

SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS

Issue 6

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PLUS: Late payments: the fightback begins

Learning curve for education sector

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INTRODUCING THE TEAM

*Pictured above: (back) Steve Oliver, Jayne Smallman, Nick Jones, Alan Brittain, Katherine Lear, Graham Mills
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Plus: late payments: the fightback begins | Learning curve for education sector | Pushes and pulls: what sort of boss are you?

Variety truly is the spice of life



The real strength of Shropshire's business community lies in its incredible diversity.

One day, you can marvel at the ancient hand-made skills of a traditional and world renowned company like teddy bear maker Merrythought, one of the county's most iconic brands and the last of its kind in the UK.

The next, you could find yourself standing in a cutting-edge cryogenic chamber which is pushing the boundaries of healthy living technology – the first of its kind in the region. Old and new, traditional and revolutionary,

urban and rural . . . it all sits happily side-by-side to give us that perfect balance. And in this issue, we're shining a light on it all.

At Merrythought's factory in Ironbridge, for example, we go behind the scenes to find out why its managing director hadn't been expecting to continue her family's tradition, but is now delighted that she did.

I also braved a new -90C cryo-chamber in Shrewsbury to find out why they're so loved by top footballers and Hollywood stars. At time of writing, the Cristiano Ronaldo physique is still a work in progress!

And here's another issue which sends a chill down the spine – the issue of issue of payment. Or, to be more specific, lack of it.

The Government talks a good game when it comes to pledging to tackle late payment of invoices. But talk is cheap; it's action that we need to snare the worst culprits, who can cause cashflow chaos for small firms.

We've pulled together top tips from a host of local experts – but at the end of the day, it's the companies themselves which need to decide how much they are prepared to rock the boat with a potentially important client.

Perhaps that depends what kind of personality you are. For example, are you a 'pusher' when it comes to getting things done, or a 'puller'?

The art of persuasion in the workplace comes in many forms, and must never be

underestimated – author Ally Yates explains all on page 42.

There's been a lot of musical chairs in the Shropshire business community this summer – we have a bumper six pages of new appointments news. Have you got new faces at your company? If so, don't forget to send us words and pictures.

Last, but certainly not least, we've got a big spotlight on education. It's the time of year when the workforce of tomorrow are making big careers decisions on the back of GCSE and A Level results.

This year, though, schools and colleges have been on an equally sharp learning curve, wrestling with changes to the curriculum and

grading systems – as well as restructuring their own campuses.

There's never a quiet time in the Shropshire business community. But if there's an area you think we are neglecting, or a topic you'd like us to tackle, please drop us a line.

And if you are feeling informed and opinionated enough to join our band of expert columnists, we'd love to hear from you.

Whether you're a pusher, or a puller, the door is open . . . variety is the spice of life. **Carl Jones, Editor**

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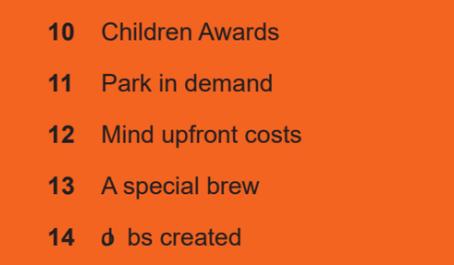
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SMEs are currently owed £26.3 billion in overdue payments. The Government has published guidance on how quickly suppliers get paid.

The many perils of late payments

By Carl Jones

Size matters. Never more so than when you're a small business trying to recover cash from an overdue invoice.

Small businesses continue to be plagued by late payments. Over the past year, figures show that only 51% of invoices sent in the UK were paid on time.

Cloud accounting software company FreeAgent has analysed over 50,000 businesses and hundreds of thousands of invoices, to get a grip on the scale of the problem.

"We're not just talking about clients taking an extra week or two to pay – this includes chronic late payers who sit on invoices for months, as well as those who just don't pay at all," says chief executive Ed Molyneux

"Micro business owners need to get paid promptly to keep their cash flow healthy and most don't have the luxury of being able to absorb a late or non-payment in their accounts.

"We need to see a complete cultural shift when it comes to paying invoices, so that these types of smaller businesses are not put at risk."

The scale of the late payments problem has been recognised by the Government,



Glenda Hammond of Wace Morgan

and last year it was announced that a small business commissioner will be appointed to tackle it . . . but at the time of writing, that position has yet to be filled.

The general consensus among Shropshire companies is that the situation has existed for years, and is getting

gradually worse, with no-one currently having real power to either scare or punish the worst culprits.

Naming and shaming sometimes works – but at what cost to the small supplier which has been brave enough to put its head above the parapet?

SMEs are currently owed £26.3 billion in overdue payments, and the Government has published guidance for large businesses to report on how quickly suppliers get paid.

Sometimes, firms won't act without an 'official' kind of prod. Two thirds of letters sent by solicitors result in invoices being paid within seven days, in contrast to two thirds of overdue invoices remaining overdue after at least a month if no letter is sent.

Glenda Hammond, a former court manager who is now a debt and credit controller at Wace Morgan in Shrewsbury, says: "I have been in debt recovery for over 40 years and know that when businesses, large or small, have outstanding invoices it has an extremely detrimental effect on their operation and can impact on their ability to stay afloat.

"Correspondence from a firm of reputable solicitors shows that you are serious, and expect to be paid on time.



Small businesses continue to be plagued by late payments. Over the past year, figures show 51% of invoices sent in the UK were paid on time.

“ Sometimes, firms won't act without an 'official' kind of prod. Two thirds of letters sent by solicitors result in invoices being paid within seven days, in contrast to two thirds of overdue invoices remaining overdue after at least a month if no letter is sent. ”

"We can often obtain settlement or can encourage the person who owes the money to set out any difficulties or disputes they have about the debt, which often leads to the matter being resolved quickly."

Of course, the contents of any letter, and the tone it takes, are crucial if an ongoing commercial relationship is to be retained.

Glenda, who recovered over £231,000 in the last financial year, says: "It is crucial to keep the balance right.

"A solicitor's letter can help to open up a dialogue with the person who owes the money as they often feel easier discussing it with a third person."

But Telford, Shrewsbury, Ludlow and Oswestry law firm Lanyon Bowdler points out that businesses claiming debts from any individual, sole trader or business, apart from limited companies or PLCs.

The Pre-Action Protocol will apply to businesses claiming debts from any individual, sole trader or business, apart from limited companies or PLCs.

The idea is to stop cases from going to court, but the big change is that debtors will have 30 days – rather than the current 14 day period – to respond to a letter of claim.



Sian Samuel of Lanyon Bowdler

lead to delays in settling a claim, but there are some potential advantages. For instance, agreeing a repayment plan at an earlier stage will save on legal costs and court fees, and debtors may involve a solicitor earlier in the process too which will actually lead to a speedier resolution overall. ▶

Top tips

Top tips for avoiding the perils of late payments, by Aaron & Partners of Shrewsbury:

1. Where you can, ask for payment (or at least part payment) up front. If you have the money before you have parted with your goods or services, there is no risk.
2. Well drafted Terms and Conditions can reduce the chances of late payment and provide an easy way to illustrate to your customers when they should pay (or that their payment is late). They ensure both parties know where they stand.
3. It may be appropriate to retain title of the goods until payment has been received. This can be incorporated into Terms and Conditions and enable you to exert pressure if payment isn't on time.
4. If you agree a credit period, stick to it. If your customer has 30 days to pay, ensure this is followed up. If you overlook a late payment once this will make it more difficult in the future.
5. Carry out credit checks before entering contracts. Don't contract with organisations with poor credit ratings and consider whether third party guarantees, for instance from directors of a customer, should be requested.
6. Don't be afraid to say no. There is no point in having a customer who doesn't pay.

◀ “Our main advice to businesses is to ensure they contact their solicitor as soon as possible when they have debts to recover, so the claim can be instigated quickly.”

Another piece of legislation, however, appears to be rather more helpful – requiring larger companies to publish information about how long they take to pay their suppliers.

The Reporting on Payment Practices and Performance Regulations applies to public, private and listed companies and to limited liability partnerships through a separate set of regulations.

Emma Northall, debt recovery manager at law firm FBC Manby Bowdler, with offices including Telford, Shrewsbury and Bridgnorth, sees this as a potentially welcome tool.

“Late payment is recognised as causing serious financial and administrative problems for businesses.

“The aim of the new regulations is to tackle concerns about adverse treatment of smaller suppliers by larger, more powerful customers, through increased transparency and scrutiny.

“It’s important that larger businesses check whether they are required to report



Emma Northall of FBC Manby Bowdler

under the regulations, and must then keep an eye on the thresholds as these will be updated over time.

“Smaller businesses can ask new customers whether they are required to

report and, if they are, check out payment performance as part of their pre-contract checks.”

There are other existing measures already available to tackle late payment, of course, including the option of claiming interest, compensation and recovery charges.

Emma says it’s worth checking that existing contract terms don’t undermine those rights with something less advantageous.

Under the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 commercial businesses are expected to pay their supplier invoices within 30 days, unless they have both agreed a longer time limit of no more than 60 days.

Alongside this, all public bodies are required to pay suppliers within 30 days, except for some specific or devolved activities.

Statutory interest can be applied, together with a fixed sum of between £40 and £100, depending on the sum owed, for the cost of recovering the late commercial payment.

The interest is currently set at 8% plus the Bank of England base rate, and starts to run automatically at 30 days from the

latest date of either receiving the supplier’s invoice, or of receiving or accepting the goods or services.

Yet Shropshire’s towns are littered with stories of successful companies which have been brought to their knees by cashflow difficulties.

And the late payments are often a direct factor behind the rising amount of unpaid VAT across the UK too – making the taxman most disgruntled.

Marie Bramwell is from Dyke Yaxley accountants based in Shrewsbury and Telford.

“Businesses not being able to pay their VAT bills on time is a huge problem – and by having no alternative but to pay late, they are risking having their assets seized or their business shut down altogether,” she says.

“It’s important to familiarise yourself with the different options available in order to secure the finance you need for your business.

“There is no one-size fits all approach, every business is different and you need to explore the options to find which suits you best.

“If you’re chasing late bills, invoice financing may provide money based on



Marie Bramwell of Dyke Yaxley

the value of the unpaid invoices you have sent to clients.

“There are two different types: factoring allows finance providers to purchase the bill owed to you by clients and they are

then responsible for collecting the debt. And discounting is where the provider will loan you a percentage of the value of your bill, but you will still be responsible for collecting overdue payments.”

We threw the question out to our facebook followers, who came back with some useful tips.

Mark Andrew Smith, managing director of the Mark Andrew Smith Group, said: “The Case Centre Pro software has a client reminder/nag not paid function.

“It can be set up so that just before payment term days, a reminder email is sent.

“An automatic reminder email is sent at reminder days, helping small businesses to lower their overdraft fees.”

And Carole Clayton, from The Rural Meeting Place near Ludlow, said: “It depends what business you are in, but payment upfront until they become a trusted partner is always good.”

And that’s the crux of this whole debate, really. Trust, and understanding.

Are small businesses being unfairly held to ransom, and how much bending of the rules can larger companies expect to get away with, before some of their small suppliers hit breaking point?

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Subject to job creation, grants of up to 45% of eligible project costs and a maximum of £100k may be available to renovate, extend or reconfigure premises in the Marches area (Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin).

The grant is unable to fund core farming operations, residential development, purchase of buildings and businesses involved in the retail sale of goods and services to the general public.

To find out if your company is eligible to apply, and to discuss your proposal further, please contact the programme team on **01432 260662** or email mbig@herefordshire.gov.uk



Bicycles by Design – the bespoke frames under construction



Miniature marvel – the tiny Iron Bridge makes a subtle addition

Bridging the gap for cycle maker

Shropshire's most iconic landmark has been immortalised in miniature form by a Shropshire steel fabricator.

Fabweld Steel Products has produced a series of intricate copies of the Iron Bridge as a brake bridge for hand built bespoke frames made by Bicycles by Design at its Coalport workshop.

The tiny versions of the original structure measure 77x29mm and are

attached to the rear seat stays that lead to the wheels on the Ironbridge brand of bicycles.

FSP also produced a small scale version of the bicycle's logo for the head badge – an image of the River Severn flowing under the Iron Bridge – that feature below the handlebars of the bikes.

Craftsmen Peter Bird and Robert Wade approached Telford based FSP for

the special commission to harness its laser cutting design skills and technology.

FSP managing director Richard Hilton said: "This was a very different commission to our usual work but the cutting edge laser technology we have allows us to engrave on many different materials from hard laminates to mild steel, brass or aluminium and in different colours."

Winning an accolade is anything but child's play

Do you run a child-friendly enterprise? Then the organisers of the 2018 Businesses for Children Awards want to hear from you.

The Shropshire-based awards aim to raise the profile of businesses who work with or for children in the county, from newborn up to the age of 18 years old.

Entries are now open for the 2018 competition, with categories include new business, educational business for five to 18 year-olds, activities for under fives, franchisee and a volunteer award.

Trish Parsons, co-ordinator of the 2018 event, now in its fifth year, said: "We are looking for those who use businesses that work with children, and business owners themselves, to put in nominations for the 2018 awards to be held in March next year.

"The BCAs look to promote Shropshire businesses that provide for future generations and we have been introduced to some amazing organisations over the past five years."

The BCA website - www.bcawards.co.uk - provides information on each category and its criteria and nominations can be made via the online form.



Headline sponsor Dave Williams from Henshalls with Julia Allinson from Homestart Telford & Wrekin – the chosen charity for the 2017 event

Nominations will close on October 1 and the finalists will be revealed in December. The black tie awards ceremony will be held at the Park Inn Hotel, Telford, on March 10.

"Every year we have the honour of thanking all of those people who contribute to our future generations, those who give

our children the chance to discover their dream and enjoy their childhood," said Trish.

"It's great to see our nominees celebrating with staff, colleagues and friends and we always have a fantastic evening."

Park in demand



Russ and Jane Smithurst, managers of the expanding Bow House Country Park

Expansion work has begun at a holiday home park in the South Shropshire Hills following a rise in demand from staycationers.

Twenty-five extra pitches are being created at Bow House Country Park, near Bishop's Castle, which already has 62 caravan holiday homes and 15 lodges.

Fourteen new pitches are being created in the first phase of the expansion. The park is one of six across Shropshire and Snowdonia owned by Shrewsbury-based Morris Leisure.

Edward Goddard, managing director of Morris Leisure, says: "We are expanding the park due to the demand for pitches, with most of the owners living within a two-hour drive of Bishop's Castle.

"We have sold 15 holiday homes on the park in the past 12 months and envisage this demand continuing, due to the growing popularity of staycationing."

Depot for sale



The bus and coach depot in Oswestry

A buyer is being sought for the bus and coach depot site in Oswestry. The site is being leased by Arriva until September next year, but moves are already underway to sell the £600,000 Salop Road plot.

"The bus depot has been a feature in Oswestry for many years, but its 0.66 acres throws up some intriguing possibilities," said James Evans of Halls Commercial, handling the sale.

"It has significant future development potential, subject to the necessary consents, and redevelopment is probably the way to go. It is classed as an 'out-of-town development' and we have seen a number of these spring up in the area recently as more businesses are drawn to the town.

"Oswestry is a growing and thriving community and there are house building programmes going on which will significantly increase the population. The town has also seen a rise in retail and commercial premises."

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Richard SHEEHAN

We continue to process what snippets of information we are being fed regarding the Government's strategy for leading the UK out of the EU.

Clearly the ongoing uncertainty is having an impact on business and consumer confidence. Add to this the very public downgrading of GDP by the IMF and others, it is no surprise that our national survey work with the British Chambers of Commerce is suggesting that economic conditions are becoming more challenging.

It is therefore vital that as well as reaching a comprehensive agreement with the EU, the Government does not lose sight of the need to address the long-standing domestic issues of upfront business costs that continue to undermine the UK's long term growth prospects.

As a chamber of commerce we continue to lobby hard for these outcomes, both at a local and national level.

Turning our attentions to Shropshire, it is clear from our latest survey work that the nationally reported domestic business conditions are having a knock-on effect into our local market.

Reported sales activity, both domestically and internationally, is showing signs of pressure within the latest quarter.

This is surprising - on the international stage in particular - with the pound still weak against the dollar and the euro, our goods and services have never been more attractive to overseas buyers. We must do more collectively to capitalise on this opportunity.

Our results show that the age-old chestnut of availability of skilled labour remains a problem, and questions the work-readiness of some candidates. Our FE and HE establishments are working hard to alleviate this, but it is not a quick fix.

Of the businesses surveyed, 30% reported they are working to capacity which is a slight increase on previous months.

This shows, however, that a large proportion of respondents are structured to do more if it is available. Investment in plant and training continues to be



With the pound still weak against the dollar and the euro, our goods and services have never been more attractive to overseas buyers

stagnating; a consistent picture for the past couple of years. Looking at areas of concern reported this quarter, rates are right up the list. Business rates, exchange rates and interest rates are all contributing to investment plans, limiting growth and strategic planning.

One area reported that is of major concern and can severely impact on business is a reduction in cash flow. This is now the third consecutive quarter that we have seen a reduction in available cash within participant businesses - we are committed to making the Government sit up and take note of this, as it cannot be allowed to continue.

Every day the team from the chamber

are engaging with businesses across Shropshire. It is clear from the feedback we receive that in most cases the sleeves have been rolled up and business is doing what it does best . . . creating wealth and employment opportunities.

We will be using our representatives within Westminster to make sure that the voice of Shropshire business is heard in the corridors of power.

We are also committed to use that resource to filter the noise emanating around Brexit, and provide only detailed facts to our business community.

● *Richard Sheehan is chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce*



Fabdec's brewery division produces stainless steel tanks and vessels for microbreweries across the United Kingdom

Added ingredient for a superb brew

The continued growth in demand for real ale and specialist beers has been a boost for Shropshire manufacturer Fabdec, with a steady increase in brewery sales throughout this year.

In the last few months, Fabdec has produced stainless steel tanks and vessels for microbreweries across the UK, including Aston Manor, Hedgedog, Brightside, Kite and The Friday Beer Co.

Sales within Fabdec's brewery division in the first six months of 2017 has doubled that of the same period for 2016.

Chris Powell, managing director of Fabdec, says the increase in microbreweries and micropubs is particularly welcome given the continuing decline of traditional pubs.

"The appetite for craft beers and ales has definitely grown over the past year or so, and along with that the number of independent and innovative breweries and micropubs.

"Given that around 20 pubs a week are closing nationwide, this is a real ray of light for the brewery and pub industry.

"The companies that we work with share a passion for quality and we are proud that they trust us to deliver first-rate products, often designed specifically for



Chris Powell, managing director of Fabdec

their needs. It is great to see independent brewing undergoing something of a renaissance, with breweries willing to make a significant investment in their operations to create distinctive beers."

Based in Ellesmere for more than 65 years, Fabdec is one of the UK's leading manufacturers of heating, cooling, storage and processing vessels.

For the brewery division, this includes mash tuns, wort 'copper' kettles, fermentation vessels, heat exchangers and

conditioning tanks. These tanks can be made to order from 5 BBL up to 35 BBL – the equivalent of more than 10,000 pints.

Gerald Williams, director of Malvern-based Friday Beer Company, said: "As our brewery has grown we have scaled up the size of our tanks to meet the new demand. Fabdec has been with us on this journey and have helped and advised us all along the way.

"Their technical support and knowledge has been invaluable and the quality and value for money of their tanks is unmatched."

