

NORTHERN

INSIGHT

FEBRUARY 2020



NEW MOVE FOR
GORDON BROWN LAW FIRM

business | property | media | technology | education | motors | fashion | arts | leisure

issue 56

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FOREWORD

Welcome to a fantastic February edition of Northern Insight.

Our cover stars are Gordon Brown Law Firm LLP who are opening a custom designed office space in Team Valley, Gateshead to grow and strengthen their regional presence.

Amongst many great interviews a particular highlight is our chat with John Porrett of Unique Magazines who looks at his new Comic Club initiative.

We also review an enjoyable trip to the Radisson Hotel in Durham as well as making a welcome return to the lovely Horton Grange.

Look out for a trip to the South Caribbean also in the latest of our Travel Insight articles.

2020 is well underway and we hope this issue brings some light into those long February days.

Thank you to all concerned for your fantastic support. Till next month.

M.J. Grahamslaw
Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher
mjgrahamslaw@outlook.com



CONTENTS

FEBRUARY 2020

Business News 6-7

Recent Appointments 8

Cover Story 10-11

Gordon Brown Law Firm

Community News 70

Legal News 76

Property News 90

Media News 110

Technology News 120

Travel 134-135

Arts News 138

Leisure News 148

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TAXI FIRM DELIVERS PRESENTS FOR CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

Kind-hearted taxi drivers were recently hailed festive heroes by their boss as they donated hundreds of presents to poorly children staying in hospital.

More than 250 presents worth more than £2000 were delivered to nursing staff at the Great North Children's Hospital in Newcastle by a fleet of taxis from Gateshead based LA Dean Taxis.

As the owner of the region's largest taxi firm, Rob Armstrong was very proud of his team who organised the collection of presents and delivery to six children's wards at the hospital.

Rob said: "This is an amazing thing that LA Dean have done for the children who are being looked after in hospital at this time of year. Our staff have all went the extra mile and I am very, very proud of their thoughtfulness and generosity.

"We have a long tradition of helping charities and good causes at LA Dean and at Christmas, I can't think of what it must be like to spend time in hospital as a child, so this gesture is very rewarding for myself and my wonderful team of drivers and office staff."



FAST-GROWTH SMES TO BENEFIT FROM NEW CHALLENGER BANK

The North East is playing a key role in the development of a new challenger bank that looks set to revolutionise the SME lending market.

County Durham fintech specialist Growth Capital Ventures (GCV) has teamed up with a range of major players in the industry to drive forward the growth of B-North, a start-up established to build the bank and get it up and running from spring 2020. Partners include Teessider Craig Iley; former Santander divisional managing director, Jonathan Thompson; and David Broadbent, the former chief commercial officer at International Personal Finance Plc.

Once operational, the bank will deliver loans of between £500,000 and £5m to ambitious companies looking to scale up their business, providing finance up to ten times faster than large mainstream banks.

After securing £4m through an initial seed round, B-North has now exceeded its target of raising a further £2.3m via a second round of investment. The money from round two is being used to strengthen the existing management team and continue building the infrastructure.

Craig Peterson, Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of GCV, said: "The B-North business model is unique. The combination of people and technology allows B-North to deliver face-to-face banking quicker and better than the competition."

LOGANAIR CONTINUES NORTH EAST EXPANSION WITH NEWCASTLE UNITED PARTNERSHIP

Major regional airline Loganair has continued its expansion in the North East of England by announcing a partnership with English Premier League club Newcastle United.

Former Newcastle United captain and current club ambassador Bobby Moncur kicked off the deal at Newcastle International Airport by presenting the Loganair team with a co-branded football and signed shirt from the North East club. Loganair has now also began advertising at live televised Premier League games.

The airline also recently announced that it would be introducing larger aircraft on its popular Newcastle-Aberdeen route to increase seat capacity by 21%.

To further celebrate the tie-up, Loganair has also announced that customers booking flights from Newcastle until the end of February will be entered into a competition to win one of four signed Newcastle United home shirts.

Dale Aitchison, Head of Commercial at Newcastle United FC, commented: "We are delighted to welcome Loganair on board as our newest Associate Partner. Loganair is not only showing a huge commitment to Newcastle United but the North East region as a whole and we look forward to working closely with the team to raise awareness of the routes from Newcastle Airport."



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RECRUITERS SPOT SUNDERLAND'S POTENTIAL

A specialist recruitment agency has become the latest company to relocate to Sunderland after being impressed by the growing number of businesses investing in the city.

Pareda Recruitment, which was founded 18 months ago by experienced recruiters Paul Brown and Rebecca Hutchinson, has moved to a new head office at Sunderland Software Centre as it looks to capitalise on the city's growing economy.

