottmaier, Louise Pugh and Lorane Scott



Edrive – Andy Lawrence, pictured here with Chris Bean, Stuart Smallwood, Steve Clubb

‘Swing for Bling’ golfing event

Teams of golfing beginners from a host of Shropshire companies took to the fairways for the third annual ‘Swing For Bling Open’.

The competition, organised by county sports partnership Energize, was hosted once again this year by The Shropshire golf centre in Telford for teams of four – each made up of three beginners, and just one experienced golfer.

The Monkey Motors team from Telford, joined by Energize team member Ben Harper, won the title this year, ahead of Shrewsbury-based car leasing company Edrive in second place. Dechra Divot Diggers, from the veterinary products company based at Hadnall, came third.

Louise Pugh of Dechra said: “We had a fantastic day. It was great to have a go at golf, but also to spend a day with workmates coming together as a team.”

The beginners had each received four weeks of professional golf lessons in the run-up to the nine-hole competition, either at The Shropshire, Shrewsbury Golf Club, or Hawkstone Park.

“We launched Swing For Bling back in 2015 to give beginners the confidence and skills to get out of the course, and take part in their first friendly golf competition, and it has been a great success,” said Helen White, business development officer at Energize.



Three of the Monkey Motors winning team – Ben Harper, Phil Barnett and Andy Barnett, with Duncan Biddle of event sponsors ATS



The Edrive runners up Chris Bean, Steve Clubb, Andy Lawrence, and Stuart Smallwood, with Helen White of Energize



Driving off on the first tee



Hatchers Solicitors on 3rd hole



Proplas – Ron Dean seen here with Mike Cator, Andy Harper, Ian Charles



Pensionlite – Louise Morgan, Lorna Evans, Pippa Payne, Tom Williams



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Jeff Anderson with course manager Justin Klekot

Exercise with B.I.T.E

A Shrewsbury based gym has launched a new initiative – the Bodytech Institute of Training and Education. Bodytech Health Club, which has been in business for the past 20 years, says it hopes the new service will spearhead change in the fitness industry across Shropshire. Bodytech director and co-founder of the enterprise Jeff Anderson, said: “Leading a fit and healthy lifestyle is extremely important and is a personal passion of mine, it was one of the main reasons why I moved into the fitness industry myself after a career in the chemical industry. “The fitness sector is ever-changing and constant training and re-qualification is key in being able to consistently offer the highest standard of instruction to members. “To attend a professional training course, many people would have to regularly travel to Birmingham - we recognised a need to bring that opportunity into our own county. “Enabling more people to succeed with a career within the sector, or to enter fitness as a profession for the first time, ultimately encourages a more vibrant industry for everyone to enjoy. “Through B.I.T.E we hope to be able to contribute to this.”

Julia turns over a new leaf

A new bookkeeping business in Market Drayton is the realisation of a lifelong ambition for Julia Donaldson.

She has launched JMD Bookkeeping Services after completing a business management degree and working her way around a number of accountancy related roles.

Julia turned to specialist UK-wide e-learning college, Ideal Schools, and joined 2,000 other students to become part of the Institute of Certified Bookkeepers (ICB).

She said: “I really have no words to describe how excellent they were for me; completely professional, supportive, and hugely knowledgeable.

“If anyone is considering starting business for themselves, or just adding new skills, and wanting to learn bookkeeping, I would say not to hesitate to get in touch.

“There’s a real feeling of community from the school, both the tutors and fellow students. The Facebook group allows everyone to help and support each other, and it feels more like a family than a school.”

JMD Bookkeeping obtained an ICB licence to practice, and began trading at the turn of this financial year, working with sole traders, partnerships and not for profit organisations all across the Staffordshire and Shropshire areas.

Julia is now the branch chair of the Staffordshire wing of the ICB.



Julia Donaldson of JMD Bookkeeping

Golden opportunity

A county man is hoping to turn his passion for whisky into a living by launching his first retail venture and opening a shop in Shrewsbury.

It is a complete departure from anything Mike Hale has done before and while he admits to it being a daunting task, he says he is loving the prospect of the challenge ahead.