Fabdec has also produced equipment for breweries including Spire, Hadham, Highgate Davenport, Penpont, Great Orme and Cwrw Llyn.

Following major investment in machinery and engineering last year – and with a highly skilled workforce – Fabdec is currently exploring opportunities to expand its steel fabrication work into sectors such as pharmaceuticals, chemicals and soft drinks.

Chris Powell added: "For Fabdec, 2017 continues to be a strong year for growth and we are pleased that our brand is now recognised in the US and other foreign markets.

"Britain should be proud of its manufacturing heritage, and exporting remains a key target for us across our brewery, dairy and water heating divisions."

Hortonwood site creates 70 jobs

Plastics manufacturer Craemer Group is set to create 70 new jobs by expanding its presence in Telford.

The company has bought a 5.3 hectare site at Hortonwood West to set up a new production facility, with construction work due to start in mid November.

Craemer opened its first UK factory in Telford, at nearby Hortonwood 1 in 2006, and has gone from strength to strength, seeing turnover increase from £5 million to £25.5 million in 2016.

During this time the business has increased its share of the UK and Ireland wheelie bin market from 5% to over 50%.

Craemer supplies local authorities as well as the environmental, logistics and manufacturing industries with plastic pallets, storage and transport containers and fish boxes.

It was originally drawn to Telford by its rich heritage in plastics and polymers, and has formed a close working relationship with Telford & Wrekin Council, which has supported the business through its initial arrival, site expansion and additional land purchase.

It is hoped that the new production facility will be open by November next year.

Steve Poppitt, managing director of Craemer UK Ltd, said: "This new site in Telford really gives us the room we need



Phil Challinor, business engagement and investment team leader at Enterprise Telford, left, with Steve Poppitt, managing director of Craemer UK Ltd

to grow and step up production. We're confident that our investment in this new facility and the creation of additional resources within our UK manufacturing platform will allow Craemer to strengthen its position in domestic, European and global markets for many years to come."

Germany-headquartered Craemer is the latest in a series of inward investors to announce its long-term commitment to Telford, following the likes of Hortonwood West neighbour Rosewood Pet Products

Ltd and automotive aluminium-castings supplier Magna Cosma. Recent figures highlight the positive trend, with the borough attracting £114 million in foreign direct investment in 2016/17 - a seven-fold increase on the previous year.

Shaun Davies, leader of Telford & Wrekin Council and ambassador for Enterprise Telford, the area's inward investment and business support service, said: "It's brilliant to see Craemer now, subject to planning permission, wanting to build on its success and committing to a long-term future in Telford."

"This investment would create many new jobs and support the region's status as a manufacturing centre of excellence. It's yet another very clear sign of the strength of business confidence in Telford and what it has to offer."

Karl Tupling, general manager for the Midlands for the Homes and Communities Agency, added: "The Telford Land Deal is giving Telford & Wrekin Council the opportunity to take responsibility for the marketing and disposal of remaining HCA land holdings."

"It's fantastic to see this latest announcement from Craemer Holdings, which is one of a series of investments helping to secure jobs in Telford."

"This in turn means increased demand for new homes and the HCA is also working closely with Telford & Wrekin Council to develop significant housing in the town."



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Lee Morgan and his father Steven have invested more than £500,000 in the Shrewsbury centre

What a cool idea

By Carl Jones

If it's good enough for football superstar Cristiano Ronaldo, screen legend Hugh Jackman, and a host of other sports and entertainment A-listers, then it's certainly good enough for me.

That was my train of thought, as I stepped into a minus 90C 'Cryozone' wearing nothing but a pair of shorts, shoes and socks and thermal coverings for my mouth, fingers and ears.

Four minutes later, emerging from the chamber with icicles on my eyebrows and tingles across my neck and shoulders, I felt invigorated, intrigued, wide-eyed, and eager to find out more.

Cryozone Health is the brainchild of award-winning Shropshire racing driver Lee Morgan, and his builder father Steven – and is unlike any other new business venture the county has seen.

Based on the Battlefield Enterprise Park in Shrewsbury, it offers the only publicly available cryotherapy facilities of their kind in the Midlands, and one of just a handful in the UK.

It's the kind of technology which has previously been reserved for the rich and famous . . . but is now right here on our doorstep.

Steven and Lee have invested more than £500,000 of their family's savings into the business, and after a three-month fitting out project, their doors have now opened.

So what exactly is cryotherapy, and how does it work? Before stripping down and taking the plunge, that's what I wanted to know.

The pair explained that it's the practice of using extreme cold – in my case the



The Cryozone which drops to temperatures around -90C

temperature gauge read minus 90C – to stimulate benefits in the body and mind.

"A quick session of just three minutes in our hi-tech cryochamber can enhance recovery times, burn calories, naturally relieve pain and boost energy levels," they said.

The business has been borne out of tragedy. Lee, 28, from Leegomery in Telford, was competing in a Superkart Championship

in Germany in 2008 when he was involved in a massive pile-up. His pelvis was broken in three places, and several ribs were also smashed, resulting in him literally having to be bolted back together.

And it was during the lengthy recovery period that Lee and his father began researching a range of alternative therapies – including cryotherapy.

Lee is now back to successfully driving Formula 3 racing cars, and has a bulging trophy cabinet at the Cryozone centre to prove it.

He said: "Having seen the beneficial results first hand, my father and I have created this centre, which we believe is the only one of its kind outside of London.

"Besides the building itself and bespoke facilities created here at Longbow Close, we have invested in a £120,000 state-of-the-art cryotherapy machine which provides the temperature-controlled environment for treatment."

Steven added: "We were looking at various places around the area as a venue, including Chester, but when we found this site in Shrewsbury, we thought it was just perfect.

"We now hope that people are fascinated enough to come and see exactly what cryotherapy treatment using sub-zero temperatures can do."

The business isn't just about the cryo chamber, though. There's also a LipoFreeze room tackling stubborn fat without the use of any invasive treatment. It uses a space-age looking piece of kit developed at Harvard University.

The mind can play strange tricks, but as I stepped out of the building after my four-minute flirtation with the cryo chamber, I swear my notoriously tight neck and shoulder muscles felt that bit more relaxed.

It was certainly enough for me to be considering a return visit some time very soon . . .

In this issue's spotlight on a firm whose trading tentacles stretch far beyond the county borders, we meet SARAH HOLMES. The woman behind the UK's last teddy bear factory certainly has...

THE RIGHT STUFF



Not just teddy bears – Digby the Dog is one of the popular products created by Merrythought of Ironbridge

By Chris Austin

Most factory storage rooms are dreary, packed full of the dull and dour. But things are slightly different at Merrythought.

Here there are rolls of fluffy mohair and clouds of

stuffing, as sumptuous fabrics and materials line up ready to bring the most charming teddy bears to life.

No wonder current director Sarah Holmes enjoyed playing here as a child. But at the heart of Shropshire's industrial heritage in Ironbridge, life is not all soft and fluffy. ▶



Fourth-generation family business – Sarah Holmes pictured with a giant Merrythought bear, in Ironbridge

◀ As Britain's last remaining teddy bear factory, it can't afford to be. And Sarah is more aware than anyone of the hard work and challenges faced with taking Merrythought from traditional English favourite to a more globally recognised brand.

Sarah and her sisters hadn't necessarily expected to take on the responsibility of this unique, fourth-generation family business, but when their father Oliver passed away from cancer in 2011, everything changed. All three siblings are now involved at some level, with Sarah at the helm overseeing the day to day operations.

"My father Oliver had some huge challenges and suffered from a lot of stress at times. He didn't want to put that pressure onto us. He very much wanted us to make our own choices about what career we wanted," Sarah explains.

"But when he was given his diagnosis I had to make a decision and at that point I decided I wanted to make a go of it. Hannah decided to take a six-month sabbatical from her job in commercial property but once she got into it she could see the likelihood of going back to London was pretty slim."

Sarah admits that if they hadn't taken the decision to take over the running of the business its future would have been very uncertain, and the historic name of Merrythought would probably have closed, with 20 workers losing their jobs and the historic brand consigned to history.

But while the challenge was daunting, she had big plans for Merrythought as she looked at building on its unique heritage to create a highly successful business on a



Production of the popular cuddly bears being filmed for a report by CNN

national and global scale. "The business was very stagnant and sales were gradually going downwards. It sounds harsh but my father was very hands-on and there was no real structure to it, so no middle management existed who could run it in his absence. It was a proper owner-run business."

Unfortunately Sarah and her sisters faced an added challenge in that their father was too ill to hand over formally before he died so they had to work out how to turn Merrythought around on their own.

"This is a traditional business making

a classic English teddy bear. How things were done had not really changed in two generations. It was one thing to know that things needed to change, but another entirely to implement these changes. That has been one of the real challenges for us in the last seven years."

It wasn't long before the sisters were starting to see a way forward. A key turning point was winning the contract to be an official licensee for the London Olympics in 2012 producing a collection of bears each embroidered with the official logo on their paw.



Each bear is lovingly crafted



Production of the Merrythought bears has changed a lot since its beginnings in 1930

"The company had become somewhat 'inward' looking and no one was driving it forwards. We realised that with just some energy and proactive effort, a huge amount could be achieved.

"So rather than try to implement drastic change, we initially just sought to maximise the resources and assets it already had, and capitalising a little more on the immediate opportunities that were available – the 'easy wins'.

"This included re-approaching former customers, tweaking our designs and streamlining our suppliers. One of our proudest early achievements was being awarded the contract to be an official licensee for the 2012 London Olympic Games."

At the time the company was making 12,000 bears, but needed to produce 20,000 more in 18 months for the games.

"We quickly realised we were trying to build that capacity on a structure that wasn't particularly efficient," says Sarah.

"We are definitely still a long way off where I want to be, but we have made the business more streamlined and improved capacity without taking on any more staff. And we have a team that are getting used to the idea that is not sustainable to carry on doing things the way we have always done them."

Turnover has doubled since 2009 but Sarah has no intention of stopping there. She wants to increase capacity by 50% over the next three to five years.

Twenty per cent of this is intended to be achieved by improving systems and efficiency with the rest from development of staff and recruitment. The fact that one of the company's bears stars in *Goodbye Christopher Robin* – in cinemas September – should help spread the word far and wide.

“ Prince George is said to have a bear and the company also collaborated with Highgrove on a limited edition Harry bear. ”

The Olympics also prompted another change for the company – Merrythought now specialises in bespoke products for luxury brands, retailers and corporate gifts.

They supply the official Fortnum & Mason bear and have also created bears for Harrods, Burberry and Danbury Mint. It has also built on its royal connections. Prince George is said to have a bear and the company also collaborated with

Highgrove on a limited edition Harry bear.

Spreading its reach further and in the luxury sector has also seen Merrythought gain an A-list following with One Direction's Liam Payne and girlfriend Cheryl recently ordering a personalised Teddy bear for their newborn son, aptly named Bear.

While celebrities are big fans Sarah also has her sights set further afield with exports the next challenge. About a third of Merrythought bears are sold to a pan - its Cheeky Bear is particularly popular in this part of the world.

"It is hard to know what Brexit will look like for a small business like us, but I think it is likely to motivate us to look more outward and focus on exports more."

Sarah is certainly ambitious for the future of this family business but she also recognises that is dependent on the whole team who have brought them this far.

"I am very lucky to have a loyal workforce."

"We have three mothers and daughters who work for us. Merrythought has been as much a part of their family as mine and very key to the community in Ironbridge."

"We do really appreciate being here and being part of the tourist landscape."

"Other plans for the future include updating the shop and the general visitor experience." ▶



Every child's dream – a line-up of grand looking giant bears outside the Ironbridge site



Harry, one of the Highgrove bears



Take your miniature bear with you in the form of a keychain



Made in Britain – luxurious materials and the finest craftsmanship

Those connections to family and community certainly also motivate Sarah and her sisters to help build a business they can hand on to the next generation.

“The amount of running around Hannah and I had to do trying to find out so many day-to-day things when Dad died is something we are very aware of. We need to make sure the business is run in a way that if something happened to one of us tomorrow it is sustainable.”

Looking to the immediate future the firm has also unveiled its newest collection.

For the first time in more than three decades, the new range for 2017 contains a cat and dog, expanding the teddy bear company’s historic portfolio.

Coco the Cat is made from dense black mohair contrasted with white mohair inner ears, tummy and upper paws. Black cotton whiskers and claws complete his adorable look. Digby the Dog’s expression has already won the hearts of Merrythought’s staff. He is carefully crafted from sandy-gold

and multi-tonal grey mohair, and features adorable lop-sided ears, along with a little upturned tail.

Merrythought also introduces a brand new teddy bear to the family – Henley.

Super-soft blonde mohair has been carefully worked with pinky beige wool felt to create this smiley bear, whose colours are complemented by an opulent burgundy bow.

As well as a host of new sizes for Merrythought’s classic London Gold and London Curly Gold teddy bear, the company has given the ever-popular Oxford bear a new look. Now crafted from soft, rich copper-gold mohair, he features sandy-beige wool felt paws and a navy blue satin bow.

“This collection highlights the very best that Merrythought has to offer – the most luxurious materials, the finest craftsmanship and characterful soft toys made completely in Britain,” explains Sarah.

“A Merrythought is not just a teddy bear, but a piece of British heritage.”



Sara Ridgway designs the stuffed toys



Collectable – Royal Baby Celebration Bear from 2015 with box



Coco the Cat is made from dense black mohair with touches of white mohair

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The workforce of 150 is expected to grow by 10% by the end of 2017



Continual investment plays a large part in Muller Holdings' success

Commemorating 90 precise years

By Chris Austin

Cleobury Mortimer's largest employer has come a long way since relocating from London during the Second World War to escape air strikes during the Blitz.

Muller Holdings, one of the UK's leading sub contract machinists, is celebrating its 90th birthday in style after securing a string of new contracts and creating 15 jobs.

The company, which also has sites in Redditch, South Wales and Wednesbury, has landed an additional £500,000 of sales to mark its big anniversary, including work for automotive, smart gas meters and producing parts for the increasingly famous 'Griplit' building product.

“Whilst we are very proud of our history, the focus now is on the next nine decades”

Muller has withstood a number of recessions over the last nine decades and was a key supplier to the Second World War effort, where it relocated from London to Shropshire.

Today, it specialises in CNC milling, turning, multi-spindle and CNC/Conventional escomatic manufacturing services, with its components ending up in the best selling cars in the world, in dental products and appliances that keep homes and factories warm.

“Ninety years of manufacturing is some achievement and we have a colourful



Stephen Lock, Adam Cunningham and Paul Bethell from Muller Holdings

history, from starting life owned by the Swiss and supplying the Ministry of Defence, to becoming Cleobury Mortimer's largest employer and forging an exciting joint venture in India,” explained Paul Bethell, managing director and one of the key people behind the management buyout in 1993.

“Our business has been based on technical excellence and providing precision machining solutions, and these two attributes have remained constant despite the changing economic and industrial picture.”

He added: “Whilst we are very proud of our history, the focus now is on the next nine decades and the first half of 2017 has been very good for all of our four sites in the UK.

“Turnover has increased across our key markets and our pipeline of enquiries has definitely received a boost from the drop in the price of Sterling.

“Our workforce stands at 150, but we expect this to grow by about 10% between now and the end of the year.

“These positions will be aimed at experienced manufacturing professionals and there is the possibility of employing more apprentices.”

Following the end of the Second World War, Muller Holdings became a significant presence in high volume turned parts for the automotive, defence and medical sectors, using a range of multi-spindle automatics, rotary transfer machines and fixed head escomatics for miniature turned parts supply.

By the early 1980s, the first investments in CNC lathes and machining centres were made and 10 years later this was followed by the introduction of multi-axis lathes with power tooling and magazine barfeeds...this gave it the opportunity to offer complicated machining at competitive rates.

Over the course of the next 20 years, a number of strategic acquisitions were made, setting up dedicated facilities in the Black Country, Redditch, Llandovery in South Wales and a joint venture in Haryana in India.

“The last two years have seen more than £850,000 of investment in new machinery, a sort of early birthday present to ourselves,” says Adam Cunningham, director at Muller Redditch.

“As part of this, we have increased our escomatic and multi-spindle capacity by 10% and we will shortly be installing high-speed visual inspection equipment to ensure we offer world class quality to our customers.

“This is designed to give us the necessary capacity and competitive advantage to go after our three-year plan to be at £16 million by 2020.”

Muller Holdings is part of the Midlands Assembly Network, a nine-strong group of sub-contract manufacturers who work together to win orders and share best practice and resource.

The collective, which enjoys more than £70 million sales and employs over 750 people, can offer every engineering discipline imaginable, including automation and control systems, casting, fabrication, forging, plastic injection moulding, PCB development and high volume pressings.



Muller Holdings is part of the Midlands Assembly Network, a group of sub-contract manufacturers



The last two years have seen more than £850,000 of investment in new machinery

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More than 700 people filled the marquee at one of Shropshire's premier networking events



Ready for play at Wrekin College

Pure Telecom Shropshire County Cricket Challenge

It's become established as Shropshire's largest business networking event – and the 2017 county cricket challenge at Wrekin College has been hailed as the most successful yet.

Pure Telecom of Shrewsbury has signed a three-year deal to back the event, which this year attracted more than 700 people.

Managing director Matt Sandford said: "This amazing event, which over the last decade has become one of the most significant days in the Shropshire business calendar, attracts people from throughout the Midlands.

"We were delighted with the way the day went this year – it was hugely successful and provided a vital networking and social platform for regional businesses.

"The cricket game, now known as the Pure Telecom Shropshire County Cricket Challenge, attracts international world-class players to face Shropshire and has helped to develop seven local players in recent years to win first class contracts."

It is also an important fundraiser, having raised more than £250,000 for charity over the years, benefiting Shropshire County Cricket Club and several other local good causes.



Toby Shaw of Shropshire Cricket presents Matt Sandford with a signed shirt in recognition of the sponsorship deal



Debbie Feasey, Peter Morris, Rachel Wood, and Nick Jones at the county cricket challenge



Melonie Taylor pictured here with Jane Concannon



Fay Easton raises a glass at the popular Shropshire event



Nigel Jefferies, Robin Price, Paul Ellis, Jason Powell and Garth Marshall



Howzat for a partnership? Matt Sandford with Bryan Jones and Toby Shaw of Shropshire County Cricket Club



Tim Pook, Edward Davies, Alan Corfield, Matt Sandford and Carl Huntley



Dressed for the occasion



Property agent David Miller



Another six – on-field action from the cricket match at Wrekin College



The charity auction raised thousands of pounds



Some of the 700 attendees inside the marquee



Graham Mills



Grainne Walters, of Lanyon Bowdler



Fiona Mellor, Liz Lowe and Suzi Marshall



Some of the prizes which were up for grabs



Ben Ewels, Lee Pearson, Christopher Greenough and Richard Homden



Lindsay Pearson and Jennifer Hicks-Jones with Matt Sandford



Glasses on or off, it was a great spectacle for all to see



Teresa Boughey enjoying the cricket match



A fun time was had by all at the charity event held at Wrekin College, Wellington



Cricketers with Macmillan cancer fundraisers Jayney Davies, Martin James and Kate Thomas

Ticking all the right boxes

Law firm FBC Manby Bowdler has teamed up with a Shropshire IT specialist to launch a new app.

Software developer Six Ticks has developed the app to allow people to connect and engage with the law firm.

The app, available for iPhone and Android mobiles and tablets, will provide up to date legal news, the chance to book onto upcoming events, and access to FBC Manby Bowdler's 200-strong team through a comprehensive legal directory.