Pareda supports clients to recruit specialist candidates for the engineering, manufacturing, energy, contact centre, financial services, fintech and professional services sectors and has a customer-base spanning the length and breadth of the UK.

Initially starting out in North Shields, Pareda moved to Sunderland after being impressed by the momentum being generated in the city by high profile developments such as Riverside Sunderland, the International Advanced Manufacturing Park and the expansion of Port of Sunderland.

Paul explained: "We reached the point where we knew we were going to have to invest in our own dedicated office space if we were to continue growing and as soon as we met the team at Sunderland Software Centre, we knew it was the perfect place for us."

Paul and Rebecca also have plans to fill roles of their own over the next 12 months as they look to add to their team and ensure Pareda continues growing.

NEW COLLABORATION FOR BTS FACADES AND FABRICATIONS



Newton Aycliffe-based BTS Facades and Fabrications has collaborated with Expanded Metal Company on a joint project to launch a new expanded mesh frame system for protecting exterior spaces. This is the first of its kind to be launched in the UK.

The product launch was celebrated by over 100 guests at an event recently held at the manufacturer's head office.

Both companies worked together to design and

create a protective mesh bracket and rail system which is affixed to buildings to create a pleasing aesthetic.

Phil Atkinson, Managing Director at BTS, said: "It was wonderful to greet so many customers and friends to the event to launch something that has been 18 months in the making. We're really proud of the team's creativity and ingenuity which means we are able to not only provide excellent products but lead the market by creating new ones."

ECOMMERCE EXPERTS SEE GROWTH SURGE THANKS TO DEMAND FROM LUXURY FASHION AND BEAUTY BRANDS

The trend for ultra-influencers and luxury names to launch 'direct to consumer' brands is fuelling growth at North East-based international ecommerce agency Fostr.

The business has doubled in size for the second year running and is set to push through the £2m turnover barrier and further expand its 32-strong workforce.

The team has recently delivered ecommerce experiences for a raft of new brands launched by global luxury, fashion and beauty names including Victoria Beckham, Kendall Jenner and Millie Bobby Brown.

Headquartered at North Shields Fish Quay, Fostr

was founded by design director Ryan Foster and specialises in providing consultancy, design and development services to a global client base.

The business is a leading specialist partner agency to one of the world's biggest ecommerce platforms, Shopify Plus, and has recently launched its first headless commerce project utilising the very latest web technologies.

Staff numbers at Fostr have also increased from 18 to 32, along with a recruitment push to fill designer, developer and project manager roles, which include benefits such as the opportunity to travel to work on site with Fostr's global client base.

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W NORTH FURTHER EXPANDS WITH THREE NEW HIRES

A Newcastle-based PR agency has appointed three new members to its growing team taking its headcount to 11.

W North, part of global independent agency, W Communications, has hired three new starters who are all a product of Newcastle University – Hannah Whyte, Laura Greatrex, and Thomas Pearson.

The new recruits will be working with W North's established team, specialising in earned media, events, and influencer marketing for a range of global, national, and regional brands.

Hannah Whyte joins the company having

gained a first-class honours degree in media, communication and cultural studies and following a summer of work experience at W's London office.

Following her undergraduate degree in English Literature and a year in London with a beauty PR agency, Laura Greatrex brings experience working with social influencers and consumer PR to the agency.

Thomas Pearson has existing experience writing for regional publications and joins the team directly after completing his master's degree in Human Geography where his dissertation focused on online and social communication.



NORTH EAST LEP APPOINTS THREE NEW MEMBERS TO ITS BOARD

The North East Local Enterprise Partnership (North East LEP) has announced three new appointments to its Board.

North of Tyne mayoral candidate, John McCabe, and TSG Marine Operations Director, Erika Leadbeater, replace outgoing Board members David Land and Farooq Hakim. Carol Botten, Chief Executive of VONNE (Voluntary Organisations' Network North East) also joins the North East LEP Board to ensure the region's third sector is better represented.

Andrew Hodgson, Chair of the North East LEP said: "As well as playing an active role in helping deliver the North East Strategic Economic Plan, our Board represents the views and opinions of the North East's public, private, education and third sectors.

"They help ensure we work in the best interest of the region and deliver our aim of creating 100,000 more and better jobs by 2024.

John McCabe is the former chair of Gateshead College and immediate past President of North East England Chamber of Commerce. He has held senior positions at some of the North East's largest organisations and launched strategic communications agency, Fusion, in 2013.



TWO TOP APPOINTMENTS AT NORTHUMBERLAND BASED HOUSEBUILDER



Ascent Homes, the award-winning housebuilder, has appointed two senior members of staff to its team to kick-start the New Year.