Mr Hale, 49, from Admaston in Telford, has taken the plunge after serving 15 years in the RAF.

He has now opened Wrekin Whiskies on Wyle Cop, after moving into the listed building, formerly the Truly Scrumptious cafe.

“I was becoming bored with what I was doing, didn’t feel fulfilled anymore and had been into whisky for a long time, so thought wouldn’t it be cool to run a whisky shop and take my passion to other people,” he said.

“The company I worked for had a voluntary redundancy scheme and I thought if I don’t try now while I have the chance, I may look back in the future and say I wish I had given it a go.

“The plan is to put on one tasting session a month in the shop to start with and if, say for example, the sergeant’s mess at RAF Cosford or other organisations and hotels were interested, then I would happily take the show on the road.”

Rebecca Welch, commercial surveyor at Halls which found the property for Mr Hale, said:



Mike Hale and Rebecca Welch

“We welcome another trader to Shrewsbury and wish Mr Hale all the very best in his new venture.

“This shows people are confident in what Shropshire has to offer regarding business opportunities. The small independent retail market in Shrewsbury is continuing to thrive and we love being a part of that process.

“We are being contacted on a daily basis by people looking to set up new businesses or wanting to expand which is great news for the high streets of Shropshire.”

Mr Hale said: “Shrewsbury has a massive retail catchment area, it is a great tourist attraction, so that galvanised us into realising that this was the place to be.

“The whisky business is on the up right now. Demographics are changing. Younger people are drinking whisky now, along with 27 per cent of women.

“I am looking at stocking about 200 whiskies, predominantly whiskies not generally found in this area, though there will be some that are well known.”

Businesses can move in to units soon

A major new industrial development enabled by Telford & Wrekin Council’s £50 million growth fund is nearing completion.

The site at Hortonwood West will soon be home to two new industrial units which the council is building, and will then lease to new tenants.

Telford & Wrekin Council is investing £5.5m from the Growth Fund it created to help attract and develop business in the Borough.

The site has also attracted a further £3.5m of funding from the Marches LEP to allow the site to be developed.

Unit 10 – a 33,000 sq ft unit – will be the first to be completed at the new industrial site just off the Queensway.

Unit 9 is still under construction and is expected to be occupied before the end of 2017.

Hortonwood West is the council’s new premier industrial estate in north of Telford comprising just over 50 acres of land and which is being brought forward as part of the Telford Land Deal.

Idea measures up for siblings

A new online retailer based in the Ironbridge Gorge is seeking to make cooking from scratch easier, and cut down on kitchen waste.

The Teaspoon Club is a start-up company that sells spices, superfoods, agents and more in the exact quantities required by recipes, from as little as half a teaspoon upwards.

It has been created by Shropshire siblings Rose-Anna and Matthew Bailey, who said they had grown frustrated at the time and cost associated with cooking from scratch, especially on a lower budget.

“We want to make healthy living and experimental cooking accessible to all, regardless of budget constraints,” says Matthew.

The Teaspoon Club says it offers customers the freedom to experiment with cooking without having to buy, and store, high-end ingredients such as saffron and vanilla pods.

“Ingredients stored on a shelf for a long time lose their flavour.



Shropshire siblings Rose-Anna and Matthew Bailey

The Teaspoon Club not only reduces waste and prevents duplicate purchases, it also ensures the ingredients used maintain maximum ability to flavour a dish.”

The firm – www.theteaspoonclub.co.uk – has developed letter-box friendly first

class delivery methods, with all ingredients premeasured. It offers dinner party solutions, and stocks some hard-to-come-by ingredients such as wheatgrass powder and bee pollen, with up to 100 ingredients available.

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Deepening your summer pockets with savvy steps

TV's money-saving expert **Martin Lewis** writes for Shropshire Business



Summer's here, and sadly shorts often have smaller pockets than trousers. The warm weather means most people go out more, socialise more and spend more.

So now we've finally thrown off our hats and scarves for the sun, I wanted to share five tips for bolstering your bank account in time for the (hopefully) hot Shropshire weather.