It also offers a single link to the firm's dedicated social platforms that operate across a wide range of sectors, and in-app facilities to pay bills and provide reviews.

The new app is the latest investment in digital technology by FBC Manby Bowdler to ensure easy and clear communication.

Last year it introduced The Link App as a new way for lawyers and clients to liaise securely about the progress of cases.

Managing partner Kim Carr said: "Digital technology is key to ensuring that our clients and other interested parties can stay in touch with us at the touch of a button, wherever they are.

"It will allow people to engage with us directly through easy signposting to our news and views and other social platforms, while our existing methods of communication remain in place for those who prefer a more traditional approach."



Six Ticks sales director Stephanie Henson (left) with FBC Manby Bowdler's marketing manager, Laura Jones

Six Ticks sales director Stephanie Henson said: "With more people using smartphones and tablets than traditional computers or laptops now, mobile apps are becoming ever more important to businesses from a wide and varied range of sectors."

Top venue invites you to dine in style

A private hire and wedding venue near Whitchurch will soon be able to offer the finest dining experiences in the region after bringing the catering in-house.

That's the prediction made by Phil and Susie Godsall, owners of Iscoyd Park, who have announced a series of new major developments which will be completed in the autumn in time to welcome company parties and other groups for pre-Christmas celebrations.

The statement of intent came after Iscoyd Park – which has won numerous national awards as a top-level wedding venue – announced it has recruited a head chef who has worked in several of the UK's most acclaimed restaurants.

"We will formally reveal his identity later in the autumn, but suffice it to say we can confirm that we have appointed our first head chef since bringing the catering in-house," said Mr Godsall.

"He is undoubtedly one of the most exciting young chefs in the country, and he will be heading a catering team which will operate out of brand new kitchens.

"This is a major step for us at Iscoyd Park.

"We are tremendously excited because we will now be able to offer private hire parties of almost all sizes an experience which we believe will be at least the equal of anywhere in the region.



Phil and Susie Godsall, who are cooking up exciting plans at Iscoyd Park

"An entirely flexible, bespoke nature of what we offer here at Iscoyd has appealed to bridal parties and we look forward to extending this approach through our catering."

Mr Godsall added that Iscoyd Park is still very much a family home which

parties will be able to use as their own, with accommodation for almost 30 on site.

"It is the ultimate blank canvas for clients to adapt as they see fit within a five-star environment with superb, locally produced food at hand whenever they want," he added.

'Fare' share please

Council officials are to seek an early meeting with the new operator of the West Midlands railway network to ensure Shropshire gets its fair share of a promised £1 billion investment.

West Midlands Trains Ltd – a joint venture between Dutch company Abellio and a panese duo East a pan Railway Company and Mitsui & Co – will take over the rights to the franchise for the West Midlands network from later this year.

This includes Shropshire's main railway line from Shrewsbury through Telford to Birmingham.

The new operator has pledged to invest £1 billion in the network, including new carriages and additional services to alleviate congestion of a variety of lines.

As part of their successful bid, West Midlands Trains have committed to:

- Additional Monday to Saturday hourly service from Telford to Shrewsbury, Wolverhampton and Birmingham starting December 2018
- New hourly Sunday service
- Smartcards for season tickets
- Free wifi on all trains



West Midlands Trains Ltd has pledged to invest £1 billion in the network, including new carriages and additional services to alleviate congestion of a variety of lines

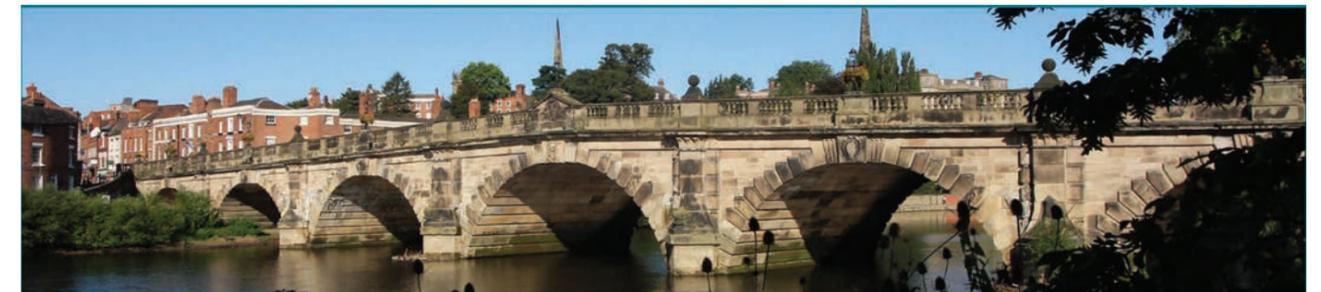
- Refurbished trains and possibly some new ones
 - Potential improvements to stations
- Councillor Angela McClements, Telford & Wrekin Council's cabinet member for Transport, said: "This is really excellent news for our transport infrastructure and I would like to welcome West Midlands Trains and congratulate them on their successful bid to win the franchise.

"I am delighted that it will mean additional train services to Telford's three stations as well as an enhanced Sunday

service. Myself and council officers met with West Midlands Trains Ltd before they submitted their bids and they had some very exciting plans for improving the stations and facilities across our borough.

"I will be seeking an early meeting with them to discuss how we can work together to further improve Telford's transport infrastructure.

"I will also be seeking their support in lobbying for electrification of the Shrewsbury to Wolverhampton line, which would bring significant benefits to Telford."



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FMB – material prices concern

One in three small builders say soaring material prices are squeezing their margins – and almost a quarter have had to pass these price increases onto consumers.

According to the Federation of Master Builders, construction SMEs have reported a range of material price increases since the depreciation of sterling following the EU referendum.

Small building firms were asked which materials have increased the

most and timber topped the list, followed by insulation, bricks, blocks, windows, plasterboard, boilers and radiators.

Brian Berry, chief executive of the FMB, said: "Material price increases have left builders under severe pressure.

"A third of builders report that these price increases are eating into their already razor-thin margins.

"This comes on top of increased wages and salaries stemming from long-term

construction skills shortages.

"Furthermore, one-in-10 builders say that they've actually made losses on projects due to material price increases – this is most likely to happen when a particular product or material jumps up in price mid-project when the builder has already quoted for the work.

"Perhaps unwisely, some builders are absorbing these extra costs as opposed to re-quoting for the project."

Smart idea to halt rise in ATM crime

Criminals who try to snatch cash from hole-in-the-wall machines might get more than they bargained for, thanks to a Shropshire company's innovative crime-fighting solution.

The Co-op has teamed-up with award-winning forensic technology company SmartWater to roll out its unique forensic fingerprint which can link criminals back to the scene of a crime.

In a first, the Telford company has adapted its dispersal technology to ensure that criminals and stolen cash from ATM's are marked with invisible gel which is almost impossible to remove.

With a reduction in ATM crime of more than 90% when the technology was piloted at over 300 locations in 2016, the technology is now being rolled out to all cash dispensers located at Co-op food stores UK-wide.

Designed by a former police officer and his scientist brother, the unique forensic signature at each ATM increases the risk to criminals of being tracked and traced by police following a theft, leading to conviction.

Invisible to the naked eye, an amount of gel the size of a speck of dust can provide the 'solution' for forensic investigators to undertake a successful analysis and help police with identification, with the forensic signature guaranteed to last five years.

Phil Cleary, chief executive and co-founder of SmartWater, said: "This technical development represents a serious upgrade in the security of ATM's as SmartWater products have helped convict hundreds of criminals world-wide and retains a 100% track record in court.

"Simply, the ATM's protected by SmartWater now represent too high a risk for criminals and the more professional will give them a wide berth".

Chris Whitfield, Co-op's director of retail



SmartWater technology is being rolled out to all cash dispensers at UK Co-op food stores



The SmartWater branding on an ATM machine, designed to deter would-be criminals

and logistics, said: "ATM crime impacts customers and communities – it can also have a disproportionate impact on rural police force areas where cash dispensers are more of a lifeline for residents and the local economy.

"At the forefront of combating ATM crime this proven technology utilises the latest ATM security capabilities and innovations to cut crime, providing a safer and secure way to deliver a key and convenient service in local communities."

Both sides of living wage

The Government's decision to begin increasing the living wage is both a challenge and an opportunity for SMEs in Shropshire, it has been claimed.

The UK National Living Wage currently stands at £7.50 for workers aged 25 and over, and £7.05 for those aged 21 to 24.

"Raising the living wage will mean SMEs have more costs, which may stunt company growth while the economy re-stabilises," says Lee Murphy, owner of accountancy software firm Pandle.

"However, hope is at hand – having more money in the pockets of consumers means increased spending to pay off personal debts.

"This can be hard to commit to though, as wages have declined relative to past years. Modifying the living wage could be a chance for the Bank of England to realign the economic landscape."

In advance of this year's Autumn Budget, there are hopes of some form of assistance package for new small businesses who may not be used to this changing environment.

Small businesses will need to work out exactly which employees are eligible, educate themselves on what these changes mean and update the company's payroll and policies.

Fast food chain McDonalds is an example of the tensions which currently exist around wage issues – workers at two of its restaurants have backed a call for industrial action.

The Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union said staff were demanding at least £10 per hour and more secure working hours, alongside the recognition of the right to form a trade union.

The union said: "Workers have found themselves living on low wages with no guarantee of hours.

"This has been viewed by some as punishment for joining a union, and has seen employees struggle to meet their rent payments.

"Some workers have even lost their homes."

Firm changes its location in order to grow

A family firm which manufactures vacuum lifting equipment, parts and components has chosen to relocate to Shrewsbury's Vanguard Park to expand and grow the business.

Danvac, which makes bespoke and off the shelf vacuum units, bought the last remaining unit of the Plot 19 development at the trade park developed by Morris Properties.

The materials handling company, which works with the glass, metal, wood and concrete industries, has been based at Morris's Centurion Park for four years. It has now moved to the new 2,070 sq ft premises in August after completing an extensive fit-out.

Director Dan Wheeler said: "We have doubled the number of employees in the last six years and expect to create more jobs in early 2018.

"We have been tenants of Morris Properties for four years and always found them easy to deal with; this move seemed the natural progression."

The company is to extend its range of vacuum pads and suction cups for the automation industry, such as robot stackers and pick and place machines, and will increase its range of bespoke vacuum lifters for specialised applications.

Vanguard Park's Plot 19 development has 10 high specification units totalling about 25,000 sq ft and all have now been sold.

Space to think and do in county town

A group of new businesses in Shrewsbury joined together to host an open evening, at which they introduced themselves, showcased their creative skills and services, and offered tours of their new premises.

Organised by commercial and fine art photographer Mark Anderson, who has moved to the area from London, the 'New Business Showcase' evening saw invited guests enjoy fizz and canapés at the

Rentaspace building, off Battlefield Road.

Businesses on site include Rentaspace, Climbing the Walls, Salop Computer Centre, ulie Nicholas Florist, The Bike Shop, d ne Cooke Designs, Battlefield Carpets, Art Illusions and Motiv8 Me.

Mark said he was delighted with the turnout – not only for himself, but also for the other wide-ranging firms at Rentaspace.



The New Business Showcase at Rentaspace

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FSB SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES IN SHROPSHIRE

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.

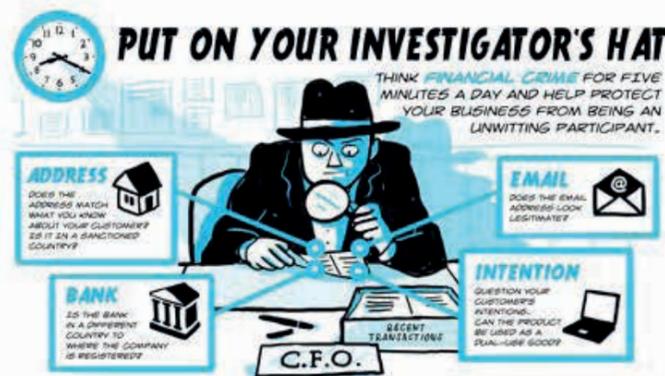
As well as this, a number of organisations have been set up in partnership with banks including Barclays to combat money laundering and tackle the use of the financial system for terrorist financing and other crimes. These include the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and Joint Money Laundering Intelligence 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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In this issue's Big Interview we meet the owners of a respected timber yard. **GRAHAM & PAT REEVES** are the couple behind one of Shropshire's greatest acts of fate.

WOOD YOU BELIEVE IT?



By Henry Carpenter

To find a Shropshire success story created by accident, you could do worse than head to New Home Farm, a quiet rural backwater just north of Wem.

Here you will find the timber yard of Graham and Pat

Reeves, the same site from which they have operated their business, GS and PA Reeves, for the last 37 years. It is now one of the region's most successful timber merchants turning over in excess of £4.5 million, but turn the clock back nearly four decades and all of Graham and Pat's energies were concentrated solely on their cattle herd. ▶



Old-fashioned values – who needs a paperless office? Graham Reeves in the site office.

◀ “Our current business started at Uttoxeter cattle market when I needed some railway sleepers for a silage pit,” explains Graham.

“At the market I found someone who sold them for a decent price, but only in a certain quantity, more than I needed. We only needed 180 sleepers and so there was a surplus of about 40. I put an advert in the Shropshire Star and managed to shift them really quickly.

“This got me thinking, and so I bought another load and again, I sold these really easily. That is how it started.”

Sleepers – which are enormously popular for all sorts of building uses – swiftly let to telegraph poles, crash barriers, fencing, gate posts, fencing . . . in fact, pretty much all timber products used for buildings and landscapes can be found at the New Home Farm.

There are enormous piles of firewood in various stores – both kiln dried and barn stored – as well as about 500 tonnes of wood pellets for boilers for the more environmentally conscious. “Wood pellets are our latest product – we probably shift about 1,000 tonnes a year,” says Graham.

Business, it seems, is brisk. In fact it gets brisker by the year with Graham confirming that there is a year-on-year increase in turnover. Business is done both at the yard – several trailers come and go each day – and via the small fleet of trucks which deliver within a 100-mile radius.

There seem to be several reasons why the firm enjoys so much success but if there is a basic theme, it is that they have instilled good, old-fashioned values throughout all



Graham and Pat Reeves keep prices low and offer no further discounts. It keeps everyone happy – including a very loyal client base.

they do. Take how hard they have worked, for instance. It was only 10 years ago that Graham and Pat decided to leave cattle farming to others (they have kept the 300 acres of land but now tenant it out).

“For the last 37 years we have worked from 6 in the morning to 7 in the evening, six days a week,” explains Pat. “We work on Sundays as well, and we even end up coming in on Boxing Day and New Year’s Day. Operating the two businesses was very, very hard and so it was a relief to give up the cattle.

“Over the years we have built up a pretty accurate understanding of how

builders and farmers operate, and their timings. That is why the early evening is such a busy time for us, as we are often the first port of call for builders after they’ve finished work so they have their materials for the following day – 5pm is rush hour here!”

The impression is also that the couple inspire real loyalty, both with their workers and also clients.

They may not employ many members of staff – there are five full-time staff, and one part-time, excluding Graham, Pat and son Will who joined the business a couple of years ago – but the sense is that there is a low staff turnover, a real two-way loyalty between employer and worker.

“The workers are given a full cooked breakfast every morning,” says Pat. “They are all from the local area and seem to be happy with the way we do things.”

They have clearly built up a strong customer base in the local farming and building community.

“We keep our prices very low but we never offer any further discount,” says Pat. “You only need a couple of customers in the pub discussing what they bought, with one having paid more than the other, and your reputation will get questioned. And that’s very important as word of mouth is the best advertising. That’s why we keep it simple – everyone knows where they stand with us.”

To some, the company office might seem incredibly outdated and disorganised. There are thick files of invoices packed in bulldog clips along the wall, the shelves are packed with well-marked box files and there is a display area housing a mass of OS maps.

But there is method here and it all runs like clockwork. From a glance, Pat can tell that 4,295 invoices have been sent out this year – already 400 more than last year’s total – and they are on order book 65. Everything is organised neatly and

methodically. But why the maps when you can use satnav?

“Satnav is absolutely useless in some areas,” explains Graham. “In parts of Mid Wales, for instance, it will only get you to within three miles of where the driver needs to be. Much better to use maps which are so much more precise.”

You can’t argue with that. ▶



Timber products used for buildings and landscapes found at the farm



Mapped out – sometimes satnav just doesn’t quite cut it



Graham sat behind the wheel of one of the trucks which deliver within a 100-mile radius

Popular – wood pellets for boilers

◀ The Reeves family business is now well established but it also feels like the future is bright, not least because the family legacy looks set to continue with son Will lined up to take over the business when his parents eventually retire.

"Will joined us two years ago having worked as a commercial diver in various spots around the world, both in the oil industry and also salvage," says Pat.

"We never put any pressure on him to work here, but I must say it is nice having him back. Neither Graham or I bother with computers but Will seems comfortable with

technology which is probably no bad thing!"

The time Graham and Pat spent as cattle farmers has served the timber business well. They have an empathy with farmers and first-hand knowledge of what farmers need, and when.

In general, this tends to be of a positive nature but not in 2001, the year of the last big foot and mouth crisis which devastated the farming community.

It was a bumper year for the sale of sleepers, and Graham and Pat sold 110,000 of them, but they were for the most tragic of purposes: to fuel the fires to dispose of the

livestock, particularly in Devon and the south west. This was, at best, a bittersweet time for Graham and Pat.

Now though is the time that farmers are looking ahead to winter, with many turning their attention to building and renovating sheds for their cattle.

And what of plans for the future?

"We haven't got any plans to expand but you never know what's round the corner," agree Pat and Graham, a couple who have seized their opportunities wisely and with a much more modern and forward-thinking attitude than their office might suggest.

New hope for sector

A shift in construction contracts from London to the Midlands will help support a sector experiencing uncertainty amid a prolonged Brexit negotiation in the region.

That's the view of Gareth Emberton, chairman of the Shropshire Constructing Excellence group and managing director of Crown Group Holdings, based at Upton Magna.

He was responding to a new report which shows major regeneration and infrastructure project work is moving from the capital to the rest of the UK.

Analysts for Barbour ABI and the Construction Products Association says investment in housebuilding, infrastructure and commercial property in Scotland and the West Midlands had the highest growth.

The total value of contracts awarded in London was £13.1 billion last year, down 14.6% on 2015.

Gareth's commercial landscaping company works with construction giants including Bowmer & Kirkland and Galliford Try, on projects across the UK.

"There's no doubt that construction firms are facing numerous challenges currently - such as finding enough people with the right



Gareth Emberton, managing director of Crown Group

skills and the fact that may be reliant on workers from overseas.

"But one of the biggest issues they may face in the coming months is the effect uncertainty over Brexit will have on decision making in terms of big project development.

"We saw the slowdown ahead of the referendum and when the economy slows, the construction sector is one of the first hit."

However, he feels the shift to

investment in the central part of the country is a good sign.

"I think it isn't just down to HS2, but could also be as a result of the Government's drive to grow the Midlands economy through the Midlands Engine and the £392 million it has invested in the region to do just that."

Crown Group has doubled in size in the last year and now employs more than 60 people across the country.

Saving £100,000



Adrian Casey, owner of Unique Copiers

A Telford company has helped save a local law firm more than £100,000 on their photocopying.