Gillian Bell is widely experienced and has joined as head of sales and marketing after two decades in the housebuilding industry. During that time, she has worked in several senior roles for leading housebuilders, giving her well-rounded understanding and knowledge of the sector. She will be responsible for spearheading sales at Ascent Homes' developments and will work closely with the land and commercial teams on new sites.

Also strengthening Ascent's growth is the appointment of Robert Murphy, who has started as senior land manager. He also boasts a strong portfolio of previous experience as associate director at a consulting engineers, where he provided strategic planning advice to clients and managed planning applications for various developments.



TOM TAKES PARTNER ROLE WITH HAY & KILNER'S COMMERCIAL LITIGATION TEAM

North East law firm Hay & Kilner has strengthened its senior team with the appointment of experienced commercial litigator Tom Whitfield.

Tom brings more than two decades' experience to the Newcastle-headquartered firm, gained across a wide range of industry sectors and areas of the law, and was most recently a legal director with fellow city firm DAC Beachcroft.

Originally from Yorkshire, his main area of practice has been working on behalf of insurers on negligence cases brought against members of the professional services community, but he also has significant experience of topics including partnership and shareholder disputes, contract claims, boundary disputes and issues between landlords and tenants.

Established in 1946, Hay & Kilner is one of North East England's leading independent law firms and provides a full range of legal services to businesses and individuals from both within and outside the region.



WEDNESDAY 11TH OF MARCH 2020

THE NORTH EAST'S ULTIMATE CYBERSECURITY EVENT

 Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, S Shore Rd, Gateshead NE8 3BA

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



LUKE HEBDITCH

Cloud Security Systems Engineer
at Cisco Umbrella



STEVEN KENNY

Architecture & Engineering
at Axis Communications



PHIL JACKMAN

Director and #CyberFest Lead
at Dynamo North East



TOM JOHNSON

Ethical Hacker &
Social Engineer



JAMES HOPPER

Chief Operating Officer
at SRM Solutions



ISHAAN KOROTANE

Cloud Security Systems Apprentice
at Cisco Umbrella

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Kathryn Taylor

NEW MOVE FOR GORDON BROWN LAW FIRM

North East law firm Gordon Brown Law Firm LLP (GBLF) is opening a custom designed office space in Team Valley, Gateshead to help grow and strengthen its regional presence.

The law firm has signed a 10-year lease, for 12,624sq ft of office space, which will be the firm's third office and will complement office space in Chester-le-Street and Newcastle city centre.

The focus of the move is to have a technology-driven central hub for all of its teams that embraces the changing nature of the legal sector.

As well as a more collaborative working environment, the new offices will have better staff facilities, taking into account a number of suggestions made by GBLF staff during a period of consultation. The upgrade reflects the firm's values and ongoing commitment to wellbeing in the workplace.

Kathryn Taylor, managing partner of Gordon Brown Law Firm said the move will be transformational helping to boost its presence within the local market.

She said: "We started this journey over a year ago and we are all looking forward to the move to Team Valley. I am confident that the new office space will not only be somewhere our teams love to work, but also somewhere that clients will enjoy visiting for years to come too.

Kathryn added: "This move represents a significant milestone for our firm and demonstrates our commitment not only to our people, but also our clients and the North East. The new office space will give us room to continue to grow and give us increased visibility, to ensure we can offer our customers a more personalised service across the region."

The new office design was created in conjunction with fit-out specialist Ultimate (Commercial Interiors) Ltd and features a bespoke modern design, a large staff breakout area and a flexible configuration which will support further expansion and growth.

Steve Cowley, Associate Director at Ultimate said: "We are delighted to have the opportunity to partner with Gordon Brown Law LLP at such an exciting time for their business, the entire design process and project discussions with the Gordon Brown team has been a pleasure.

"By working closely together we have gained an insight to their business, including brand and core values and importantly the personalities within that will be reflected in our finished scheme. There are many impressive features to the proposed design and fit-out for Gordon Brown staff and clients alike to enjoy and we are all looking forward to seeing them in their new home in February."

GBLF offers a range of legal services and advice across all areas of family, residential conveyancing, wills and probate, dispute resolution, corporate and commercial law. For more information on GBLF visit www.gblf.co.uk or get in touch on 0191 388 1778.



COMMENT WITH...

Barry Speker

barryspeker@hotmail.com



A recent London trip provided the delight of seeing Hamilton at the Victoria Palace Theatre. The sell out Cameron MacKintosh show is innovative and electric. The hip hop style may not be easily digestible to all but it does add to the vibrancy of an amazing experience.