Of course if you need more money, the obvious ways are to work more, find better paid work, or flog things. But I'm going to focus a little off that well-beaten track...

1) Free £662 if you're married or in civil partnership (not just cohabiting)

Back in April 2015, the Government launched a new tax-break for married people and civil partners, but out of the 4.2 million eligible couples for the marriage tax allowance, far less than half have claimed it.



Are you entitled to it? Claim the tax break for married people and civil partnerships.



The 'Lounge Club' scheme gives two free visits to most UK affiliated airport lounges

You're eligible if both of you are under age 82 (if older there's a different allowance), one of you pays the basic 20% tax and the other's a non-income taxpayer. The non-taxpayer can apply on gov.uk to transfer £1,150 of their personal allowance to their spouse, which means £1,150 of income you would've paid 20% tax on is now tax-free, a £230 gain.

Plus you can back claim if you missed out too, like Fran who tweeted: "@MartinSLewis thanks Martin for info on marriage allowance claimed and got over £400!" And since April this year, you can claim back an extra year so it's now £662, much of which will come as a cheque.

If you think you may qualify for more help and to claim read www.mse.me/marriagetax.

2) Free £100 and airport lounge tickets

Just by temporarily changing the plastic in your pocket, you can grab a little cash. Currently, accepted new applicants for

the www.americanexpress.com Preferred Rewards Gold charge get 20,000 reward points when they spend £2,000 on the card in the first three months.

Those points are enough to exchange for a £100 voucher for a range of shops, including Amazon, M&S and more (or use for flights, eg two BA/Virgin economy return flights to Amsterdam or Paris, or one for further afield).

Now spending £2,000 sounds like a lot. But it's £700 a month and I'm suggesting you use the card for everything you can – petrol, supermarkets and more (it's not an excuse to spend more, just shift your normal spending on it) and if that's over the threshold you'll qualify for the freebies.

You also get a membership card to the 'Lounge Club' scheme which gives you two free visits to most UK affiliated airport lounges (£15/person per visit after).

However, this card has a £140 annual fee after the first year, so diarise to cancel before then if you want to avoid it. And as it's a charge card, not a credit card, you MUST repay IN FULL every month - if not, you face a £12 penalty and a mark on your credit file.

● Martin Lewis is the Founder and Chair of Money Saving Expert. To join the 12 million people who get his Martin's Money Tips weekly email, go to www.moneysavingexpert.com/latesttip



You can earn up to £250 by simply switching your bank account



Claim any Tesco points you are owed

3) Get up to free £250 switching bank accounts

The bank account market is fiercely competitive right now; and the way many of the challenger banks (those which don't have a big legacy of customers) fight to get you to switch is quite simple . . . they pay you!

Luckily this is a positive form of bribery as their accounts often have better customer service ratings anyway. So grab the cash. At the time of writing TSB is offering up to £130 to switch and then up to £10 a month cashback on top, First Direct £125 and a 5% linked regular savings account, and Co-Op is offering £110 and then up to £5.50 a month. Yet the best-buys change regularly, so for my full update of today's best go to www.moneysavingexpert.com/bestbanks.

If you're worried about the hassle of switching, don't be. To get these bonuses you'll need to use their switching services and that means they shift all direct debits and standing orders for you, close the old account, and redirect payments to the old bank for three years. The vast majority of people in my polling report that it's 'easy and hassle free'.

4) Get a tax rebate if you wear a uniform

If you wear a recognisable uniform to work, even if it's just a branded t-shirt, and you wash it yourself, you may be able to reclaim hundreds of pounds of tax back, like Jackie who tweeted me: "@MartinSLewis we got a £250 cheque today after writing to the HMRC about a uniform tax rebate for my husband! Thank you!"

The amount you can claim depends on the industry you work in – the standard expense allowance is £60 which means a basic-rate taxpayer can claim £12 (20% of £60), though some occupations allow up to £185 so that's claiming £37 and higher-rate taxpayer can claim more. As you can go back four years in total you could get up to £185 extra for basic-rate or £370 for higher-rate tax payers. To claim fill out the P87 form from Gov.uk and send it to HMRC – don't pay anyone to do this for you. It's free to do direct from the Government website. Once you've registered, your tax code will change, so you'll be taxed less in the future.