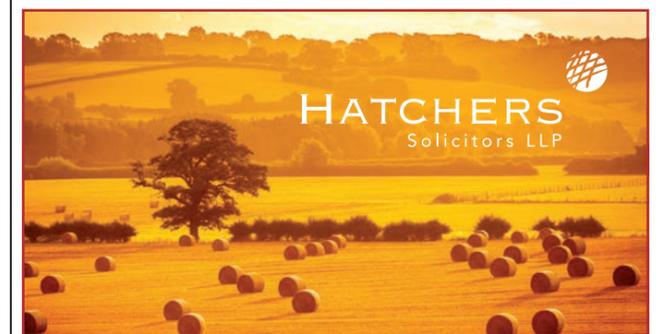
Unique Copiers, in St Georges, will supply, fit and install around 30 photocopy and print machines across the six offices of Lanyon Bowdler.

The work, across the sites in Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Oswestry, Telford, Bromyard and Hereford, is part of a £300,000 five-year contract.

Owner of Unique Copiers, Adrian Casey, said: "A large part of our business is done in Shropshire and it is always good to be able to work with a local company.

"We worked hard to be able to offer them the best deal possible and we are pleased with the savings we have found. We will be providing equipment, maintenance and repair.

"This will also make a big difference to both their business and the environment."



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Cliff edge or glide path?



As changes in the way that people think of retirement become more widespread, will you take time out to travel and then return to work?

The age-old practice of retiring at 65 is being supplanted by a lifestyle choice of phased retirement that brings a host of new financial considerations.

Will retiring from your full-time job mark the end of your career? Or will you travel the world as a 'grey gapper', before returning energised and refreshed for a fulfilling new phase of work well into your 70s? That's the choice some of those in their 50s and early 60s now have.

The practice of an employee being pensioned off from full-time work and disappearing from the workplace is fast being replaced by phased retirement. Instead of working full-time until they leave on a full pension, older workers are scaling back their hours or taking on less demanding roles, thus extending their working lives for a decade or more. Undeniably, it is also a chance to break with decades of workplace routine.

All this reflects a huge generational shift in the face of factors such as the demise of the job for life, rising life expectancy and increases to the State Pension age. It's also spurred by more enlightened organisational attitudes to job sharing and other forms of



flexible working. There are also legislative changes which give us access to our pensions earlier.

Self-employment, which has been enjoying an inexorable rise, is often the neatest way to step off the corporate treadmill while still earning an income (source – ons.gov.uk July, 2016). Plus, for some, there may be a yearning for greater workplace fulfilment, perhaps realising their dream to open an artisan bakery, buy a small vineyard in the South of France, or take up a voluntary role helping a local charity.

So, whereas previous generations had too little choice about how or when to retire, we now find ourselves beset by a host of consequential decisions. Do we 'downshift', taking on less responsibility, or do we stay in post but simply go part-time? When is the best time to take our pension; and do we take it all, or just part of it? Do we dip into our ISA savings first?

"Many people like the idea of working but not full-time, so the cliff face is being replaced by a glide path," says Ian Price, divisional director at St. James's Place. "This brings tricky decisions, such as whether to pay off the mortgage or help the children get on the property ladder, and when to start taking pensions. Financial advice on retirement planning is essential."

To receive a complimentary guide covering Wealth Management, Retirement Planning or Inheritance Tax Planning, produced by St. James's Place Wealth Management, contact Nick Jones on 01743 240968, by email nick.jones@sjpg.co.uk or visit www.njwealthplanning.co.uk

- Nick Jones is the Principal of Nick Jones Wealth Planning in Shrewsbury, a Senior Partner Practice of St. James's Place Wealth Management. The Senior 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 'St. James's Place Partnership' and the titles 'Partner' and 'Partner Practice' are marketing terms used to describe St. James's Place representatives.

Pair are specialists in matrimonial law

Hannah Lowe and Alex Hiscutt have joined the matrimonial law department at law firm Terry Jones Solicitors.

They provide advice on areas such as asset separation upon a relationship breakdown, and arrangements for children when parents cannot agree.

Alex joined the department after completing her training with the firm and qualifying as a solicitor.

She previously worked mainly in conveyancing, giving her good understanding of remortgages, transfer of equity and buying and selling property. Alex is a keen runner who completed a 5km Race for Life and 5km 'Pretty Muddy' race to raise money for Cancer Research with a team of staff from the firm.

Hannah is currently a trainee solicitor, who is due to qualify in January next year. She has completed her Legal Practice Course, which she was studying part-time with the University of Law, alongside her training with Terry Jones Solicitors, which has offices in Shrewsbury, Telford,



Hannah Lowe, left, and Alex Hiscutt

Newport and Bridgnorth. Hannah has experienced a varied workload during her training from domestic violence, divorce, financial matters and children.

Sue Fitzmaurice, director and head of the family department said: "I am delighted that Alex and Hannah have joined the department; they are both totally committed to providing the best possible service to the public and I look forward to seeing them both progress within the firm."



The 5.2 acre roadside site on the outskirts of Shrewsbury

Dealership site?

Another car dealership could be bolstering its presence on the outskirts of Shrewsbury, as a new 5.2 acre prime roadside site has gone on the market in Battlefield.

Just weeks after it was announced that Evans Halshaw is coming to the area, the new site which fronts directly onto the roundabout where the A49 and A53 meet – described as ideal for a motor dealership – is up for sale.

James Evans, of Halls, which is handling the sale, said: "Battlefield is becoming home for many big names who can rent, buy or build to service the needs of the high level of local and visiting shoppers. "Obtaining this site will be a massive coup for the company that finally gets it. This is a very busy area of Shrewsbury in a prime location."

Mr Evans said he believed the site would best suit typical roadside uses such as the car trade and associated businesses.

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Graham Davies from Martin-Kaye, Alison Yeomans and Tracy Hinton from Dechra



David Wauchope from McPhillips Ltd, Neil Phillips from Phillips Chartered Accountants and Sherrel Fikeis from Bridge House Day Care Centre

Martin-Kaye Solicitors' Employment Seminar

The team from Martin-Kaye Solicitors held their latest 'Top Ten Employment Blunders' seminar at their offices in Euston Way, Telford.

It was organised specifically to support HR managers and managing directors.

Employment law specialist John Mehtam, who led the presentation, said: "Our aim – as always with this kind of seminar – was to give our delegates an insight into the ever-changing UK employment legislation and share our experience of the most common pitfalls.

"We then share our advice to help businesses navigate through the increasingly-complicated minefield of law, to help them learn from other people's mistakes, and so avoid drawn-out negotiations and expensive errors."



Emma Palmer from Martin-Kaye and Chris Truman from Syspal



Lee Jakeman from Newport Town Council and Andrew Oranjuk from Martin-Kaye



George Heron from Martin-Kaye and John Showell from Product Approvals Ltd



Ingrid McMaster and Marvin Owen from MBO Safety Solutions with Jagdeep Kandola from Martin-Kaye



Satty Singh and Jay Khokhar from Active Staff Recruitment



Mandy Parkinson and Sian Parry from Wrekin Housing Trust



Tom Minshall from Minshall Construction and Clare Pitchford from Martin-Kaye



The team at Base Architects in Shrewsbury

Designs are of a grand scale

It's been a record-breaking year for the team at Base Architects in Shrewsbury.

The company is currently working on more than 170 projects covering Grand Design new builds, renovations, extensions, and urban and commercial developments across Shropshire, Cheshire and in other parts of the UK.

Last year was also a record-breaking period for the business, which employs 12 people at its head office in Roushill, completing projects worth with a contract value of circa £40 million.

Set up by managing director Carl Huntley 13 years ago, Base Architects has developed a niche for homes of architectural value in open countryside sites, thanks to a 100% success rate at planning stage.

On the back of recent growth, the practice has announced plans to open an office in Chester to serve Cheshire, Wales and the North West.

Carl said: "This year, we've seen significant growth at Base, both in terms of job creation and new commissions.

"What's interesting is the number of property remodelling projects and renovations we're being approached to design, with more and more people looking improve the property they own, rather than moving to a new premises or home.

"The demand for this type of development doesn't show any sign of slowing down, which may be down to a reluctance to move while uncertainty remains over the economy and Brexit.

"We're known as being 'Paragraph 55' specialists, which is the section in the national planning guidance which says you can build a new home in open countryside, as long as the design is exceptional and innovative – we have a 100% success rate for these types of homes."



The Base team transformed The Old Shop at Vennington near Shrewsbury



One of Base's Grand Designs recently completed near Diddlebury



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Feeling the push or pull?

By Ally Yates

Are you a Pusher or a Puller? Most of us are one or the other when it comes to trying to persuade and influence people.

Persuasion is not about "Getting other people to do what I ask." Unfortunately, this commonly held belief demonstrates a lack of understanding of both the scope of persuasion and the opportunity for using different influencing strategies. It also illustrates the lamentable fact that most of us are convinced by our own sense of rightness and that our ideas are the best.

Although academic research on influencing highlights as many as nine different styles, most of us fall into the Push or Pull category. Each style is behaviourally distinctive and each is appropriate for different situations.

Let's start with the **Push** style:

- I share my idea or opinion with you
- I tell you the reasons why it's a good idea and/or why I'm correct
- You agree and you move your position

Behaviourally speaking, Push style is characterised by: Proposing Content (suggesting an idea); Giving Information (providing the rationale); and Shutting Out (talking across others). The solution comes from the influencer and it's the influencer who does most of the talking.

The Push style is the most commonly used and yet it's only effective around 50% of the time. This may be because we are



Persuasion – Ally Yates talks about push and pull styles of influencing others

apologetic or aggressive pushers. Or we may be a misjudged Pusher, revealing our solution too early. In so doing, we underestimate the strength of resistance we will encounter.

There are, however, times when Push works well, for example in conditions where the influencer has positional authority, where you have the expertise, where the decision has already been made, where there's only one solution, when speed is important and you can enforce compliance.

Yet how often do you adopt a Push style when none of these conditions apply?

Take James for example – a middle manager in a multinational business. He needed to create a new direction for his team. He articulated a clear, coherent plan and instructed each of his team as to who would do what, and by when.

For him, the logic was clear, the detail was exemplary and he was in charge; the team was bound to agree. Push style was a no-brainer.

However, James had overlooked a fundamental question: How important was it that he gain everyone's commitment to the plan? If engagement is essential, then a Pull style is much more likely to work.

Pullers use three behaviours in particular:

- Seeking Proposals (e.g. How should we best do this?)
- Seeking Information (e.g. Who has the relevant experience?)
- the rare but highly prized skill of Building – extending or developing a proposal made by another person.

Building is not used as often as it should be, and unfortunately this is usually because the persuader is much more interested in his own ideas and therefore fails to harness the suggestions of others. If James had focused on engaging his team using the Pull style it would have looked more like the following:



1. James asks the team for their ideas
2. The team offers some options
3. James then asks questions to explore their suggestions
4. James builds on their suggestions
5. Together, James and the team agree a way forward.

Using this approach sees the team's level of commitment increase in line with their engagement.

The Pull style can also be effective when influencing upwards, when there's more than one option, where resistance is likely to be high, when there are no time pressures, where any movement is better than none, when encouraging collaboration and when coaching others to use their resources.

Yes, Pull might take a little longer and require greater listening skills, but the rewards outweigh the costs.

If you think back to the last time you tried to influence someone and were unsuccessful, the likelihood is that you opted for the wrong style or perhaps it was the right style executed poorly.

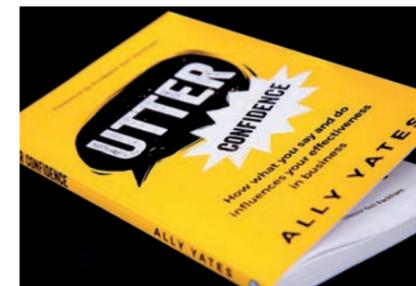
To be effective we need to be able to use both styles skilfully.

Push and Pull styles of influencing have nothing to do with tone. You can Push in a thoughtful, low-key way and you can Pull in an intense manner. What differentiates each style is the behaviours involved.

Give some thought as to which style to use and why.

When you're operating as a Pusher, be clear about your proposal, give your reasons and explain what's in it for the other party.

As a Puller, lead with questions, exercise your curiosity, believe that other people can have ideas that could be better than yours and work with those ideas, gaining engagement as you go.



Utter Confidence by Ally Yates



Push and pull styles suit different situations



If you think back to the last time you tried to influence someone and were unsuccessful, the likelihood is that you opted for the wrong style or perhaps it was the right style executed poorly

Ally Yates is author of 'Utter Confidence: How what you say and do influences your effectiveness in business' and an expert on behaviour analysis and the interactions that define us.

Toby's prestigious hat-trick



TSR partner Toby Shaw

Toby Shaw, a partner at chartered surveyors Towler Shaw Roberts, has completed a hat-trick of prestigious industry awards.

He has been named 'deal maker of the year' for Shropshire for the third successive year by Estates Gazette, the nationally recognised property publication covering all aspects of the commercial property market.

Mr Shaw has received the award for completing most deals within the county during the last 12 months.

TSR, which has offices in Shrewsbury, Telford and Wolverhampton, has also been recognised by Estates Gazette. The firm has been named as the most active agents in Shropshire.

Mr Shaw said: "We have consistently been recognised by Estates Gazette

over the last 10 years, which is extremely pleasing, and we are again very proud to come out top of the local firms.

"We've had an exceptional run and it really does highlight our consistency and the profile we continue to enjoy."

Mr Shaw, who formed TSR with d n Towler in 1991, added he was delighted to complete a hat-trick of top individual awards.

"It's always nice to receive accolades," he said.

"The local commercial property market remains strong and there is certainly cause for optimism when it comes to assessing the future.

"The main challenge currently is the volume of ready stock, but our team continues to work extremely hard to make deals happen."

Aiding war victims

An Oswestry businessman has launched the world's first coffee company to donate proceeds from its sales to bereaved armed forces children.

Nick Woodhead has formed One Shot Coffee Co, which pledges to donate 50p from every bag of coffee sold to Scotty's Little Soldiers.

Founded by war widow Nikki Scott in 2010, it supports children across the UK who have lost a parent while serving in the British Armed Forces.

The charity was set up in memory of Nikki's husband and father to her two children, Corporal Lee Scott, killed in Afghanistan in 2009.

Nick is involved with Airsoft Imports – promoting an energetic sport in which participants eliminate each other with plastic BBs via airsoft guns. The non-lethal shootout is often likened to paintball and has a cult following.

After learning about Scotty's Little Soldiers from a friend, he said he simply had to support the cause.

"Starting the coffee company is something that I'm proud of, and supporting Scotty's Little Soldiers is a big part of this.

"We decided that we'd give it a go and we feel there's a demand there for high quality coffee within the airsoft community. Hopefully people love our coffee and can rally around Scotty's Little Soldiers, knowing that by purchasing, they're helping children who have lost a parent in the Armed Forces."

One Shot Coffee Company promises to bring the best coffee beans and grinds to customers, so they can be alert throughout the working week and ready for airsoft matches at weekends.

The idea came to Nick after reading a log post online, after which he decided



Nick is involved with Airsoft Imports – an energetic sport in which participants eliminate each other with plastic BBs via airsoft guns



The new coffee company will donate proceeds from sales to bereaved armed forces children

he'd make the jump and start a business alongside his partner Tori Orritt and friend Todd Foulger.

Nick and his partner Tori have both friends and family members who have served.

Charity founder, Nikki Scott said: "We're overwhelmed when we hear the fantastic lengths fundraisers go to support our cause. The coffee company is a great idea and we're so grateful that the charity is involved in some way."



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Is your business ready for GDPR?



With more and more businesses and services operating across international borders, the growth of the digital economy and the ever-present threat of cyber-crime, it is inevitable that we need and important that we have consistent, strong and effective data protection laws to protect businesses, consumers and individuals.

That is why new regulations are coming into force from May next year, in the form of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). However, I worry that many businesses, especially small businesses, are unaware of the scale and potential impact of the GDPR.

The GDPR applies to data 'controllers' and data 'processors'. Data Controllers specify why personal data is processed and how it is used. Data Processors act on the controller's behalf. Data Controllers must ensure that Data Processors comply with the GDPR, in particular legal obligations such as maintaining records of personal data and related processing activities.

What's more, the GDPR applies to processing carried out by organisations operating within the EU and also those outside the EU that offer goods or services to EU customers.

I know that this all sounds as dull as ditch-water and seems an unnecessary distraction from getting on with running a business. However, data protection is an important issue for all responsible businesses and there is no escaping the fact that GDPR will come into effect from May 25 2018.

That gives business owners just nine months in which to ensure they comply with the provisions of the new regulations. Those that don't could face severe penalties, because GDPR makes provisions for fines of up to four percent of a non-compliant business's turnover, to a maximum of £20 million for larger companies.



General Data Protection Regulation comes in to force next May

Although GDPR is new legislation from the EU, the Government has confirmed that it will still be implemented in the UK. This is because The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport says that research shows "more than 80 per cent of people feel that they do not have complete control over their data online".

The GDPR will give individuals much more power over the way that organisations collect, process and utilise information about themselves. Therefore, any business that processes electronic, personal data must ensure that it is fully compliant with the new rules.

There are three things that I would advise business owners to do as a priority.

First, they should acquaint themselves with the legislation within GDPR – and how

it applies to them – by visiting the website of the Information Commissioner's Office (www.ico.org.uk).

Second, they should ensure that their internal processes provide the required protection to data and that they can demonstrate this to satisfy any inspection. Third, they should seek expert advice about the current state, on-going usage and future disposal of their IT equipment, to minimise the risk of data leakage.

Most important of all is that businesses act now to comply with GDPR requirements. That way they will be able to protect their data, their reputations and ultimately, their future.

● Ray Hickinbottom is the FSB Shropshire and regional chairman

Charitable ladies

Two members of staff at a Pontesbury pharmacy are celebrating 55 years of service between them . . . and thousands of pounds raised for charity.

Nicky Pearson joined Lunts Pharmacy when she was just 16, and has since completed a host of qualifications. And Jan McDermott, from Minsterley, has worked there 19 years – but been with the Lunts company for 31 years.

Between them the pair have also helped raise thousands of pounds for MacMillan, a charity close to their hearts.

Jan has suffered with breast cancer and lost her mum and husband to cancer. Nicky lost her mum to bowel and liver cancer too.



Jan McDermott and Nicky Pearson, both of Lunts Pharmacy

It's a five-star salon

A Much Wenlock beauty business has received a five-star rating in the latest Good Salon Guide.

Salon Ten received the top rating from the independent assessment team for its hair and beauty services.

Owner Nicky Macar said: "We are honoured to receive these top assessments, which are testament to the hard work of the entire team."



The team at Salon Ten

Ant adds China to life's great adventure

Adventurer Ant Eddies-Davies has China in his hands after being invited to develop a range of outdoor education courses for the Far Eastern powerhouse.

Ant, who runs Live the Adventure in Bridgnorth, has made his name running adventure travel trips in Nepal and Bhutan. Now he's being brought in by leisure operators in China to run rescue courses and adventure training at a host of centres around Shenzhen.

"This is really exciting news for Live the Adventure," Ant explained. "We have worked in Nepal and Bhutan for 25 years developing their travel and tourism potential and China want to get a piece of the action because they simply don't have an adventure travel industry at present."

"While most people talk about China exporting to the West, it's nice to know that I'm going in the opposite direction!"

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

Anonymous

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Shrewsbury's historic and iconic skyline is well known to the town's many thousands of visitors Seb Slater, executive director, Shrewsbury BID

Bold BID to promote vibrant town centre

Seb Slater, executive director of Shrewsbury BID, has now been in post for six months. We caught up with him to find out more about the work of the BID, and what the future might hold for Shrewsbury...

Q: What do you like most about living in Shrewsbury?