Alexander Hamilton's political and personal life were both colourful and controversial. His remarkable role as the most unlikely of the founding fathers of the fledgling United States, rising to being George Washington's number two and leading to his dramatic demise, makes compelling watching. This is so even for those not versed in the details of early American history. Strongly recommended.

There was also the delight of seeing the unique Yuja Wang at the Barbican playing with French cellist Gautier Capuçon the Chopin Cello Sonata in G minor. A dazzling performance. The encore of Piazzola's Le Grand Tango left the audience enraptured, and roaring for more.

A rather calmer musical event was my return as troubadour to granddaughter Vered's class at MMK School in Mill Hill, London, my third gig there. The enticing programme included The Toothbrush Song, Gilly Gilly Ossenfaffer and I Know An Old Lady who Swallowed a Fly and other classics. My agent may be bombarded with bookings.

Let us hope that the powers that be see sense and shelve their plan to make the Tyne Bridge one lane each way. The tail backs and delays impeding entry into and departure from our fine City are already more than an irritation. They are also a significant dampener on our already troubled retail sector, driving increasing numbers to the Metro Centre and other out of town outlets.

The 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz is a time not only to recognise the past horrors and repeat the slogan 'never again'. We need to look at the present and the future and appreciate that we must contend with rising anti-semitism as well as the growing hatred of the Jewish collective through

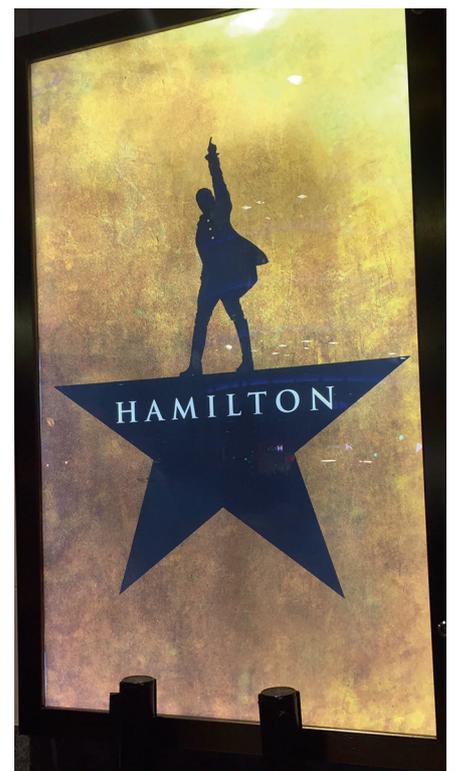
attempts to delegitimise the Jewish state which cloaks the desire of some including Iran, to eradicate the Jewish people.

January 31 2020 will go down in history as a day of major change for our country, when Brexit finally became a reality and Boris "got it done". Not only that but it is the date when I eventually retired from practice as a solicitor after 50 years.

Generously Sintons marked the occasion with a lavish reception at As You Like It. My thanks for all who attended including many consultants and colleagues from Newcastle Hospitals, members of the Chinese community including North East Chinese Community, South Mountain and the Healthy Living Centre, lawyers, clients and representatives from numerous charities and associations in which I am very pleased to be involved. As I begun in the 60s and we are now in the 20s, this is my seventh decade in the law. I am grateful for the kind speeches by Mark Quigley, Jimmy Tsang and Andy Welch - as well as from Sarah and Robert who had come up from London for the occasion.

The future will give more time for reading, sitting as a Judge, dubious singing with my guitar, mediocre but enthusiastic golf, and turning up at St James Park. That will not be too time-consuming as it is only worth getting there for injury time. Importantly I will continue my columns in Northern Insight - sighs of relief all round!

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may be
bombarded
with
bookings...**
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Our first 2020 speaker at Jesmond Dene House delivered a motivating presentation to our guests, our thanks to Neil Stephenson for speaking and to everyone who attended.



EXCLUSIVE BUSINESS

BOOKING NOW FOR MONDAY 24TH FEBRUARY...

Speaker - NIGEL JOHN MILLS CBE
The Lakes Distillery

Nigel John Mills CBE is a chartered accountant whose career path has led to him becoming the co-founder of England's premier Whisky distillery, The Lakes Distillery.



Venue - Jesmond Dene House, Newcastle upon Tyne
Date - Monday 24th January, arrive 11.30 lunch at 12.15
Price - £55pp to include a two-course lunch and coffee

BOOKING NOW FOR MONDAY 9TH MARCH 2020...

Speaker - GRAHAM ROBB
Recognition PR & Marketing

Graham is the owner of Recognition PR and Marketing and has been part of the company for over 30 years, regularly working with some of the leading national and international business and political leaders



Venue - Wynyard Hall, Stockton-on-Tees
Date - Monday 9th March, arrive 11.30, lunch 12.15
Price - £55pp to include a two-course lunch and coffee

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IN CONVERSATION WITH...