5) Reclaim lost Tesco Clubcard vouchers

Very simple this one – though I've cheated slightly as it's not quite cash. If you shop at Tesco, you can easily find any unused or lost Clubcard vouchers going back the last two years.

Just log into your www.tesco.com account (or register with your Clubcard details) and under the 'my vouchers' section (found on the left-hand side) you'll be able to see a list of the vouchers you still have to spend.

This can be huge, as Alison tweeted: "@MartinSLewis £132.50 reclaimed in lost Tesco vouchers! New bikes for our boys maybe..." and AnnaV, who said: "WOW - I've got £413 of unspent vouchers."

Playing Leapfrog

BY NICK JONES

Money is set to skip a generation, as families act to counter the unequal spread of wealth between young and old. Over £400 billion in wealth being held by Britain's grandparents is set to cascade down to the benefit of grandchildren in the coming years, according to a new report from Royal London¹.

The data was collected by YouGov, which surveyed over 5,000 people from three generations². As well as highlighting the vast wealth inequality between generations, the report also reveals a significant difference in the ways different age groups think about giving or receiving an inheritance.

An overwhelming majority of those aged 25–44 want to see their parents and grandparents spending freely and enjoying their retirement. This is a powerful challenge to the idea of a generation of 'millennials' resenting the lifestyles of older generations.

But older generations, the report finds, are much more focused on preserving their wealth with the aim of passing it on.

Grandparents, in particular, have a strong desire to leave an inheritance, especially to their children but also to their grandchildren. It is clear that the UK is entering an unprecedented era in which people are retiring with much greater wealth than their predecessors. That wealth is largely being preserved through retirement and will in due course find its way down through the generations. It therefore makes sense for more individuals to consider estate planning as part their overall financial planning strategy.

There are a range of measures you can take while you are still alive to pass wealth on and minimise liability to Inheritance Tax.

With the benefit of advice, you can ensure that your wealth goes to whom you intend, without putting your own retirement security at risk.

The levels and base of taxation, and reliefs from taxation, can change at any time. The value of any tax relief depends on individual circumstances.

^{*} Nick Jones is the Principal of Nick Jones Wealth Planning, a Senior Partner Practice of St. James's Place Wealth Management.

¹ Royal London Policy Paper 12, Will harassed 'baby boomers' rescue Generation Rent? April 2017.

² YouGov conducted interviews between 1st February and 8th February 2017.

The Partner Practice represents only St. James's Place Wealth Management plc (which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority) for the purpose of advising solely on the Group's wealth management products and services, more details of which are set out on the Group's website www.sjp.co.uk/products. The title 'Partner Practice' is the marketing term used to describe St. James's Place representatives.



Emma Vollmer has joined KEW Accountants as a payroll specialist

Invaluable experience

An Oswestry-based financial specialist has joined an accountancy firm in Shropshire as it expands its payroll team. Emma Vollmer, who specialises in payroll administration, has joined KEW Accountants to help with the firm's growing workload. Managing director Karen Whitehead, said: "We are actually being reunited

because we both worked at an accountancy firm in Oswestry for about 13 years so it will be great working together again. "We have seen a big rise in demand for payroll services over the past year and Emma is very knowledgeable on the systems and processes involved. Her experience is invaluable."

Bridgnorth woman is up for a career challenge

A desire to take on a fresh career challenge has steered businesswoman Gina Hinde to her new job as marketing manager at Shrewsbury-based Morris Lubricants.

Gina, from Bridgnorth, has spent the past nine years working as marketing manager for Hartman Outdoor Products in Telford.

Prior to that, she ran Wofi Lighting in Bridgnorth, a lighting distributorship, with her husband, John, for four years, having previously worked for the BBC at Pebble Mill for four years.

"The company has a fantastic history, lots of potential and it's clear that it has strong family values," she said. "The whole place emanates warmth and I could tell from the moment I arrived that everyone employed here loves the company."