A: It's a beautiful place with such welcoming people and a fantastic mix of businesses in the town for leisure, shopping and relaxing - and workwise, I am settled into my role and really enjoying it.

From day one when I first visited here before moving to Shrewsbury, there was such a great independent spirit to the place and everyone I met - something that really appealed and set the place apart for me.

There's the Park Run - what's not to love about an invigorating jog around the Quarry? We have such a great food and drink offer in town.

Q: What exactly is Shrewsbury BID?

A: Shrewsbury Business Improvement District is a business-led partnership working to improve and promote Shrewsbury town centre as a vibrant town to live, work, invest or visit. It's the businesses themselves who helped us create our Business Plan and voted us in, so they can influence and impact how Shrewsbury town centre is managed and how it evolves. The BID area covers the town within the river loop, although I am passionate about including and working in collaboration with others in the wider geographic area. We're one of over 250 BIDs in the country which are now seen as



Kevin Lockwood promotes the new scheme with Aleks Vladimirov, partnership development manager at Shrewsbury BID

a vital part of creating healthy, successful town and city centres.

Q: How is Shrewsbury BID funded and managed?

A: Shrewsbury BID has an annual levy of over £300,000 mainly financed by a levy paid by BID members set at 1.5% rateable

value of business properties above a £10,000 rv threshold. The BID levy is paid each year by the occupiers of a property with funds collected by Shropshire Council. It is then transferred to Shrewsbury BID for use on the projects and services in Shrewsbury BID's Business Plan which was led and voted for by the businesses themselves.

Q: How do you involve your members in your work?

A: Good question, and something I see as absolutely integral and essential. We are the voice of our businesses and therefore the more influence and involvement they have with our work, the better. We have a voluntary board of directors from a range of business sectors who oversee and measure our progress and impact as well as project area working groups who work with the BID team developing ideas and projects.

Q: What has the BID achieved in Shrewsbury in its first three years?

A: We've run over 50 different projects, but to pick out a few highlights:

- Some inspirational marketing projects from the Christmas Snowglobe to attracting national journalists on press trips.
- Our Wayfinding initiative is really exciting and will start to be rolled out in the next year.
- Giving businesses a collective voice on car parking charges and introduced the £1 Sunday Car Parking with Shropshire Council.
- Handling and evolving the Safety Partnerships like Shop Watch and Pub Watch and winning a national award for this.
- Supporting business on issues that matter to them and to the health of the town such as retaining the Quarry Pool.
- Setting up the Big Town Plan with Shropshire Council and Shrewsbury Town Council.

“We need to attract investment into the town which is why the Big Town Plan is so important to our future”

Q: What do you see as the biggest opportunities facing Shrewsbury at the moment?

A: I think the future for Shrewsbury is very bright. There is real drive and ambition from the business community to develop our town into a distinctive and must-visit destination, making the most of our historic heritage, beautiful location and daytime and night time offer.

The huge growth in online has been challenging to all high streets and I believe the BID has a role in nurturing a more experiential town centre - helping to create a place where people really want to spend their time and money.

To unlock our true potential we need to attract investment into the town which is why the Big Town Plan is so important to our future. It will ensure Shrewsbury develops in a way that is complimentary of, and sensitive to, the place that it is today. And that the identity of Shrewsbury - the place in which our businesses and residents trade and live, and visitors spend their precious free time - is curated and managed to ensure that growth continues.

- To find out more about the work of the BID, please visit www.shrewsbury.bid



The huge growth in online has been challenging to all high streets and it is believed that the BID has a role in nurturing a more experiential town centre

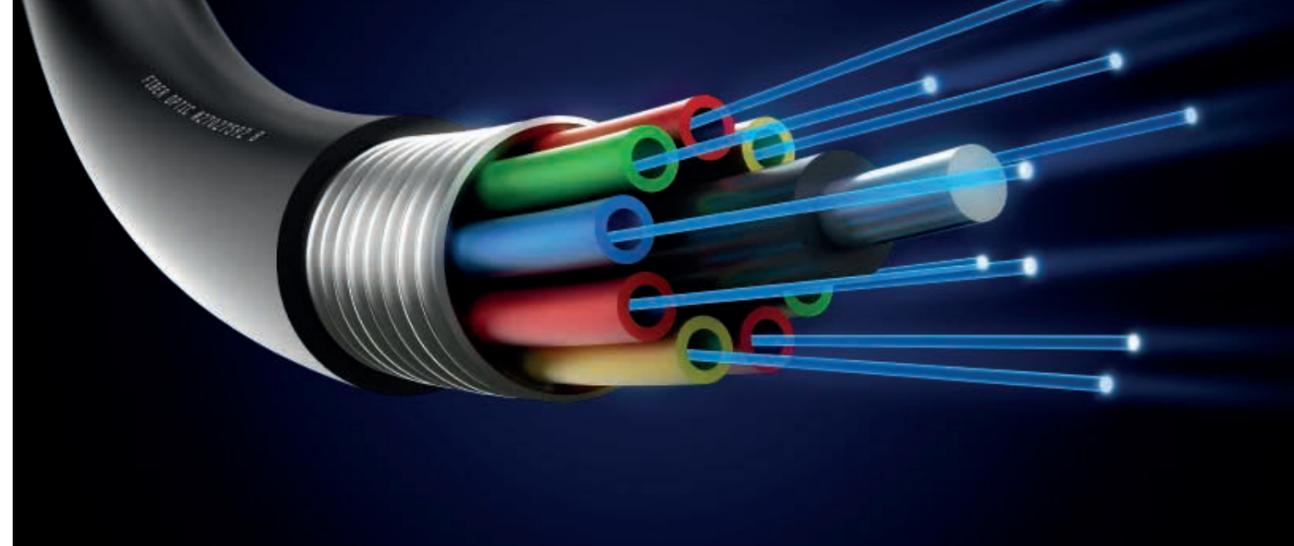


The 'Christmas In Shrewsbury' film has become an eagerly anticipated part of the festive season



The town centre has so much to offer, including Pride Hill pictured above

How to make digital technology work for you



Digital communications technology platforms are helping smaller players to compete with larger organisations like never before



It's a great time to be in business – and an even better time to be a small business.

Digital communications technology platforms are helping smaller players to compete with larger organisations like never before.

Today, many business people are discovering that digital technology is helping them to level the playing field with accessible, portable and relatively inexpensive technology that can help their company or organisation to become more efficient, reach new markets and so boost profits.

PUNCH BEYOND YOUR WEIGHT

As the technology is simple to use and set up, smaller players can get the functionality they need to grow.

Much of this functionality used to be expensive and difficult to deploy, so it was usually only the big guys that could gain the efficiency benefits.

In the past small businesses had to align with larger companies and pay for software licences and upgrades, hardware (purchasing and maintenance), power costs, plus consultants' fees.

These expenses meant that only larger firms could afford to invest in their

efficiencies via IT while small businesses generally waited until they could afford market-standard technology. And this had a dampening effect on the competitiveness of smaller companies.

Today, an exciting range of digital communication technology is helping SMBs overcome some of the traditional obstacles to growth.

BENEFITS ABOUND

Technologies like cloud computing, mobile apps, social media, online payment options (e-commerce), financial management software, collaboration solutions, websites, data analytics, and Customer Relationship Management (CRM) are all helping small business to address everyday challenges. And by improving your efficiencies you can take on the big boys.

Just think about all the efficiencies digital technology allows. There's online banking, invoicing and purchasing, let alone online market research about your competitors and new developments in your industry.

Here are some of the other benefits digital communication technology can bring to your business.

CASH FLOW

- Business Activity Monitoring apps – alert you to changes in your trading environment so you can take timely action, like overdue invoices.

- Mobile document management – and e-signature services help your team sign up clients faster through improved workflows.

MARKETING

Marketing could be costly before the Internet changed all that. Digital marketing can be a great way to find, target and engage prospects and customers leading to greater sales through tools and platforms

like eDMs, social media and online advertising. Other benefits include:

- Connecting with customers – today it's easier to target and secure customers. For example, customer analytics, sometimes known as data analytics, used to be costly and were accessible only to larger organisations. With a lower entry price, your business can take advantage of this resource without the need to pay for external consultants or gear up internally.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Cloud and mobile technologies mean your business can improve collaboration so you can be more responsive to customer needs.

Customer-related information can be more easily found online which helps with your business efficiencies and assists with customer service improvements and customer retention.

HUMAN RESOURCES

When your business is equipped with mobility devices and online apps this can lead to a more efficient team who work on the go.

- Staff retention – if your staff can work more flexibly, there's a better chance they will stay on— reducing your recruitment costs.

- Staff numbers – with greater efficiency you can lower additional staffing costs.

- Mobile workforces – with mobile solutions, field workers aren't tied to the office. They can complete quotations, invoices and timesheet on the go. Plus, video conferencing can reduce staff travel costs.

- *Matt Sandford is managing director of Pure Telecom, based at Shrewsbury Business Park*



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<p>Features & Analysis</p> <p>Business costs denting confidence Small firms' operating costs on the rise, says FSB</p>	<p>People</p> <p>W11 announces new partner Jacki promoted at accountancy firm</p> <p>Nic leed up for prestigious role Former chairman new position with golf body</p> <p>County law firm expands Four graduates on Terry Jones trainee scheme</p>	<p>twitter</p> <p>about 8 hours ago: Telford manufacturer of oil mist collectors invests in robot to help continue growth @telforduk telford.com/n/wb/robotuk</p> <p>about 8 hours ago: Could convenience stores across the region suffer from rising inflation? shropshirebiz.com/news/pic-builder.com/00220000</p> <p>about 2 days ago: Just over a week until entries for 2017 Shropshire Business Awards close shropshirebiz.com/news/pic-builder.com/00220000</p>
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<p>Shropshire's high streets - flying high or falling flat? Rags of hope in challenging times, says expert</p>	<p>Call for business leaders to help young entrepreneurs SYST expands into north of county</p>	<p>Makeover for wedding venue Tenn Hill Hall enjoying new lease of life</p>	<p>Selling a business can be tricky There are ways of easing the process, says Telford lawyer</p>
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<p>Shropshire manufacturer stars at Cannes Festival's role at famous film festival</p>	<p>TripAdvisor manager guest speaker at event Official launch of the Tourism Campaign on April 28</p>	<p>Team at IT firm expands NSI reverts to former name as it welcomes new employees</p>	<p>Growth fund industrial projects nearing completion New units in Telford attracting interest</p>
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A well-attended party

A Shropshire homecare firm threw a surprise party to celebrate 20 years of service from their longest serving member of staff.

Julie Brooks was joined by family, friends and colleagues at the headquarters of Anchorage Care, in Condover, for a party and an official presentation to mark her career milestone.

She originally joined the company as a care assistant in the community, and travelled between calls on her bicycle, before joining the office team as a senior care organiser and a telephone supervisor.

Anchorage Care partner, John Rhodes, said: "Julie is our longest-serving staff member, and she plays a crucial role in ensuring all our clients receive the care they need at the time they need it by co-ordinating our carers and the appointments they need to cover.

"We were thrilled to see so many friends, colleagues and family members at the party, and would like to officially thank Julie for the dedication she has shown to Anchorage Care over the years.

"Since she joined our team, there have been many changes in the care sector and in our company itself, and Julie has taken everything in her stride thanks to her positive approach and her great sense of humour!"

Julie said: "It was just such a fantastic surprise. I really couldn't believe that so many people had taken the time and trouble to come along to the offices to join me on the day."

Anchorage Care Group employs a network of over 120 carers across the county, delivering homecare services to elderly people 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



Tanners' Robert Boutflower collecting the award from Mark Calver, of sponsor Hatch Mansfield (left) and Peter McCombie

Wine merchant acknowledged

Tanners Wines scooped a top accolade at this year's International Wine Challenge Merchant Awards.

The event, referred to as the 'Oscars' of the wine world, is held at the Hilton Hotel, Park Lane, London.

It was noted by the judges that: "Tanners has a tremendous wine range and a real understanding of its customer base, which helps it to focus on providing a winning customer experience."

James Tanner, chairman of Tanners, said: "We are really delighted to win this award, it's great to be recognised for our range and customer service. This year it's especially meaningful as Tanners is celebrating its 175th anniversary."

Tanners now has seven branches across the region in Chester, Bridgnorth, Hereford, Welshpool, Llandudno – and its original site on Wyle Cop in Shrewsbury.

Robert Boutflower, private sales director of Tanners, said: "Although Tanners is a long established firm deeply rooted in the community we strive to innovate and push ourselves, so this acknowledgement is a real thrill."

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A raft spider – only found in the meres and mosses



White-faced damselfly – endangered and only breeds in these habitats

Gold and green are the keys to business success

The November meeting of the Meres & Mosses Business Enterprise Network will mark the third birthday of a business organisation with a difference.

Whilst the group is very much about encouraging business people to meet, chat, get to know each other and hopefully increase profitability, there is also something else which brings them together: an appreciation of their surroundings and the contribution they can make to improve sustainability and environmental best practice.

It is a group set up by Shropshire Wildlife Trust and, as its Meres & Mosses moniker suggests, it has primarily attracted businesses from the more northern parts of the county, and even some in Cheshire and Staffordshire.

The man responsible for setting up the network is Tom Hayek who was taken on by Shropshire Wildlife Trust to help push its green agenda across the county.

"I have to say, it has been extremely well received with membership numbers increasing at a healthy rate," says Tom, who operates out of the trust's headquarters in Abbey Foregate.

"It has come a long way since its inception which really dates back to 2012 when Shropshire Wildlife Trust was named as lead partner in a Defra-funded Nature Improvement Areas initiative.

"SWT was chosen along with nine others, predominantly NGOs and statutory bodies, to take the lead in what is a five-year programme, and I came in to manage it after the first year.

"It is all about conservation delivery in what is a massive geographical area, broadly covering a swathe running from Oswestry to Ellesmere to Whitchurch and onto Malpas and Crewe.

"I realised very quickly that while we were managing a huge area, we weren't necessarily talking to the right people; as



Tom Hayek, left, with Bryan Jones and Stephen Graves of Muller Dairy, MMBEN members



A typical meres and mosses wetland habitat at Brown Moss

I saw it, the key to delivering improved conservation was to reach a wide range of people.

"This led me to the area's corporate world and setting up MMBEN."

Tom explains that there are three main focuses which the network concentrates on.

The first is education, and helping business people understand how their local environment is important.

The second is initiating a change of behaviour, and supporting businesses make an environmental and sustainable footprint and approach.

And finally there is a concerted push to raise money to help provide effective conservation delivery and a meaningful contribution to the landscape.

"We want MMBEN to be run by businesses for business," Tom continues. "It has to be about presenting the business world with the benefits of minimising the environmental footprint and maximising sustainability.

"The hope was that like-minded people, who have a care for the environment, meet and get on and talk business in a mutually beneficial way.

"I am really glad to say that the format we have chosen - of having relatively few networking events but filling these with a full and diverse programme lasting half a day, with lunch and refreshments included - seems to work really well."

• The next MMBEN networking event is on September 20th.

For further information on MMBEN and future meetings visit www.meresandmossesben.co.uk or contact Tom Hayek or Craig Baker on 01743 284274.

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Ian Jordan and wife Yvonne promoting a selection of Bulldog products at the company's trade stand

Security has such a fabulous pedigree

By Chris Austin

Three decades ago, the office was a caravan in a field, and the production line was housed in a Nissen hut.

Times have certainly changed for Bulldog Security Products, which now has a team of 16 operating from its hi-tech base in Much Wenlock, and is exporting products all over the world.

But the company takes pride in the fact that the business remains firmly in the county it was founded, supplying jobs for local people.

Managing director Ian Jordan has spent all his working life at the firm and is proud to retain the family ties with the company founded by his father Ray.

His wife Yvonne is company secretary, while brother Neil is a director and Ray's granddaughter Lucy and Ian and Yvonne's son Andy have also now joined the firm.

"The company has moved on big-time since dad created a caravan stabiliser in his shed at home back in 1984," Ian says.



The company has moved on big-time since the creation of a caravan stabiliser in 1984

"But with that stabiliser came the launch of Bulldog Security Products and the firm has continued to grow ever since.

"There were obviously dreams and hopes for the company, but I'm not sure even my father would have dared to think of just how successful we have turned out to be.

"From that first caravan stabiliser dad

went on to make another 25, believing there was a market for the product.

"He was obviously proved right – the Bulldog name is bigger and stronger than ever.

"We still operate from our Much Wenlock base, and are extremely proud to do so. We are also proud that we source all our products from the UK.



The company produces a security product for just about any eventuality



It's all a far cry from that Nissen hut on Church Lane, Bridgnorth

"Bulldog is continuing to evolve with the times, but at the core of the business our message and our goal remains the same - to keep producing the best possible security product to protect the property of our clients.

"There are many criminals out there who have an eye on the property and premises of others with a view to making money out of those people's misfortune.

"We see it as our main objective to limit those options as much as possible."

Ian says it is his strong team which makes the business such a success, with many long-serving members of staff.

The company produces a security product for just about any eventuality. These range from simple items like locks and parking posts to GPS tracking systems, security lighting, skip locks, home fuel tank locks and equine saddle security.

Ian says: "We advise and supply on a number of different areas.

"Vehicle security is obviously uppermost in the minds of many people and something thieves can easily target.

"We supply help with cars, HGVs, vans, trailers, plant equipment, motorbikes, quads, scooters, motorhomes, 4X4s and caravans.

"We also have a wealth of experience in the equestrian field, homes and garages and retail premises security. And we are, of course, able to provide a back-up service with all relevant spares."

As the breadth of our experience and our products have grown, so to has our staff

Today's Bulldog production line includes modern equipment like a laser-cutting machine and a robot which welds the products.

This is all a far cry from that Nissen hut on Church Lane, Bridgnorth, which was the first home of Bulldog Security Products and

an old caravan in an adjoining field which Ian remembers acting as an office.

"As the breadth of our experience and our products have grown, so to has our staff and we now distribute worldwide, including to Saudi Arabia, Dubai and Canada among others," Ian adds.

"I've worked at Bulldog all my working life – starting out in the workshop. My brother Neil has also always worked at the firm and he oversees production, making sure our high quality control standards are met. He looks after the day-to-day running of the factory.

"My wife Yvonne is our company secretary and looks after the administration side of things. She has been here more than 25 years.

"We are passionate about what we do and about looking after our staff, who have a vast pool of knowledge and experience.

"That is vital in today's workplace and I believe the long service of so many of our employees highlights the importance they also put on the work we do here."



Today's Bulldog production line includes modern equipment like a laser-cutting machine and a robot which welds the products



Making business work – a Connecting Shropshire cabinet



Connecting Shropshire cable laying

Making connections

Superfast broadband is super important if businesses in Shropshire are to have the tools to compete in a global marketplace.

For the past four years, Shropshire Council has been working on a solution for beleaguered businesses through a project called 'Connecting Shropshire'.

It aims to bring faster broadband to places across the Shropshire Council area where it isn't economically viable for commercial companies to provide it.

Chris Taylor, project manager for the programme in Shropshire says the council are well aware of the problems businesses have been experiencing.

"We've worked hard over the past four years to contribute towards the Government's target of 95% of premises having access to superfast broadband by 2020, and will continue to do so.

"But the council had already fully recognised that digital connectivity is critical to the growth of our local economy."

The project began in 2013 with the council's commitment to match funds supplied by central government to the tune of £8.2 million.

The aim was to deliver at least two megabits per second (known as basic broadband) to 93% of premises in the Shropshire Council area by winter 2016, with 87% having access to superfast broadband.