ERIN KIRTLEY

Regional Team Manager, Concept Personnel

Launched in 2002 Concept Personnel are the leading creative, marketing and digital recruitment agency in Newcastle. They also have a satellite office in Edinburgh covering roles in Scotland and an office in Milton Keynes covering the South of the UK. Michael Grahamslaw met with Regional Team Manager, Erin Kirtley, to talk about her journey so far.

What were your career ambitions growing up?

It's fair to say I never envisaged a career in recruitment. I have always been a bit arty and creative so did a degree in Interactive Media Design at Northumbria. I spent a year working in a design job, before moving into account management. I then, rather cheekily approached Jo at Concept, and told her I would make a good at recruiter as I enjoy problem solving, mediating and I'm a good judge of character. I became a consultant in 2015.

Tell us about your current role?

I was promoted to run the Newcastle operation in 2018 when Jo moved and opened our Milton Keynes office. I'm super proud of the team here. We all work really hard to fill roles in digital, design, marketing and communications. The North East is a great place to live and work and I'm passionate about retaining our fantastic talent in the region.

Tell us about your team?

There are currently seven people in the business, five in the Newcastle office. We currently have a vacancy for a Junior Recruiter/Resourcer in Newcastle so we're expanding, and we have plans to add another person in the next quarter too. It's an exciting time at Concept. They are a truly awesome bunch and they're as invested as I am in changing the negative perception of recruiters.

What are you currently working on?

As well as working on my current vacancies, I'm constantly working on raising my own profile in the industry with a focus on brand profile raising for Concept Personnel too. I do a lot of networking and spend time doing presentations at local colleges to advise our graduating students on careers in this industry. With the skills shortages in the digital sector, it's important that we are visible to emerging talent and investing a little time at the start of their careers goes a long way. They're our clients and candidates of the future after all.

What are your biggest challenges?

I'd say it's probably juggling my workload. As Team Leader it's my job to make sure the team is happy and motivated and productive whilst at the same time handling my own vacancies, networking and profile raising. Sometimes there just aren't enough hours in the day. It's all made worthwhile when you find someone their dream job though or when you can help a student to get their pitch right and they get their career off the ground because of my advice. Honestly, I wouldn't change any part of my job for the world.

What is the best piece of advice you have been given?

"Seek first to understand, then be understood." A great quote from Stephen Covey's inspirational book 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People'. Jo bought me the book when I first started at Concept and this one stuck with me, it makes such good sense.

How do you see the industry evolving in the next five to ten years?

It's only going to get more exciting and I can't wait. I think video interviewing is going to be the next big thing. We've just launched Concept Live Interview to stay ahead of the curve. It allows clients to screen applicants by video so they can get a real handle on what they're going to be like at the actual face to face interview. The time and cost saving is absolutely brilliant. I was reading up about cluster hiring recently too. Where companies hire teams at the same time in a hunger games type style so during the interview process you get to see how a team gel together. Fascinating! I fully intend to stay ahead of the curve and learn as much as possible about new hiring techniques and emerging tech so that I can keep Concept ahead of the curve.

What advice would you give to your 18 year old self?

There is no planned path to your career or life and it's way more interesting to figure it out as you go along, just roll with the punches and don't sweat the small stuff. Failure is not necessarily failing, it's a learning experience. It's taken me a while to understand this one but as a Team Leader I can see that every time we fail or make a little mistake, it's a positive move towards the successful outcome.

Who are your Heroes and Mentors?

Our founder Jo Carter has given me lots of great advice, she introduced me to David Baxter who taught me a lot about sales, negotiation and understanding people. I also have some great clients and advisers around me who I often use as a sounding board; Wayne Halton of MHW and Pete Daykin of WordNerds have both helped me a lot over the last few years of my career.

How do you like to unwind?

Travelling, reading and socialising.

Favourite...

Book: Way too many to list!

CD: Fleetwood Mac - *Rumours*, Kayne West - *The College Dropout* and Maroon5 - *Songs About Jane*. An eclectic taste, I know.

DVD: *Pretty Woman* - a guilty pleasure!

For further information visit the website www.conceptpersonnel.co.uk



READ ALL ABOUT IT - JOIN THE COMIC CLUB

How often have you either popped into your local newsagent to buy a magazine and found that they haven't got it, or it's sold out, or possibly tried to go online only to find that you can't actually buy the magazine online because the publisher doesn't do that sort of thing?



Thankfully, there is a way around this problem.

Go to Unique Magazines.