"There is great loyalty in the workforce."



Gina Hinde from Bridgnorth

Three reasons for celebration



Charlotte Nutting, David Preece and Michelle Monnes-Thomas

One new partner and two new associates have joined the growing team at Shropshire law firm FBC Manby Bowdler.

The firm which has offices in Shrewsbury, Telford and Bridgnorth, employs nearly 200 people and turns over £12 million a year.

David Preece, who joined the firm as a trainee solicitor in 2008, has stepped up to partner, with Michelle Monnes-Thomas and Charlotte Nutting becoming associates.

David is based in the Corporate department and advises on company and commercial law. He is also a member of the firm's Intellectual Property, Technology & Media Law Group, advising on a range of non-contentious intellectual property matters, with an emphasis on the protection of IP through the registration of trademarks, plus copyright and design rights.

Michelle joined FBC Manby Bowdler's wills, probate and lifetime planning department in 2014, while Charlotte has become the firm's resident commercial property specialist for the leisure and hospitality sector. She joined the Shrewsbury office in 2014.



Giles Scott



Lisa Jones



Tristan Lewis

Many changes

Rachel Bentley has returned to her native county and taken up a post at the Telford office of law firm Lanyon Bowdler. Newport born and educated, she started out in the legal profession in Shropshire before spending a number of years in the south west.

Adrian Roberts, head of the criminal law team, said: "Rachel has a vast amount of experience dealing with all types of crime, ranging from motoring offences to murder, and has devoted a number of years to running her own specialist criminal defence firm. She is a fearless and tenacious solicitor who has a friendly and sympathetic approach towards clients."

Lanyon Bowdler has also expanded its private client team, with two new associates - Lisa Jones being based at the Oswestry office and Tristan Lewis in Ludlow. The pair join



Rachel Bentley

the firm as Giles Scott takes up the position as head of the private client team to allow Edward Rees, who previously ran the department, to head up the team based in Telford.

Tristan Lewis has around 10 years' experience of dealing with wills, trusts and administration of estates, while Lisa Jones is experienced in advising on a range of private client matters.



Nick Jones welcomes Jayne Smallman to the firm

Jayne is latest addition

Nick Jones Wealth Planning of Shrewsbury has added another experienced financial advisor to its ranks.

Jayne Smallman, from Copthorne, has over two decades of involvement in the financial industry having previously worked for the Nationwide Building Society followed by two years as a financial advisor with St.

James's Place Wealth Management.

Nick Jones, said: "Jayne has a wealth of experience and will be a great asset to the team."

"It really is a small world as Jayne and I first met as college students many years ago, working nights at Minsterley creamery, before going our separate ways and eventually meeting up to work together again."

Growing business

IT specialist Bespoke Computing has made a key appointment to drive forward its strategy for growth. Paul Cook has been appointed as the firm's first business development manager.

His role will focus on drawing in new clients for the Telford-based organisation that provides tailored IT and communications solutions to businesses.

The move is part of an expansion in the sales and support team over the next financial year. Bespoke Computing recently moved to new headquarters in Stafford Park, doubling its footprint to support its expansion.



Paul Cook has joined Chris Pallett at Bespoke Computing

Managing director Chris Pallett said: "Recruiting somebody into a sales capacity was the next logical move for our business at this time of growth."

Sam's promotion



Commercial litigation specialist – Sam Pedley joined mfg Solicitors as a trainee in 2007

Shropshire law firm mfg Solicitors has appointed one of its youngest ever partners.

Commercial litigation specialist Sam Pedley, 32, has been promoted after joining as a trainee in 2007.

An expert in commercial dispute resolution, insolvency, intellectual property

and contractual disputes, he will continue to work closely with partner Tom Esler and take on a wider strategic management role.

Recognised by the prestigious Legal 500 and the Chambers and Partners guides as a 'rising star', Mr Pedley will also mentor the firm's junior lawyers and trainees, alongside growing his client base.

He said: "It is a new chapter in my career and to celebrate my 10 years with the firm by becoming a partner is fantastic."