In 2014 Shropshire Council accessed a further £11.38 million, which, when taking commercial market projections into consideration, will mean that approximately 92% premises have access to Superfast broadband by winter 2017.

Chris adds: "Perhaps the main message here is that in order to access superfast broadband businesses and individuals have to subscribe or 'upgrade' to it - it is not automatic.

"The good news is that for premises that do switch, whether it be a household or business, a degree of the funding is returned to Shropshire Council so that it can be re-invested by the project in improving broadband services further.

"In short, the more premises that upgrade, the more money will be returned to us which will enable us to connect more



A mast erected for Connecting Shropshire

of the Shropshire Council area to faster broadband.

"To date there has been a 40% take-up, but it would be great to see this figure improving."

A lot has been achieved in the first two phases of the project, the council says, with upgrade work being completed in every village and hamlet of significant size in Shropshire.

But, as Chris admits, it's not been an easy task. "There are lots of technical

problems that we still have to be overcome and there is still a great deal to do, but we are working hard to bring faster broadband to the people and businesses of Shropshire, from the towns to the hard to reach corners of the county."

Happily, further funding has come from the European Regional Development Agency (ERDF). This means that the project can now provide grants worth up to £25,000 to cover capital infrastructure costs for eligible small to medium sized businesses who have yet to secure access to superfast broadband.

Chris says: "Businesses are crucial to the Shropshire economy, so it's imperative that we give them every opportunity to be competitive, and a faster broadband connection is becoming increasingly important in enabling this. It's highly encouraging to have secured this additional funding."

To overcome particular connectivity problems in remote rural areas, Connecting Shropshire is working with Worcester-based Airband.

Chris explains why: "Airband have extensive experience of providing high-speed broadband in particularly challenging rural areas.

"They specialise in deploying wireless technology: this works by sending a signal from a transmitter on a mast, to a receiver attached to the property. This means that businesses can access the Internet in the same way as any other broadband connection.

"Airband will be responsible for delivering superfast broadband to a further 14,000 homes and businesses in the Shropshire Council area over the next three years."

The targets for the project have been challenging, but Chris says he is quietly confident.

"At the end of all the contracts in 2020 we estimate, alongside the projections supplied to us by commercial providers, that out of the 144,000 premises in the county, 142,000 will have access to superfast broadband if they wish it.

"I must stress that it is the residents' responsibility to upgrade to faster broadband once it is available to them."

Want to know more? See <http://connectingshropshire.co.uk/> or email connecting.shropshire@shropshire.gov.uk

Support from club

Office equipment specialist Chrisbeon has scored a £6,500 contract to supply a range of furniture for Shrewsbury Town football club's training ground.

Chrisbeon, which has bases in Shrewsbury and Telford, was contacted by the club's physio Chris Skitt.

He asked if the company was interested in producing joint plans for the Sundorne Castle training facilities, which include rooms for the manager and coaches as well as a canteen.

Chris said: "When I contacted Richard Hughes at the Chrisbeon Shrewsbury office I was delighted that he agreed to us working together and his kind work has been fundamental in getting a brilliant training facility which we have today.

"We were delighted with the selection of opportunities that Chrisbeon could provide, and we have worked jointly together on the project."

The canteen has nine tables and 35 chairs and the coaches' room has six desks and chairs as well as filing cabinets and a sofa. In the manager's office there is an executive desk and a round table with four meeting chairs.

Chrisbeon has also supplied physio stools and a small range of their 'Pre-Loved' nearly new furniture.

Richard Hughes said: "As I live in Shrewsbury and support Shrewsbury Town by attending home games whenever I can, it was really good to be involved with the new training ground and to see behind the scenes at the facilities.

"I was very impressed with how the new building has been fitted out inside."



Richard Hughes (left) with Chris Skitt in Shrewsbury Town's new training headquarters

In brief . . .

• Write Here in Shrewsbury's High Street has invested in a major overhaul, working with two Shropshire companies on the project. The pen retailer called in Steve Hayward of form:form architects in Nesscliffe to draw up plans, and Wem-based Hammersmith Shopfitters, whose clients include Harrods and Calvin Klein, to carry out the work.

• A charity that supports families with young children has been given free membership Shropshire Chamber by Telford-based Bespoke Computing. Home-Start Telford & Wrekin supports families with at least one child under five dealing with issues ranging from disability to mental health, isolation or domestic abuse.

• A long-serving volunteer and rare books expert in south Shropshire has left the county. Helen Muir volunteered at Renaissance in Tower Street, Ludlow, for more than seven years, but has moved to the Welsh coast. She was responsible for raising around £75,000 for The Furniture Scheme, the charity which runs the shop, through book sales.

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The contemporary reception area greets visitors to Uplands Care Home at Bicton Heath

Exemplary in field of adult social care

A Shropshire care operator has been given a ringing national endorsement coinciding with the 10th anniversary of the launch of its Shrewsbury nursing home.

Marches Care, which owns and runs both the Uplands Care Home and Uplands Day Centre at Bicton Heath, has been pinpointed as a national exemplar in the use of information technology and the implementation of information governance in adult social care.

The operator was largely responsible for putting together the NHS Information Governance Toolkit, a guide for bodies in the care sector to store and share individuals' information in a safe and secure way, which is being published this autumn.

Nurse director Carey Bloomer said: "From the point of view of the Uplands, to have such a prominent role in writing the definitive guide for information governance for care homes is very rewarding, and we know that it has already made a real difference to care homes across the country."

"There was a team of us working on it, one of whom was Katie Thorn, the daughter of our managing director Mandy Thorn.



Viewed from the air, the Uplands is owned and run by Marches Care

"We were absolutely delighted when Katie was seconded by NHS Digital as a result of the work she did on the toolkit - she showed real passion and expertise in her approach.

"For Marches Care to be seen by the NHS - as well as care operators across the country - as pioneers and exemplars in information governance is a massive compliment."

On the back of her involvement on the

toolkit, nurse director Carey Bloomer was appointed a Caldicott Guardian.

The role of a Caldicott Guardian is to protect the confidentiality of patient information while at the same time enabling appropriate sharing of data, and Mrs Bloomer was the first professional in the county not employed by the NHS to be given this honour. She has since been asked to join the committee for Caldicott Guardians



Signage throughout has been given an effective makeover



Carey Bloomer and Katie Thorn at the Uplands

The publication of the NHS toolkit came at the same time as the Uplands celebrated its 10th birthday since opening at its current site.

The milestone was marked by a beach-themed party attended by friends, residents and their relatives and dignitaries including the High Sheriff of Shropshire Charles Lillis, and his wife Veronica.

At the same time, work was completed on a new and extended reception area at the home, and Marches Care also underwent an extensive rebranding exercise and launched a brand new website.

Managing director Mandy Thorn said: "This has been an exceptional year for

Marches Care, not least because we continue to be cited as a national exemplar in leading the way with information governance.

This continues to be a really happy home with excellent occupancy levels

"I also know that we continue to be held up within the industry as exponents of best practice in our dementia care and we were all delighted when we were shortlisted for

the Dementia Team category in the National Dementia Care Awards last year.

"But there have also been some really exciting changes at the Uplands, and it has been a real pleasure working with local suppliers to improve the building, the website and the branding to bring the whole operation to the most modern standards.

"Above all though, this continues to be a really happy home with excellent occupancy levels and low rates of staff turnover - bucking national trends.

"This is down to the hard work, professionalism and caring attitude of our wonderful team of staff and I couldn't be more proud of each and every one of them."

Unite in battle against cancer

The new chair of a Shropshire cancer charity is calling on the county's business community to offer its support as part of a major fundraising campaign.

Mandy Thorn, the managing director and co-owner of Marches Care, which operates the Uplands care home and day resource centre in Shrewsbury, took on the chairmanship of the Lingen Davies board of Trustees earlier in the year.

Mrs Thorn, a prominent businesswoman in the county who is also joint vice chair of Marches Local Enterprise Partnership and a patron of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, said contributions from the county's commercial sector would be invaluable to the continued success of a charity that has provided enormous support to cancer sufferers over the last 40 years.

"The Lingen Davies Cancer Fund not only supports those individuals with cancer during their treatment and afterwards but also works to raise awareness of the causes and early symptoms," said Mrs Thorn, who was awarded an MBE in 2014 for services to dementia.

"It is a wonderful charity that has helped many thousands of Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Mid-Wales residents since it was set up in 1979 by a local politician, Bernard Lingen, and accountant Frank Davies.

"To commemorate the 40th anniversary of the charity, we have embarked on a massive fundraising drive with a target of £1.25 million to be reached by 2019.

"Almost everyone's life has in some way been affected by cancer - whether through family, friend or colleague - and a pledge of any sort from businesses in Shropshire would be enormously appreciated.

"Supporting a local charity can also improve staff morale, business profile and customer engagement.

"Lingen Davies can offer companies a range of options.

"These include promotional activities and working with your staff to encourage their engagement in screenings and symptom awareness."

Since its launch, the Lingen Davies Charity Fund has contributed the equivalent of £18 million to improve cancer services in the local area, with some 75,000 people benefiting from improved cancer treatment and care thanks to the charity.

Naomi Atkin, executive officer of the fund, said: "I am really pleased to have Mandy on board as Chair of Trustees.

"Her business skills and enthusiasm are a great asset to our talented board as we move into an exciting new appeal period."



Mandy Thorn



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Celebrations all round at Shrewsbury High School as the 2017 GCSE results were revealed

ABC of GCSEs – or should that be 1-9?

By Chris Austin

Nothing stands still for very long in the world of education – and that's been particularly true this year.

Mergers, federations, and major changes to exam systems have put significant pressure on both staff, and students to adapt to the brave new world.

Employers also have the task of working out the difference between a GCSE A* and a Grade 9 when they're interviewing potential job candidates. And the shift back to more exam-based courses has required a change in working habits for both lecturers and students.

Huge strides have been made across the county's academic centres in recent years to ensure their courses are tailored for the needs of the Shropshire economy.

Work placements, apprenticeships, and courses with a much more vocational emphasis are helping to bridge the gap between education, and careers.

Wrekin College, for example, launched its new £1.2 million business school earlier

this year, and believes that university should no longer be seen as the ultimate path to success – even for the most gifted pupils.

Headmaster Tim Firth says soaring tuition fees and a changing jobs market mean teachers had to look at alternatives.

Business leaders claim the 'snowflake generation' is producing graduates not fit for the workplace - having failed to acquire key skills to create resilience and a can-do attitude.

Mr Firth says: "Young people today live in a very different world to the one we did and the challenges are new, but they are such that we as schools need to think even more about how we prepare them for the world outside of the academic arena.

"University is not the only option. We need to go back to putting value on apprenticeships, to creating good entrepreneurs, bosses and employees, key skills for the workplace rather than just great scholars."

Before pupils reach that point of choice, they have to negotiate the changing world of GCSEs. This summer saw many courses move from the traditional A* to G grading system to a new classification of 1-9.

Given the challenge of adapting to not only the grade changes, but shifts in many

syllabuses too, Shropshire schools say they are delighted with their results.

Shrewsbury High School challenged its recent records with a total of 62% of students achieving A* or A grades, with many top rate grade nines under the new classification for maths and English.

"There has been a lot of worry nationally about how the new GCSEs in English and mathematics would turn out but the girls' results show they have managed things with incredible skill and competency," says headmaster Michael Getty.

"Schools recognise that GCSE has been made much more demanding and as a consequence the girls' superb achievements deserve even more credit."

Nearly one third of the entire GCSE year group managed to secure straight A*/A grades and above with 22 entries securing the new Grade 9 - despite national reports suggesting that allocations of this new even higher grade would be limited to only several hundred across the UK.

Mr Getty says: "I am particularly delighted with the girls' fantastic results in science and mathematics, where they achieved 87% A*/A in biology, 84% in physics, 81% in chemistry and a brilliant 93% A*/A in statistics. ▶

◀ "It is unsurprising that so many of them go on to pursue careers in medicine, veterinary science and engineering."

The High School has been shortlisted for a national award for its work in encouraging girls to pursue careers in science, mathematics and engineering and its work with young doctors as they prepare for university.

Despite national reports of turbulence surrounding A Levels and University places, independent school Moreton Hall at Weston Rhyn also reported a vintage year of A Level results.

A total of 53% of grades were awarded A* or A with a third of candidates achieving straight A* or A grades in all their subjects. One student, Phoebe Jackson, is off to Cambridge to read engineering after three A*s and one A.

Principal Jonathan Forster says: "Eight departments achieved 100% A* and A – a remarkable achievement for a school that does not set a high bar for admission to our A Level courses."

It's not just changing exam systems which are challenging educational establishments, of course.

Many are looking to either federate, or merge, as part of the Government's drive to create fewer, but larger centres of educational excellence.

Telford College – a collaboration between TCAT and New College Telford – is now up and running.

It had been expected that North Shropshire College and nearby Reaseheath in Nantwich would be following suit. But their plans to merge have been thwarted by funding issues.



Shrewsbury High School students Ella Everall and Grania McKittrick are thrilled with their results

The two colleges have successfully worked closely together in federation for over a year, sharing best practice and quality improvement projects, and say they have achieved significant benefits for learners in North Shropshire.

But they have now been told that long-term funding is not available to support

a potential merger. In a statement, the colleges say management teams and governors of both institutions were keen to build on these initial benefits and had been working with the Education and Skills Funding Agency and the Treasury Transaction Unit, for the past 10 months, to secure sufficient funds.



It was a vintage year for A Levels at Moreton Hall School. A total of 53% of grades were awarded A* or A.

"Despite best efforts and long discussions, the ESFA and the TU have been unable to fund a merger sufficiently to enable the college management teams and governors to recommend with confidence that the financial support offered will ensure a successful merger.

"A huge amount of work and expense

has gone into this over the past 18 months and both college management teams and governors are extremely disappointed with this outcome. North Shropshire College and their management team will now work with the ESFA and the FE Commissioner to find an alternative solution. Following extensive discussions with the Government



Independent Living Students who have chosen to study the Hospitality and Catering pathway at North Shropshire College

Transaction Unit, a decision has been made not to proceed to formal merger between Reaseheath College and NSC.

"The conclusion to this process is disappointing to both colleges and the Government, but we have explored all possible long-term funding support and unfortunately there is no viable solution." ▶

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Discover life as an undergraduate

University Centre Shrewsbury is showcasing its courses and facilities at an open day on October 21.

The campus, at Frankwell Quay, will be open from 10am to 3pm – giving prospective students the chance to experience what life would be like as an undergraduate.

There will be a chance to meet course tutors, view partnership accommodation in the town centre, and talk with current students about their experiences.

Established by the University of Chester and Shropshire Council, UCS is focused on high-quality teaching and research, fostering entrepreneurship and contributing to the community.

It offers courses across a number of disciplines and specialised facilities at the main learning and research site at Guildhall in Frankwell Quay, as well as the historic Rowley's House, together with student accommodation at nearby Mardol House.



Established by the University of Chester and Shropshire Council, University Centre Shrewsbury is focused on high-quality teaching and research



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◀ The college, which has just appointed Ian Clinton as its new principal, says: "After so much work together it is of course disappointing that the merger has broken down at the eleventh hour."

"But North Shropshire College has already begun discussing alternative strategies with our community and government stakeholders and we will ensure that the outcome serves the needs of our students, employers and community as effectively as possible."

The college is once again offering an Employment and Development Skills course this autumn, run in partnership with Open College Network West Midlands and delivered at the Oswestry and Walford campuses.

The level one diploma offers students with additional support needs and learning difficulties the opportunity to pick several different pathways, such as hospitality and catering, construction, sport & leisure, and land-based studies.

Anna Thomas, curriculum manager in independent living, resilience and child and healthcare studies, says: "The flexibility of the OCN West Midlands units has allowed NSC to create bespoke vocational programmes of study linked to key growth sectors in the area."

"This has further enhanced the employability opportunities for learners and will help them develop their vocational, personal, social and employability skills to prepare them for further study, employment and independence."

When it comes to collaboration between education and enterprise, a good example was found at Idsall School in Shifnal, where students had a taste of life in the construction industry thanks to an innovative game designed by graduates from a house building company.

Three employees from Barratt and David Wilson Homes Mercia led the session, where pupils took on the role of house builders. They were divided into small teams, and acted as project managers to work their way through all aspects of creating a development.

They finished the class by building a model home and using applied mathematics to work out the profit on their development.

♦ hn Fitzgerald, managing director at Barratt and David Wilson



Idsall School students have taken on the role of house builders

Homes said: "It was fantastic for David Wilson Homes to be able to go into Idsall School and hopefully inspire the next generation of homebuilders."

"The game has been designed to engage students in all stages of building

a housing development and I hope it gave them the chance to see the many varied roles which are part of the industry to consider as a career in the future."

Graham Northall of Idsall School said: "This was a fantastic opportunity for our

year 11 and year 12 learners to get a feel for construction work.

"To see the learners competing with one another and being so engaged in the construction activities and in maths was excellent." 

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Ivan Watkiss, managing director of Coopers Gourmet Foods

Feed the economy

More than £1.2 million in grant funding was awarded to businesses across the Marches area in 2016/17 to help them grow and create jobs.

The figure was revealed by business support service, the Marches Growth Hub, as it launched a new campaign aimed at helping even more businesses to 'Get Growing'.

More than 4,000 people attended hub events in the same year, with 5,574 businesses seeking support from both the virtual hub and the three hub teams in Shrewsbury, Telford and Hereford.

Chairman Paul Hinkins said the figures demonstrated both the ambition of the region's businesses and the need for the 'one stop shop' for support.

"Businesses are making excellent use of the resources and help on offer and there is clearly an appetite for further support from ambitious businesses wanting to expand, innovate and create new jobs.

"This is why our newest campaign, on the back of the success of Get Started, is focused on those smaller businesses which have growth potential and can achieve great things if they are able to access both the support and the finance they need."

The campaign will be supported by companies which have benefitted from grant funding and help from the Marches Growth Hub, with a series of short films and case studies released on www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk



Mike Morgan slices nougat at the Champion & Reeves food processing facility in Shrewsbury

They include:

● **Coopers Gourmet Foods**

The company supplies to a range of companies from farm shops to delicatessens, plus the Co-op, Harrods and Selfridges. The company started in a small unit in Oswestry, but has expanded to a unit in Roden

● **Champion & Reeves**

The maker of luxury nougat, butterscotch and toffee welcomed HRS Prince Andrew to officially open its expanded premises at Battlefield in Shrewsbury.

Mr Hinkins added: "Get Growing will see the Marches Growth Hub promote events

such as the Meet the Buyer in Telford with Balfour Beatty and the EU funding workshop in south Shropshire on how businesses can access available funding.

"It will also be supporting the launch of the new Midlands Engine Investment Fund. MEIF is a £250 million fund, a joint agreement between the British Business Bank and eleven Local Enterprise Partnerships including the Marches LEP, which aims to support the growth ambitions of 460,000 smaller businesses in the Midlands."

Businesses can keep up to date with the campaign at www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk

ACE business with a worldwide vision

A precision metal specialist from Telford is setting its sights on international expansion after boosting export work by 10% in the first seven months of 2017.

Advanced Chemical Etching (ACE), which employs 50 people at Hortonwood, has secured three big projects in aerospace, communications and the medical sector, taking overseas trade to 38% of its £5m turnover.

It comes after the company embarked on a continuous improvement drive that has increased on time delivery and right first time performance, two crucial factors in securing the recent contract wins.

"Our export activity has been steadily growing year-on-year since 2010, but the last seven months have definitely seen a spike that we're hoping to sustain," explained Ian Whateley, managing director of ACE.