John Porrett is the driving force behind this fascinating business. If you go onto his website uniquemagazines.co.uk you will find over 3500 different magazines. If for some reason the magazine you're looking for isn't there (unlikely), give him a call and he'll go and source it for you. Every single magazine can be ordered from his company's website and mailed out to you.

And that's what thousands of customers do in 106 different countries.

If you take a look at the responses from customers on Google, you will find a typical message reads along the lines of..."I live in Australia and couldn't source my favourite hobby magazine. I discovered that Unique Magazines in NE England could find it for me so I ordered a copy. Four days later it was delivered through my letterbox here in Melbourne. I took out a subscription and, for the last three years, the magazine has arrived like clockwork, on time, every time, every month."

It sounds crazy. People from all over the world are buying their magazines on line from a company based in Swalwell in Gateshead.

John started off in the magazines business in 1992 as a stock controller for Mills newsagents and convenience stores. He rose to become the company's commercial director. However, by 2009 John decided to concentrate all of his efforts on developing Unique Magazines. Within two years, Unique Magazines had notched-up sales in excess of £1 million. He arranges some magazines to be sent to customers directly from the publishers, but over 60 per cent are sent out from John's premises in Swalwell.

But the time has now come for John to let his team of 10 staff concentrate on running Unique Magazines while he begins work on another equally fascinating venture.

The Comic Club.

Many of you reading this will have been brought up in an era where there wasn't a plethora of social media distractions like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc. The internet really only got going to any great extent in the mid-1990s and mobile phones were a luxury for the few. Satellite TV appeared in 1990 but it's only over the last fifteen years or so that we've seen the number of channels increase rapidly.

So, how did we entertain ourselves? Thankfully, if you were fortunate enough to have supportive parents, you got to read comics and books.

"The earlier we can encourage children to start reading, the greater chance they have of doing well at school," said John. "Reading is a habit. Okay, technology certainly has its place in the learning process, but a child sitting with a parent or grandparent reading an interesting and stimulating comic, can make education hugely engaging. It's a case of getting the right balance between technology and magazines so, here at Unique Magazines, we've devised a way for children to receive a monthly package which contains two magazines and an activity journal that are relevant to their age range (7-11). The journal encourages them to search for material and make some notes. The magazines are sufficiently informative that they can be kept and used for future reference."

A brand new Comic Club website is being launched this month which will allow parents and grandparents to subscribe to the Comic club on a recurring monthly payment of £9.95. The Comic Club will become something that children and parents will look forward to receiving through the post

"We've already had terrific feedback from local authorities, schools and help centres," added John. "As well as making the packages available to parents and grandparents who want to encourage children to read, we also see the Comic Club as being a tool to help those children who come from disadvantaged backgrounds who perhaps don't normally get a chance to read a comic or book. Schools see the Comic Club as a way of tempting children to read and become inquisitive."

It's acknowledged that children benefit from family engagement and spending time with a parent or grandparent. Sitting together and enjoying a comic will help the child with their reading, writing and creativity. It also helps them develop good social interaction skills.

So, what sort of magazines will be delivered as part of the package? There will be comics like Horrible Histories, Eco Kids, Brilliant Brains, Whiz Pop Bang and National Geographic Kids, all of which feature stunning photography and thought-provoking articles. The activity sheet will relate to the content of the magazines.

The Comic Club website (www.thecomclub.co.uk) will also be a mine of fun and information. There's a Kids Zone which has loads of videos and fascinating articles. There's a Parent Zone which features useful articles on topics such as healthy eating and keeping active. Parents will find Ask the Teacher to be a valuable resource to ask educational related questions.

But what made John decide to launch the Comic Club?

"My grandchildren are the same as other children; they love techy gadgets, but they've been read to from an early age which has certainly helped with their overall development. I always notice that when they have a fun and engaging comic in front of them, they start to interact and ask questions. Why can't all children have that sort of opportunity? Consequently, I have devised a cost-effective way to help children learn AND have some fun. The mantra of Unique Magazines is "Always looking to make a change and make a real difference." I'm putting those words into practice."

TESTIMONIALS

"The Comic Club is a brilliant resource which puts family engagement at the heart of the initiative. This innovative local business is genuinely supportive of improving the learning and development of children and young people. This is especially important in a time that some children are more interested in social media and gaming. A highly recommended publication."

Marjorie Hunter, CEO, North East Counselling Services CIC

"As a parent, publisher and lifelong avid reader I think the Comic Club is a fantastic initiative from a fantastic local business. Anything that promotes family engagement should be applauded and I could not recommend higher."

Michael Grahamslaw, Founder and Managing Director, Northern Insight

We Deliver 1000's of Magazines Worldwide!