Roberto Tumaliuan and Liz Hallen

A proud day for manager

Roberto Tumaliuan has been promoted to the manager's role at Isle Court Nursing Home in Shrewsbury. It follows the retirement of Liz Hallen who held the post for eight years.

The 54-bed home provides short and long term care for the elderly, mentally frail and those needing dementia care, employing up to 98 people. Roberto, originally from the Philippines, was promoted after completing a successful period as acting home manager. He joined Morris Care in 2010 as a student nurse at Isle Court before rising through the ranks and securing a promotion to deputy nurse manager at the company's Oldbury Grange Nursing Home in Bridgnorth.

Welcome to department

Wace Morgan Solicitors, which has its head office in St Mary's Street, Shrewsbury, has welcomed Gemma Hughes to its family department.

Gemma, who has moved from another Shropshire law firm, will focus on issues relating to finance.

After attending Moreton Hall School in Oswestry she studied at St Andrew's University, Scotland, obtaining a masters degree in international relations.



Gemma Hughes

Honour for Michelle



New associate – Michelle Poulton pictured with Graham Davies

A Telford lawyer with almost 20 years of experience has now been named as an associate at a local law firm.

Michelle Poulton began her career as a legal assistant in the conveyancing team with Martin-Kaye Solicitors, and she is now a qualified licensed conveyancer at the firm's head

office in Euston Way, in Telford.

Senior partner Graham Davies said: "Michelle is a key member of our conveyancing team and we're very pleased to announce that she is now an associate with the firm – an honour that we reserve for our most talented and committed staff."



Appointment – Ryan Berrisford is customer relationship manager

Long service reaps rewards

Telford-based voice and data communications provider, Entanet, has expanded its successful Service Review Programme and appointed one of its most experienced service team members to the newly-created role of customer relationship manager.

Ryan Berrisford is one of the longest-serving members of the company's team and brings more than a decade of experience to the position.

Having worked in first line technical support and latterly the company's premier support team as team leader and then team manager, he has extensive company, industry and operational knowledge.



Yvonne Cotterill and Shaun Smithson pictured at Go Plant Limited

Yvonne takes up a new role

Go Plant Limited, based at Stafford Park in Telford, has welcomed Yvonne Cotterill as business development manager of its West Midlands operation following a successful career at a waste management company which saw her co-ordinating contracts with managers, buyers and procurement teams across Scotland and manage key customers across the UK.

"Yvonne has already proven to be a valuable member of the team," said Shaun Smithson, national key accounts and sales manager.

"She's been able to draw from her experience in the waste management sector – one which we're passionate about as a company – and thrive in her new role."



David Wells has a new role as a mortgage and insurance advisor

Golfer switches to a fresh course

Golf professional David Wells has teed off for a completely different career by becoming the latest addition to the team at Q Financial Services.

He is as a newly-qualified mortgage and insurance advisor by the company, based in Telford, whose directors include Wolverhampton Wanderers

footballer Dave Edwards. It represents a change in direction for David, who gained a degree in business management with golf studies at Lincoln University, before taking up golfing roles at both Patshull Park Golf Club and The Astbury, near Bridgnorth. He achieved his new qualifications within just three busy months of studies.

Making plastic extra fantastic



GB Plastics' general manager Matt Wedderkopp (left) with new branch managers Phil Broadbent (centre) and Deepak Kalia

Phil Broadbent is at the helm of family-owned GB Plastics' Shrewsbury branch on the Battlefield estate, whilst Deepak Kalia is the new manager of its Walsall branch.

GB Plastics has its head office in Rugeley, and six trade counter sites, including a base in Oswestry.

As manager of the Shrewsbury branch on the town's Battlefield Enterprise Park, Phil, 33, is responsible for a team of six.

He has previously been a contract manager for a specialist waste management company, and area sales manager for adhesives and silicon manufacturer and supplier to the building, construction and interiors industries, Hranipex.

"I'm enjoying the variety of work across both sales and management roles," he said.