"There may be an element of the pound slipping making us more competitive. However, a lot of the projects we are winning are extremely technical and not many firms around the world can deliver the complexity of components the customer requires.

"Interest has come from all over too...Germany, Luxembourg, United States of America, we've even had orders from customers in Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Thailand."

ACE's scope of activities is far and wide and can include anything from safety critical components for aircraft and cars to simple washers, electronic connectors and ornate clock faces.

With the latest production machinery and a culture of ongoing investment at its 25,000 sq ft facility in Telford, it can make products in materials, including stainless steel, nickel alloys, copper, beryllium copper, phosphor bronze, brass and, thanks to ground-breaking new processes, aluminium, titanium, molybdenum, nitinol and elgiloy.

The latest continuous improvement exercise has been in operation for six months and has involved collecting data on current operating parameters and reviewing what is working well and what could be improved.

This has seen the firm alter its chemistry settings and the introduction of twice daily process control checks, which have already resulted in a 2% increase on right first time figures and the potential for a 10% boost in throughput on certain products.

Ian added: "We are really pleased with the results of this latest exercise and we now have daily improvement meetings to ensure all work instructions and operating procedures are being reviewed.

"It has also allowed us to create a robust new product introduction system with technically challenging jobs and new processes for exotic materials never before etched."

Advanced Chemical Etching, which is working towards the AS9100 aerospace quality standard, has made a number of key appointments to cope with recent expansion, including a new technical sales specialist and business development expert.



Stuart Weston, Chris Ball and Ian Whateley, all of Advanced Chemical Etching



ACE products in the manufacturing process at the Telford site

Red market for auction centre

A new fortnightly 'red market' at Shrewsbury Auction Centre to sell cattle from TB restricted farms has been declared a big success.

The 'red market', to be held at 3.30pm on Wednesday every other week, attracted 37 cattle from 10 vendors to its first session, selling to eight buyers.

"The red market is a new service for farmers to provide them with more marketing opportunities for their cattle," said Halls' cattle auctioneer Jonny Dymond. "Previously, they had to sell their cattle directly from the farm or take them to other markets to sell.

"When a farm is under TB restrictions, there are limits to how they can sell their cattle. Everyone associated with the farming industry would all like to see the back of TB but, due to the increasing incidence of the disease, I fear that red markets are going to grow."

At the first sale, nine prime cattle attracted a competitive trade as they sold to a peak of £1,310.40p or 208p per kilo. Mr Dymond appealed for more cow entries, emphasising that liveweight is the best way to sell them.



Cattle auctioneer Jonny Dymond in action at Halls' Shrewsbury Auction Centre

Brexit opportunity is food for thought

The president of the National Farmers Union is calling on policy-makers to grasp Brexit as an opportunity to enhance the nation's ability to produce food.

August 6 marked the theoretical day in the calendar when the British larder would run bare if we fed the nation only home-grown food from the start of the year.

Figures show that Britain produces 60% of its own food and this rate is both falling and in long-term decline.

Meurig Raymond said: "Food self-sufficiency statistics have always been an important measure of the nation's ability to feed itself. But since the UK voted to leave the EU, and with trade negotiations now starting, the supply of British food is now seen in a very different light.

"Government recognition of farming's enormous contribution to this country will be



Meurig Raymond

vital in the coming weeks and months.

"We're not advocating a fully self-sufficient nation - we recognise the need for importing food which can only be produced in different climates. But what we should be doing is maximising on the food production

we are good at, and looking at the potential for this.

"If we buy in foods that we are capable of producing ourselves then we risk exporting all the environmental, economic and social benefits that farming delivers here in Britain."

He added: "Farmers deliver for our economy, providing jobs and driving growth in rural communities.

"We provide the raw materials for a domestic food industry that employs 3.8m people, generates £109bn in value for the UK economy and 13% of the country's Gross Domestic Product.

"It is interesting to see that since the UK voted to leave the EU, 25% of people think it's now more important to buy British food. We already knew that 86% of shoppers say they want to buy more British food.

"We are calling on the Government to deliver policies that will ensure that Britain retains its ability to be more self-sufficient, support home-grown food and ensure that we have profitable, productive and progressive farm businesses for the future."



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QUALITY, INNOVATION AND PERFORMANCE

A sobering report of factory farming

Shropshire has been named as the second worst county in the UK for so-called 'factory farming' – the practice of rearing livestock indoors.

It follows the publication of a factory farming map by the Compassion In World Farming organisation, which is committed to wiping out the practice across the world.

The map highlights 'hotspots' where large numbers of animals are reared indoors, and claims that the figure in Shropshire tops 14.7 million. Only neighbouring Herefordshire features higher on the list.

Emma Slawinski, Compassion in World Farming's director of campaigns, says: "With around 70% of farm animals in the UK kept in factory farms, this is a practice we should be moving away from, not towards."

"Animals are not simply commodities, whose sole purpose is production. The huge implications on animal welfare, human health and our environment cannot be ignored."

"Moving animals away from the countryside into cages and crowded sheds may seem like a space-saving idea, but this ignores the fact that vast amounts of land is used elsewhere to grow feed for them."

"There is a better way. By choosing cage-free, free range and organic produce you are providing farm animals with the opportunity to live a full life, able to move freely and display their natural behaviours."

"The end of factory farming will benefit the animals, us and our planet."

The report claims that many counties associated with vast, green pastures and extensive grazing are some of the areas with the highest numbers of indoor-reared farm animals.

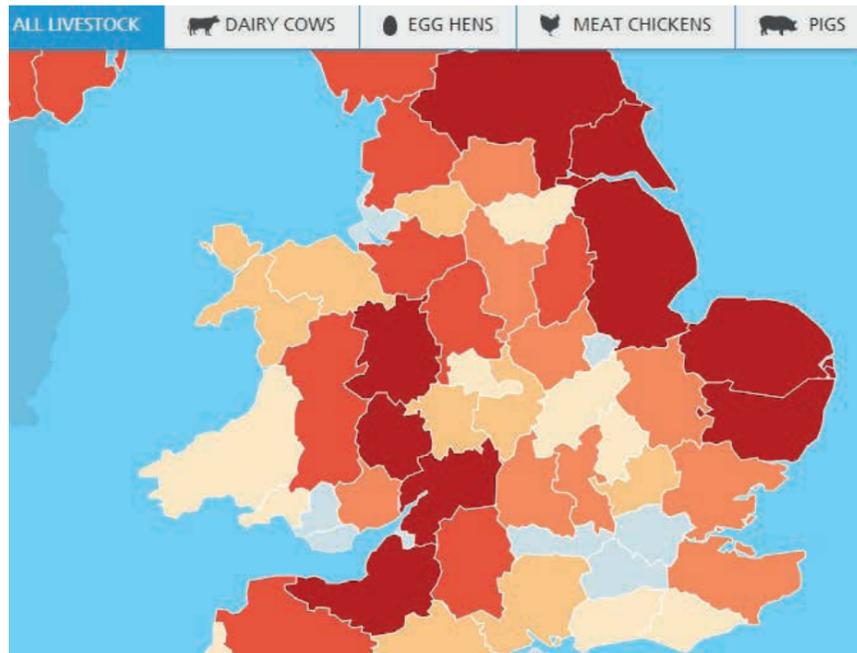
In Shropshire, the number of indoor reared dairy cows is listed as 2,040, with 1.33 million laying hens, 13.36 million broiler chickens and more than 23,000 pigs.

Cumulatively the figure for the top three counties, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Norfolk, stands at almost 44 million animals confined indoors without access to natural daylight, fresh air or ability to display their natural behaviours, the report claims.

British farmers are under growing pressure to use more intensive methods to produce huge quantities of cheap meat, dairy, and eggs.

And as ever, there are two sides to the story. Richard Griffiths, chief executive of the British Poultry Council, said birds reared on intensive farms enjoy good standards.

"These are high health and welfare farms. The husbandry of the birds is the crucial element here – I think people think of hens roaming around a farm, but that



The map of the UK featuring hot spots of factory farming. The practice appears widespread.



"Last year, we grew almost a billion birds, 95% indoors," said Richard Griffiths of the BPC

image is no longer the case. That's not how chicken is farmed any more."

Pressure from consumers means it has become impractical to keep birds in free range or organic conditions for general consumption, he claims.

"Last year, we grew almost a billion birds, 95% indoors and 3.4% free range and 1% organic. If we tried to grow a billion birds a year organically, that would be a lot of land. It's a balancing act, and it's demand-driven."

"I don't think we'll see a change in systems without consumer demand. At the

moment, that demand isn't there."

The above map was created through a comprehensive data search of poultry, dairy, and pig farms in the United Kingdom using Freedom of Information requests, planning documents, industry publications, feed company literature, equipment suppliers, farm websites, on-location verification and other sources.

Compassion in World Farming was founded in 1967 by a British dairy farmer alarmed at the development of intensive factory farming. With headquarters in the UK, it also has offices across Europe, in the US, China and South Africa.

Charity auction draws crowd of more than 200 at Burwarton



A crowd begins to gather at the Nock Deighton stand in anticipation of the charity auction

Nock Deighton Agricultural LLP held a charity auctioneering competition at Burwarton Show, in aid of Prostate Cancer UK.

Eight budding auctioneers took to the rostrum selling a variety of lots donated by local businesses which included a case of wine, toy tractors, meat hampers, sheep ear tags and Gold Cup Tickets for the Cheltenham Festival, with bids raising a total of £1,164.

This year's competition winner, voted for by the crowd of more than 200 people attending the Nock Deighton Agricultural stand, was local schoolgirl, 8 sie Pritchard, aged seven, who brought the hammer down on a toy tractor at £40.

An additional auction lot was sold in aid of Rupert's Revenge, a charity set up for a local youngster with a rare form of cancer.

Owen & 8 hn Hughes donated a Texel Ram which had been won in a charity raffle organised for the same cause by Oakwood Farm Services.

Local farmer Ed Bunning, past winner of the auctioneering competition, took the bids with the lot being purchased by Howard Mottershead for £500.

Raising the profile

Staff from Tudor Griffiths Group have been taking their show on the road this summer as part of a high-profile campaign to raise their profile among the agricultural community.

The team from the Ellesmere-based business have signed up to exhibit at a host of agricultural shows across Shropshire and Wales.

Managing director Tudor Griffiths said: "We have exhibited at agricultural shows in previous years, but this is the first time we've had such an ambitious programme of events in one summer."

"It's a great opportunity to meet new and existing customers in a very different environment, and to share our services with a brand new audience."

"Agricultural shows are extremely popular in this area, and they give us the chance to spread the word to thousands of people about TG Group and the services we provide."

The team began their tour at Burwarton Show, followed by appearances at Oswestry Show, Llanfyllin Show, Anglesey Show, Ceriog Sheep Dog Trials, and Cruckton Ploughing Match at Ruyton-XI-Towns.

In particular, the show displays have been featuring the group's newest additions, its kitchen and bathrooms



Carl Banks, Matt Nicholls and Simon Plant are ready for the TG Group tour

services that have been launched at the Oswestry branch, and the new doors showroom which has also been unveiled in the town.

There has also been a focus on the aggregates and concrete division, as well as displays from the skip hire and electrical divisions.

Mr Griffiths said: "We're hoping that this programme of events will help us to share our services with a varied audience over a wide area, and we're looking forward

to meeting show visitors from all industry sectors."

TG Group has a network of eight builders' merchants' branches – in Ellesmere, Nantwich, Northwich, Oswestry, Chester, Welshpool, Kidderminster, and Bridgnorth.

It also operates 12 ready-mixed concrete plants, two sand and gravel quarries, a sea-dredged sand operation, recycling services, and skip hire, and employs more than 250 people.



Martin Lewis offers advice on car hire when abroad. His seven tips below should help to avoid any unwanted added costs

Don't drive yourself to despair while abroad

TV's money-saving expert Martin Lewis writes for Shropshire Business



Every year, many Shropshire people sit behind the wheel in far-flung destinations across the world.

Yet there are many financial bumps in the road. I hope these seven tips will navigate you through it.

1. Book car hire early

The earlier you hire your car, the better. Walk in during the summer holidays, and if they've capacity you'll usually pay around £40 a day for a small car. Yet book a few weeks early, even in peak season, and it

can be as little as £13/day in resorts like Malaga or Tenerife.

And if you can book months ahead, even better, like Dave, who emailed his thanks for the info: "Booked four months ahead, got 10 days for £296 for a decent-sized car. I just before I went, checked and price had gone to £900."

To find your cheapest, use as many comparison sites as possible, including www.kayak.co.uk and www.carrentals.co.uk

Once booked, double check the details with the car firm.

2. Beware stealth fuel charges on hire cars

Some firms try to make you pay for a full tank of fuel, then ask you to "return it empty". If you're not likely to drive far, this can mean a €100 extra charge. Instead use the fuel policy filter on most comparison sites and look for full to full policies.

3. Avoid the 'and you need insurance' hard sell when you pick up the car

Hire a car and basic insurance is covered with it. Yet when you get to the

desk, there's usually a hard sell, I've countless times heard the person at the desk say: "Hey señor, you need excess insurance too – if not and there's a problem, you pay €1,000".

And it happens. Someone recently asked me about £1,000 excess they were charged for gearbox damage. The problem is the excess insurance is usually exorbitant, often up to £20/day.

Instead you can get a standalone policy before you jet off for a fraction of the cost. Go to comparison site www.moneymaxim.co.uk or better <http://www.mse.me/carhire> which also lists special discounts. The savings can be large, as Glyn tweeted me: "Thanks @MartinSLewis, I followed your guide & got a week's car hire excess insurance for £13. Rental company wanted £12 per day."

Yet even if you get one of these policies, the person at the car hire desk will often try and pooh-pooh it. They will make you leave €1,000 deposit which any costs are taken from (you then reclaim this from your insurer).

The deposit must be on a credit card (not a debit or prepaid card) in the name

● 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



If you are driving through Paris, Lyon or Grenoble you will need to display a Crit' Air sticker

of the person who booked. I've seen people forget their card and offer their partners card instead, which is then refused, meaning they must double pay for insurance.

4. Officially you should have a DVLA code to hire a car

When hiring a car in the UK or abroad you need to request a 'personal code' from <http://www.gov.uk/view-driving-licence> to show when picking up the car, so it can check for points. In practice though, many firms don't ask. In a twitter poll of 1,700 people only 3% said they were asked for the code abroad, 14% in the UK. Each code is valid for 21 days from the date you obtain it and it can only be used once.

5. International driving licences are recommended outside the EU

If you're driving in Europe, you can use your UK driving licence. Outside Europe around 140 countries either require or recommend you to have an International Driving Permit. That includes the USA, Thailand and India (a full list is at <http://www.theaa.com>).

The fastest way to get it is at the counter at selected Post Office branches (costs £5.50), or you can get it from RAC (£8) or the AA (£8.50) by post

6. Taking your own car to Paris, Lyon or Grenoble? You need a sticker

They've introduced a new 'Crit'Air' scheme to curb pollution, meaning if you want to drive through certain areas at certain times, you need a sticker on the windscreen to show its pollution level. If not there can be an on-the-spot fine of around £60. To get this you must apply before you go (can take 30 days) from <http://www.certificat-air.gouv.fr/en/demande> and it costs €4.80.

7. Check the rules of the road where you're driving

Speak to the car hire firm or do a search online as early as possible. For example, in some countries where you drive on the right, you can turn right on a red light without waiting – if you don't expect many honked horns.

In Spain officially drivers who wear glasses or contact lenses must carry a spare pair in the car by law, and in some cities, you're only allowed to park your car on the side of the street where house numbers are odd, on odd-numbered days of the month.

Do also checking if there are certain rules for children, and whether they can sit in the front. And unsecured bags in the back and driving with flip flops can be frowned upon by police.

Ensure you are covered

Nearly a quarter of people who plan to drive their cars in Europe have admitted they don't know if their insurance covers them abroad.

Martin Pitchford, from Henshalls Insurance Brokers in Newport and Shrewsbury, said research had shown that 23 per cent of motorists either didn't believe they were covered or didn't know if they were.

And the survey also found that one in three British motorists travelling abroad had no idea if they were adequately covered if they broke down on European roads, or they knew they wouldn't be covered but didn't plan on doing anything about it.

"Taking this kind of risk is just not acceptable, and motorists must take a much more sensible approach before they head off to Europe," said Mr Pitchford.

"If you're taking your car across the Channel, it's your responsibility to check your policy and ensure you're covered for breakdowns and other emergencies.



"Bear in mind too, that even if your policy does cover you for driving in the EU, the level of protection it offers may be much lower than when you're driving here at home in the UK."

Mr Pitchford said motorists must also take into account the length of time they'll be away as some insurance policies include extended EU travel cover as a standard condition, but it's dangerous to assume this would be the same for everyone.

"Think about your breakdown cover too – the last thing you want is to find out about the small print of your policy at the roadside overseas, just when you need the help most."

The survey from M&S Bank also revealed that more than a quarter (26%) of motorists bound for Europe had not familiarised themselves with the rules of the road in their chosen destination country.

"This is an even more worrying figure as the rules vary from country to country, so motorists must take the time to research the rules that cover their journey across all the countries they intend to visit."

Mr Pitchford said Austria, Croatia and France required first aid kits to be carried in the car, as well as a warning triangle and hi-vis vest.

And in French cities such as Grenoble, Lyon or Paris, a new rule introduced in low emission zones requires motorists to display a sticker in the windscreen or they could face a fine of up to 135 Euros.

Brand specialist praised Sarah's joined the team

A sales manager at a Shropshire motor dealership has been recognised as a fully-accredited brand specialist. Dan Edwards, based at Furrows of Oswestry, is now one of the first in the UK to successfully complete a tough assessment process to become an approved Skoda sales manager. The training programme began late last year with a five-day course in Derby, followed by a series of tests in Leeds involving role play situations and written examinations.

Furrows of Oswestry's general manager, Richard Pettener, said: "Dan has really worked hard to achieve this accreditation, and we're all very proud of his success. We are a close-knit team and it's great to see the support Dan has received from his colleagues



Dan Edwards (centre) celebrates his Skoda sales manager accreditation with assessor Rebecca Aitken-Moist (left) and Daniel Parsons from Skoda at Furrows of Oswestry

that has helped him through this rigorous and demanding assessment process."

Much Wenlock-based public relations company Nathan Rous PR has welcomed its second new member of the team this year.

Sarah Hughes joins from Lime Marketing and brings particular experience within the health and social care sectors.

Her appointment comes on the back of contract wins for the company in 2017, including global bikeshare provider nextbike, all-girls boarding school Westonbirt and teddy bear manufacturer Merrythought.

Sarah's appointment marks the second job created since the business moved into its new office earlier this year. Lily Rutherford joined from Radar Communications in March.

"While many of our clients are based in London we believe



Sarah Hughes

Shropshire is a great place to work from.

"Creative talent is in abundance," said director Nathan Rous.

Michelle turns a career full circle

Her first job out of college aged 17 was in an independent, family run car dealership where she sold her first car. The career of Michelle Davies, of Gobowen, has gone full circle on her joining Vauxhall dealer Arthurs of Oswestry.

She is working with the service team as customer relations specialist and explained: "My role mainly involves me contacting our customers to ensure their MOT and servicing work is carried out on time and at our customers' convenience.

"It is a key part of my job to make sure our customers feel valued."

Michelle has worked in customer facing sales and marketing roles for 30 years. David Goldthorpe, Arthurs Vauxhall general manager, said: "Michelle's role is a courtesy service to ensure vehicles are well maintained at all times, whether it is an MOT or service schedule."