If you'd like more information about Unique Magazines or the Comic Club, you can contact John and his team by calling 0191 270 2805 or email John directly on john.porrett@uniquemagazines.co.uk

ARE YOU AN EFFECTIVE LEADER?

Astute.Work provides management consultancy, PR and marketing to organisations wanting to articulate their purpose, manage change, engage with stakeholders and build profits both ethically and sustainably. Here managing director Sarah Waddington looks at what makes an effective leader.

In my last Northern Insight column I wrote about the competencies needed to be a strong director, using the Institute of Director's Competency Framework. This article is about being an effective leader and some of the key components to this role.

Vision

Leadership is the ability to deliver a vision based on an organisation's goals.

It's related to the forward direction of the business and sets out a shared purpose that empowers employees to deliver what's needed.

Effective leaders ensure a vision is motivating, creates a sense of belonging, establishes a standard of excellence and provides a clear pathway between the present and the future.

Making sure it is well articulated and communicated throughout the whole organisation ensures every member of the team knows what you're collectively trying to achieve.

Engagement

Engagement is about co-ordinating activities and motivating employees to come on a shared journey, ensuring everyone is aware of the part they play in making the vision a reality. Effective leaders build a culture that enables an organisation to perform well. They establish and execute good strategies.

According to the Chartered Management Institute organisational culture is made up of "shared values, beliefs and assumptions about how people should behave and interact, how decisions should be made and how work activities should be carried out. Key factors in an organisation's culture include its history and environment as well as the people who lead and work for it."

Effective leaders link good behaviours to business objectives, reinforce the right thinking, and ensure the culture evolves according to the organisation's needs as time goes on.

Decision-making

The ability to make decisions is one of the key skills of an effective leader – and one of the most challenging. When working in real time, directors



Sarah Waddington

may not always have access to all the information needed or data may be imperfect; there may be time constraints; there may be conscious or unconscious bias; and often there are differing levels of uncertainty.

All of this means making logical and informed decisions is not as straight forward as it first appears.

Having a formal decision-making framework can significantly help reduce risk when evaluating courses of actions that affect the business. It can also help increase the speed and transparency of the process.

I recently completed an Executive Leadership course at Oxford University's Saïd Business School. It advocates following an adaptation of Peter Drucker's decision-making stages, as follows:

- Categorise and define the problem
- Gather information
- Identify alternatives and consider the consequences

- Weight the evidence
- Choose among alternatives
- Take action
- Review the decision

Making sure this is adopted across all teams internally ensures consistency of approach and a basic quality standard.

Continuous improvements

Ultimately good leadership skills are not something that you either have or don't - leadership is a set of traits and behaviours that can be honed through continuous development.

The most important role of being an effective leader is empowering employees to think independently and support them as they progress on their own leadership journey.

Helping those around you to become more effective will make you a better boss, but most of all help your organisation become more sustainable and thrive.

If you'd like help with any of the above, please contact Sarah Waddington at Astute.Work at sarah@astute.work or on 07702 162704.



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Contact Sarah Waddington - sarah@astute.work / 07702162704
www.astute.work

NEW YEAR - NEW MORTGAGE?

For many of us, 2019 was a strange year financially and economically with the headlines being dominated by one ongoing saga of...well you know it without me saying it!

Alternatively, 2019 may have been a year where you intended to (and perhaps did!) lose weight, drink less, exercise more etc. All of these aims should be applauded, but financial health and wellbeing should also be at the top of the New Year agenda.

The newspaper headlines often focus on savings which can be made by reviewing areas such as utility bills and costs of shopping, areas which can produce a gradual saving each month over time. Many of these ideas are also targeted by the price comparison sites as they offer small savings in a quick and easy manner.

A mortgage review though can produce significant savings both month on month by lowering repayments, and long term by securing a lower rate and possibly reducing the mortgage term. To many, it may seem a daunting prospect, however, by using a mortgage broker, much of this pain and time can be removed.

After an initial no obligation conversation in the region of 45 minutes, a good quality broker



Paul Hardingham, Director of Innovate Mortgages and Loans

will know whether they are able to assist and also broadly how much you might be able to save or perhaps raise capital to clear credit commitments, fund a Buy to Let, help children etc. In addition, they will deal with the lender and all of the paperwork so that you don't have to be too concerned, and your time investment is kept to a minimum.

Given everything that is going on with Brexit, now really is a good time to review the biggest financial transaction that any of us ever undertake. Interest rates are currently at all-time lows with many experts now suggesting that interest rates may be

about to rise. So as we enter a potentially volatile period for the UK financially, why not take this early opportunity of a no obligation mortgage review to establish your options and make this one of your New Year's resolutions that is actually kept?