College merger has new man at its helm

Graham Guest is the new principal and chief executive at Telford College of Arts and Technology – which is due to complete its merger with near neighbour New College Telford over the coming weeks.

He was previously deputy principal at Waltham Forest College and has worked in education for 28 years, starting out as a lecturer in building services, as well as running his own training provider business.

"I've lived in Shropshire for nearly two years now so I am honoured at having the opportunity to lead the organisation during this exciting time," he said.

"There have been great strides made this year and I will be looking to keep up the momentum and take the new college to the next level with the support of staff.



Graham Guest has almost 30 years of experience in education

"There is the opportunity to share best practice, knowledge and expertise from both sites and to build a strong and successful college in Telford."

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Connexis is based at 5 Pearson Road, Telford. The company rebrand includes a new logo and vans display a new livery too.

Two decades later and 'connexion' is still great

It is almost 20 years since I formed Connexis. Now, as our new logo and rebranding comes to fruition, it has me reflecting on the journey so far. How the company got to where it is today, and indeed, where the next chapter will take us.

The year was 1998 and I had already established myself in the world of telecommunications, with 10 years of invaluable experience.

I had worked in sales and accounts in London, employed by GPT as a regular account manager, prior to relocating back to my birthplace – Shropshire.

Back on familiar turf, I further developed my skills with what was then Mercury Communications, working on large accounts. In time, that business would be superseded by Siemens.

I rose to the position of regional sales manager by the mid-1990s, running what was the Midlands region and North West, but hit what many folk would refer to as, a glass ceiling.

Career progression had been good but it was pretty evident that I would need to leave to progress further.

So, I had two choices – find another job with a competitor, or set up my own business and become that rival.

I'm not going to pretend it was an easy transition. These things take time, but I was more than up for the challenge. Besides, there is nothing more motivating than a young family at home.

Back in the early days, what was



William Rowland, founder of Connexis

then telecommunications was a pretty uncomplicated affair – internal telephone systems and fax. Pretty much it really.

That was then, but as you are all aware, the internet has changed everything.

These days, it's all about multi-platform integration, where computers, telephones and mobile devices are all synced and work beautifully together.

We have moved with the times, staying at the forefront of the industry and embracing new technologies – and this is why Connexis is perfectly placed to help businesses today and into the future.

Our business communications include the latest internet-based telephony. VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) is just one example. CRM (customer relationship management) is another. It's all focused on integration, where one system talks to the other perfectly.

Our products and software come from industry leading suppliers, such as AVAYA, Mitel, UNIFY, Panasonic and Ericsson (LG).

Another product is IP Surveillance, or

CCTV as it used to be called. Manufacturers such as Mobotix and ACTi have some exceptional technology now available.

Data networking comes predominantly via ZyXEL and both voice and internet connectivity, including cloud and hosted telephony from leading service providers including TalkTalk Business, Gamma Telecom, Entanet and Unitron.

We work predominantly within a 50-mile radius and while our policy is to give the best advice regarding hardware and software, we also have an excellent reputation for no pressure sales.

WiFi solutions are another specialism, especially in public places like hotels, sports clubs and schools. We've installed ZyXEL Public Access WiFi solutions in a number of hotels as far North as Harrogate and as far West as Aberdovey.

Some customers just want support for existing kit and that is fine too. They can rest assured that when they feel the time is right to upgrade, Connexis will have the ideal solution for their telecommunications wants and needs.

All work is carried out by our in-house team. Our engineers are fully accredited, having trained through TCATs IT apprenticeship scheme prior to gaining further specific knowledge, which in this industry is ongoing.

It's a small, cohesive team -one that works well together with the customer's needs always the main focus.

In short, we are the complete telecommunications solution, offering the personal touch and building relationships with customers for decades to come.

WILLIAM ROWLAND

● William Rowland is managing director of Connexis, a communications specialist based in Telford with a customer-focused team of specialist staff. A new website is in development and this will launch soon.

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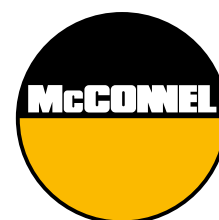
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