Michelle Davies at Arthurs of Oswestry



Mel Edwards

Francesca Hutcheson

Tatiana Ten

Count on them

Accountancy firm Dyke Yaxley has welcomed three new faces.

Mel Edwards is the latest recruit to join the company, in Old Potts Way, Shrewsbury, as the company's new marketing assistant. Her appointment follows previous roles as an administration manager for a local healthcare agency and a web developer while she was studying for her NVQ in business and administration. She will now work closely with Dyke Yaxley's marketing experts, directors and managers, to ensure clients receive regular updates on the very latest developments in the accountancy world through newsletters, mailshots, and across all social media platforms. Mel will also help with networking events, produce presentations, update the company website, and manage the company's databases.

Francesca Hutcheson, who has almost 20 years' industry experience, is the company's new associate tax director. She started her career with a Big 4 accountancy firm in Manchester, before relocating to a large firm here in Shropshire. She will be responsible for delivering tax planning and advisory services, and said she was looking forward to helping to build and grow the already successful tax department.

And senior tax consultant Tatiana Ten has joined Dyke Yaxley to work alongside the firm's USA team which is based in Cleveland, Ohio. She has worked in accountancy for over 20 years – nine in Russia and 13 in the UK, and joins Dyke Yaxley after working for a neighbouring Shropshire company for the last three years. "I will be working alongside the Dyke Yaxley US team and will be responsible for tax preparations and providing clients with tax advice, so I'm looking forward to an exciting new challenge," said Tatiana.

Board welcomes directors in a BID to drive business



Joanne Roberts with David Phillips

New faces join an established firm of solicitors

Hatchers Solicitors, which has offices at Welsh Bridge and Harlescott in Shrewsbury, and Whitchurch, has appointed four new solicitors to meet growing demand. They include David Phillips, who joins the firm's agricultural and commercial property team.

His experience spans a wide range of commercial property matters including acquisitions and disposals, leases, refinancing and secured lending, and auction sales and purchases. David also specialises in agricultural matters and acts for a number of farming clients.

The residential property team welcomes Joanne Roberts, who has worked in Shropshire for over 20 years specialising in all aspects of residential conveyancing. Joanne has a particular interest in the purchase of new build properties, having previously been on the panel for two national builders.

Joanne is based at Hatchers' recently refurbished Whitchurch office. The family department also expands, as Morgan Fitzpatrick joins as solicitor, and Sarah Jane Smith as team manager, having specialised in family law for over 25 years.



Gemma Davies



Rachel Williams



Paul Kirkbright

Three new board directors have been announced by the Shrewsbury Business Improvement District to help drive its business plan for a thriving town centre.

Gemma Davies of Shropshire Council, Paul Kirkbright, University Centre Shrewsbury, and Rachel Williams, Marks and Spencer, were appointed to the board at Shrewsbury BID's annual meeting, held at Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery.

The board serves voluntarily and reflects the make-up of the town's businesses and organisations which also has representation from the independent, night-time economy,

office and leisure sectors. Mike Matthews, chairman of Shrewsbury BID, said: "I would like to welcome the new directors and thank them for giving their time.

"The strength of Shrewsbury BID board lies in the enthusiasm and knowledge of its members and their willingness to work with and for each other for the good of the town.

"I look forward to the contribution of our new directors as we continue to deliver our BID priorities and represent sectors from across Shrewsbury's business community."

The board has 14 directors and meets quarterly to help ensure the priorities of businesses are being met and to monitor performance and delivery.

The BID is a not-for-profit, business-led partnership.



Galliers customer care duo Mark Leece (left) and Mark Johnson

Multi-skilled technicians

Two new members of staff have been appointed to strengthen Galliers Homes' customer care department. Mark Johnson and Mark Leece join the Shrewsbury-based developers as multi-skilled technicians.

Mark Johnson originally trained as a carpenter with a Sandwell District Council contractor before starting his own business as a kitchen, bathroom and window fitter.

He also has experience as a contracts manager with a safety and environmental business and as a qualified surveyor

of hazardous materials. Mark Leece trained as a builder, refurbishing empty properties for Birmingham City Council, and has worked with Sandwell Council to adapt bathrooms for people with mobility problems as well as carrying out a range of maintenance work for developers.

Their manager Debbie Adams said: "We take customer care very seriously and are determined to enhance our service even further so we are obviously delighted to welcome both Marks to our expanding team."

A real 'glass' act



Phil Jones is welcomed to the team by general sales manager Jason Richards and Paul Hotchkiss

Heritage Glass Group has appointed a new trainee sales advisor following the company's expansion into Mid Wales. Phil Jones, 21, from Nesscliffe, joins the Shrewsbury firm after working in a restaurant in the town for three years. Operations director Paul Hotchkiss said: "Rather than take on an apprentice, we decided to employ Phil on a proper payment structure as an official trainee brand executive. He will

visit several manufacturers and suppliers to see how things are actually made and will also be made part of our sales team who really believe in our brand and its products, before taking part in site visits to appreciate the care taken in installations." Phil added: "I am very grateful to be given this opportunity. I love working with people and see this as a wonderful chance as a first step to an exciting new career."



Samantha Richards and Cei Evans at Salop Leisure

After sales team grows

The caravan holiday home after sales team at Salop Leisure in Shrewsbury has been strengthened with two new appointments. Samantha Richards, 43, from Minsterley and Cei Evans, 25, from Welshampton, have joined the team at Emstrey as after sales administrators. Samantha, who is married with two daughters, previously worked at Castle Country Club, near Shrewsbury as a receptionist for 15 years, while Cei previously worked at a local garden centre in Shrewsbury for seven years. Both said they were attracted by the former Shropshire Company of the Year's reputation as an employer and by the potential to grow with the fast-growing business. Salop Leisure employs more than 200 staff and serves caravan holiday home parks across Mid Wales and the Heart of England.

Role gives real boost to executive car firm



Business development manager Graeme Cleland

Taxi firm Go Carz has appointed a new business development manager to expand its executive car service. Shropshire's largest private hire firm launched Go Exec in November, providing a new fleet to cater for business clients and formal occasions. It has been such a success that the firm has made the new appointment with the aim of expanding the service even further. Graeme Cleland, who has an MBA from Wolverhampton University Business School, joins Go Carz with a wealth of key account experience after a career in marketing, printing and publishing nationwide. He said: "My new role at Go Carz will mean getting out and about, forming a good working relationship with companies and spreading the word about Go Exec. "I will be connecting with local businesses, leisure clubs and hotels to explain the advantages of Go Exec and what the service could mean for them."

From placement to graduate surveyor

Anna Bowen has joined the Shrewsbury office of Berrys as a graduate surveyor working alongside partners Matthew Anwyl and Mark Morison on valuation, estate management and professional matters.

Anna has just completed her honours degree in Rural Enterprise and Land Management at Harper Adams University and is no stranger to Berrys having spent her placement year with the surveying team last year.

Matthew Anwyl, managing partner of Berrys, said: "With our recent move to new larger offices on Shrewsbury Business Park this has been an extremely busy year for us and Anna will be hitting the ground running helping with a range professional work whilst she works towards her Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors Assessment of Professional Competence qualifications."



Anna Bowen of Berrys



Beth Harrison



Louise Howard

Promotion news

Law firm Lanyon Bowdler has announced three promotions – strengthening its senior team of lawyers.

The company has appointed Louise Howard, Katherine Marriott-Lodge and Beth Harrison to associated solicitor status.

All three have extensive experience within the firm. Brian Evans, managing partner, said: "The promotions are fully deserved. All three have contributed to the ongoing success of Lanyon Bowdler. Louise has been a solicitor in our personal injury department since her qualification in September 2011 but has been with the firm since November 2007.



Katherine Marriott-Lodge

"Katherine qualified as a solicitor in September 2013 within the clinical negligence department, having joined us in 2008, while Beth qualified as a solicitor in March 2014, also within the clinical negligence department.

"These appointments recognise the high regard in which Louise, Katherine and Beth are held by the firm, and their level of achievement."



Paul Morris and Jon Griffiths swap roles at TG Builders' Merchants'

Swapping roles

It's all change for two Shropshire managers who have swapped roles at a family-owned builders' merchants company after a total of 50 years' combined service.

Jon Griffiths has worked for Tudor Griffiths Group for over 30 years managing several branches in the company's builders' merchants' network, and Paul Morris began working for the firm by taking a Saturday job almost 20 years ago. Jon has most recently been the manager at the Oswestry branch and Paul was in charge at Ellesmere.

But now Jon has moved to Ellesmere, with Paul moving in the opposite direction to lead the team at Oswestry. TG Builders' Merchants manager, Mark Evans, said: "It's great to have such key members of our team playing these important roles in the company, as their experience is absolutely invaluable.

The TG Group includes a network of eight builders' merchants' branches – in Ellesmere, Nantwich, Northwich, Oswestry, Chester, Welshpool, Kidderminster, and the latest branch in Bridgnorth.

Specialist technician strengthens the team

Telecoms firm Ocean Telecom has strengthened its team with the appointment of a specialist technician. Chris Spriggs has joined the firm to provide IT and telecoms support after moving into the area from his hometown of Bradford.

Based at the firm's Oswestry office, Chris will work closely with support manager Robin Talbot to provide clients with technical support in all types of issues involving mobile, broadband, hosted IP, fixed phone lines and IT hardware.

Robin Talbot said: "Chris is already proving to be a key member of our team and we are really impressed with his broad range of skills and ability to get customers up-and-running very quickly. His IT expertise will allow us to provide an extra dimension to our support service." Chris said: "This role is



Chris Spriggs

very similar to the one I enjoyed previously, so I'm glad I can bring my skills here at a time when the company is growing. I'm looking forward to a fresh challenge and getting to know the loyal customers from a number of sectors."

Rachel is thrilled to train as solicitor in Newport

Rachel Clements, from the Newport office of Terry Jones Solicitors, has been promoted to the role of trainee solicitor. She has now begun a period of training with the aim of qualifying as a solicitor in January 2019.

Rachel, a member of the conveyancing department in Newport, grew up on an arable farm on the Nottinghamshire/Lincolnshire border.

Eager to study law and move to the city, Rachel headed to London. She was a finalist of the Deutsche Bank Compliance Essay Competition 2013, and two years later Rachel studied the Postgraduate Legal Practice Course at the University of Sheffield.

Rachel said: "I am absolutely thrilled to become a trainee solicitor and I am very much looking forward to starting my training in Newport – which is a town I call home from home. I take pride in working with the local community and surrounding areas and looking to the future, I would really like to engage in more issues surrounding agricultural law.

"I can relate very much to the issues that farmers face on a daily basis as well as future planning and succession."



Rachel Clements



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Nursery management

A former teacher has joined a nursery in Telford to manage the education input into the daily activities.

Zoe Broadhurst is the new lead practitioner at ABC Day Nursery in Green Moors, Lightmoor. She had worked as a teacher of year one pupils at a primary school in Madeley for four years before moving into the nursery environment.

She is managing the nursery practitioners and also working with the children at the nursery. The 27-year-old said: "I have gone from a class full of children to children and adults. It is a different role being in charge of the girls here but I like the challenge."



Zoe Broadhurst

New sales advisor joins estate agent



Lucy Middleton-Foster from Samuel Wood, Church Stretton

Estate agent Samuel Wood and Company has welcomed a new member to its south Shropshire team.

Lucy Middleton-Foster has joined as a residential sales advisor based in Church Stretton, having recently worked within the property market with Strutt & Parker in Shrewsbury, before which she had several years of experience throughout the Cotswolds and in Oxfordshire.

Lucy said: "We have recently just completed renovation of an old property in the town.

"My great grandparents were married here many years ago and I am very passionate about the area in general, the beautiful countryside and its properties, so it really feels like I have come home."

Samuel Wood & Company employs around 35 people countywide, with offices in Ludlow, Craven Arms and Shrewsbury, as well as its Mayfair office in London.



Stewart Mackness pictured with Harry Marsh at EFG Harris Allday

Dymond auctioneer

One of the region's largest stockbroking firms which handles assets of more than £3 billion has been bolstered with the addition of a new investment manager.

Stewart Mackness has joined the Bridgnorth office of EFG Harris Allday, a regional investment powerhouse which has its headquarters in Birmingham.

Mr Mackness joins the office, based in St Leonard's Close in Bridgnorth's town centre, from Brewin Dolphin's Shrewsbury office where he worked for five years.

He will team up with EFG Harris Allday's existing investment department of Christopher Morley, Dominic Curran and Harry Marsh.

"He will help continue the development of our business which has seen assets under management grow to over £750 million in the 30 years since the branch was first opened," said Mr Marsh.

Mr Mackness, 27, a former county tennis champion who lives in Shrewsbury, said: "EFG Harris Allday has long held a reputation as a successful and dynamic investment house which has a strong client base in Shropshire – I feel I have a real affinity with the office in Bridgnorth.

"For me it is exactly where I see my career progressing and will hopefully be part of the team here for many years."

Relationship role for Chris

Zen Communications has welcomed Chris Bentley as relationship manager at its Telford office after securing several exciting new business wins.

A qualified former journalist with 15 years' experience in public relations and communications – including senior roles at a major UK charity, a global FSTE100 company and government body – Chris brings expertise across stakeholder relations and issues and crisis communications, as well as more traditional PR.

He said: "I've enjoyed a strong communications career to date but it's been focused around more in-house roles and so I was eager to make the move to an agency where I could expand my skillset as well as best utilise my ingrained news sense to help my clients gain a competitive edge.

"I'm leading on the technical side of the business and I'm really enjoying getting stuck into some incredibly complex and expert subject matters – from non-Newtonian fluids and chemical rheology to microbial food testing and predictive analytics. It's fair to say that it's appealing to my inner geek!"



Chris Bentley

A passion for good food



Harry Wyatt with James Evans of Halls which handled the commercial property deal

A restaurateur who moved away to study has returned to his home town to take on an iconic building. Harry Wyatt, 27, opened House of Grain – formerly The Cornhouse – on Wyle Cop, Shrewsbury, after spending around four months renovating the building.

Harry, from Underdale, quit his job on a management

graduate programme in Manchester.

He said: "I just love the industry. I have been in it all my life and I wanted to come back to where I'm from and have something of my own.

"I am passionate about good food, about local suppliers and organic and free range food, as well as good beer too."

Proud achievement

Solicitor Lizzie Hughes has been appointed to the Law Society Children's Panel.

Lizzie, of Wace Morgan Solicitors in Shrewsbury, is one of only a few legal professionals in the region to be accredited by the panel, meaning that she can now represent children in care proceedings.

"I was accredited in July after a lengthy written application and interview by panel at the Law Society in London," said Lizzie who is also vice president of Shropshire Law Society.

The appointment is designed for law practitioners who are able to demonstrate awareness, knowledge and expertise in child law proceedings and the representation of children.

"It provides a recognised quality standard and enables professionals such as guardians to identify suitably qualified practitioners when representation of a child is required.

"It is an achievement I am very proud of and that I have aimed for since qualifying as a solicitor," Lizzie added.



Lizzie Hughes of Wace Morgan Solicitors

Satellite office for a specialist

A biomass energy specialist has established a satellite office in Shropshire as it continues to grow.

Experienced wood energy specialist Ewan Bent has joined re:heat as principal consultant to enhance and strengthen the business' comprehensive portfolio of services, supporting client demand for green heating and leading work to drive up industry standards.

Ewan brings over 20 years' experience in renewable and wood energy to his new role. He boasts an impressive CV of relevant achievements, including establishing one of the first wood fuel supply companies in the UK; Midlands Wood Fuel.

After stepping down from Midlands Wood Fuel, Ewan worked as a freelance consultant for the industry, supporting a range of organisations and businesses at all stages of the renewable energy cycle, from forestry to wood fuel businesses and end users including public housing providers.

Most recently, as part time commercial director of Afterwood Ltd, he secured significant new business and Woodsure accreditation for the firm.



Ewan Bent



Sandra Fraser receives her award

Sandra's award for charity work

Sandra Fraser from Westbury has been given an Unsung Hero Award for the dedicated work she carries out for Shrewsbury-based Charity Dog Assistance in Disability.

The award, presented at DogFest, is given on behalf of Dogs Today and Dogs Monthly for those that go that extra mile. Sandra is the Chair of Dog A.I.D., a charity that enables people with disabilities to train their own pet dog to Assistance Dog level.

This is a full-time role she has carried out for nearly 10 years on an entirely voluntary basis. During this time she has grown the charity exponentially, despite relying solely on fundraising, corporate support and legacies, with only a small team.

Beverley Cuddy, editor of Dogs Today magazine, says: "Sandra's award was in recognition of her amazing long service at Dog A.I.D. and how she has helped mitigate so very many people's disabilities while working on a virtual shoestring. The idea of presenting Sandra with this award, sponsored by Natural Instinct, was to make people aware of the efficiency of this Charity and how every penny donated really does make a very significant difference. Sandra joins TV's Chris Packham and John Cooper QC in this year's recipients of the Unsung Hero Award."



William Rowland, managing director of Connexis



Connexis is based at 5 Pearson Road, Telford

Connecting sites for improved business

Does your business operate from more than one site? If the answer is yes, then you are probably already familiar with IP Networking.

An IP network, fitted by Connexis of Telford, creates a communication system using internet protocol (IP) to send and receive messages between a number of computers.

IP is one of the most commonly used global networks, implemented in internet, local area (LAN) and enterprise networks.

This method of communication is ideal for streamlining business practices between offices/branches of multi-site companies.

Furrows Group, with three dealerships across Telford, Shrewsbury and Oswestry, representing Ford, Kia, Mazda and Skoda franchises, has been a long term client for Connexis.

Telford-based communications specialist Connexis has a customer-focused team, headed up by managing director and founder William Rowland.

"The working relationship between Furrows and Connexis goes way back," says William.

"We first started working together some 15 years ago. It's great working with such a forward-thinking company."

Forward thinking indeed. When Furrows first contemplated replacing its existing communications infrastructure 12 months ago, there was no hesitation in contacting Connexis.

The ISDN link at Furrows in Oswestry, Telford and Shrewsbury has just been replaced with a contemporary VoIP based network.

ISDN (integrated services digital network) has been a favourite in the business community for many years, but Openreach has recently announced that it will be withdrawing support in 2025.

"The VoIP-based network offers Furrows an enhanced communications link for its three branches," says William. "The company will benefit in many ways, including improved out of hours services and flexibility in the handling of calls from one branch if need be. Caller ID



Joe Newton, technical manager from Connexis with Mark Roberts, group IT manager, Furrows

reveals which site has been contacted and determines the response.

"The beauty of the system we have installed for Furrows is that it is fully inclusive of UK local, national and mobile calls. All these calls are free."

Another benefit is the way data is handled, with voice and data channelled separately, ensuring no drop in connection speed.

Each branch of Furrows experienced minimal disruption during the changeover.

Mark Roberts, group IT manager at Furrows said: "The engineers from Connexis were extremely efficient."

"Each site in the group was upgraded in just a couple of days."

Sounds easy doesn't it? In truth there is a lot more to it than that.

"The minimal disruption for clients is primarily down to excellent project planning and project engineering," says William.

"A lot of behind the scenes work takes place prior to the final installation. The majority of the work has a three month lead in time, with cabling of panels and migration of contact numbers to the cloud being just two of the tasks carried out in advance."

WILLIAM ROWLAND

● William Rowland is managing director of communications specialist Connexis, based in Telford. A new website is in development and this will launch soon.

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