Local, face-to-face, independent mortgage advice can smooth the process - we are ready to take your call and offer assistance! If you would like to see what our clients have to say about us we have in excess of one hundred Google 5* reviews on our website (www.innovatempl.co.uk) from satisfied clients!

Paul Hardingham and Tony Ibson are Mortgage and Protection Advisers at Innovate Mortgages and Loans. Both have over 20 years of experience advising individuals and businesses across the North East of England. They can be contacted for bespoke advice at paul@innovatempl.co.uk or tony@innovatempl.co.uk or call 0191 284 3723.

Your home is at risk if you do not keep up repayments on a mortgage or other loan secured on it.

WE ARE INDEPENDENT AND PROUD TO BE CHARTERED



Vintage, Chartered Financial Planners are an independent financial planning firm based in Stockton-on-Tees, and have been providing advice on pensions, investments, retirement planning, mortgages and both personal and business protection since 1988.

During those 30+ years, the firm has continued to grow and adapt to meet the ever-changing demands of not only their clients, but the financial services profession as a whole.

The firm now encompasses 18 staff, including six advisers, all of whom share the same values, ethos and beliefs to make a positive difference to the lives of each of their clients. Vintage are proud to be recognised as a Chartered firm, one of only around 900 in the UK, according to the Chartered Institute of Insurance (CII). The firm's independence means that it is not tied to any particular providers or products, simply tailoring advice to meet their clients' needs.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

A significant part of Vintage's day-to-day business involves pension planning and retirement advice for clients. Whether it be looking to build up a pot large enough to support you in retirement

or making sense of the various options available when you do decide to stop working; these are complex and potentially life-changing decisions, with Vintage providing the expertise to help clients make the right decisions.

As previously noted, Vintage also provide advice on other areas of financial planning such as investing surplus capital or income for the future, mortgages for those looking to climb - or simply get on - the property ladder and ensuring that you and your family are protected should the worst happen. By having experts in all of these fields, Vintage ensure that clients' circumstances are considered from a holistic point of view, leaving no stone unturned to provide peace of mind and a sound financial plan for the future.

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

Embracing innovation is also an important part of the firm's future. The introduction of the

new Vintage View portal provides clients with 24/7 access to their pension and investment valuations, secure messaging, property valuations, keeping track of spending and a document store amongst other features. This technology aims to help clients keep a closer eye on their finances, by allowing them to hold all of this important information in one place under one simple login.

The way in which Vintage charge for their services also aims to challenge the status quo. Gone, is the traditional and opaque 'percentage of assets under advice' model, instead a flat fee basis displayed in pounds and pence is preferred. This means that clients know exactly how much the advice will cost, with this being agreed in writing before any work commences. Vintage also offer a free initial meeting for prospective clients, with no obligation to proceed after this point.

If you would like to know more about Vintage and the services the firm offer, please visit www.vintage-fp.com or call the office on 01642 525050.

Vintage Investment Services are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). FCA Number: 142806.



CO-WORKING HITS POPULAR HIGH IN UK CITIES

Commerce House brings Middlesbrough it's very own option.

The UK, as well as the rest of the world, is experiencing a wave of popularity for co-working, with offices across the major cities opening their doors to draw in more self employed or travelling professionals.

However, Commerce House in Middlesbrough was clearly ahead of its time in the region as it opened its newly refurbished doors two years ago, as a business community that offered office space, meeting space, virtual tenancy, hot desking and co-working.

Co-working was a phrase that was coined by Bernard DeKoven, a video designer in 1999 meaning people who work together on a project. In 2005 Brad Neuberg opening the first co-working space, and changed the meaning of the word as we understand it in 2020. His co-working space was in San-Francisco and the working option has grown in popularity ever since, hitting an all time high at the end of last year, when more than three million people co-worked across 19,000 co-working spaces!

At Commerce House, which is conveniently positioned on Exchange Square by Middlesbrough Train Station, there are a number of co-working



Christine Huntington

spaces, and options on prices for interested parties. The space is currently proving popular as people in start-ups, new businesses, or those who need to travel a lot, share the luxury surroundings. Facilities manager, Christine Huntington, said: "The number of co-workers is expected to reach nearly 26,000

by 2025. The largest floor space for co-working is in the USA, and the largest number of co-workers is in Asia-Pacific, but right here in Middlesbrough we have been enjoying the trend for the last two years very successfully.

"Throughout the UK statistics showing that shared office space is becoming a major industry, and although freelancers are the main fans, many corporate players are also buying in, as well as the self employed or smaller companies. It is not about cost-cutting, it is about space well used, creating a community, introducing a social element to the working day and enjoying flexibility, which is all important in today's modern business world."

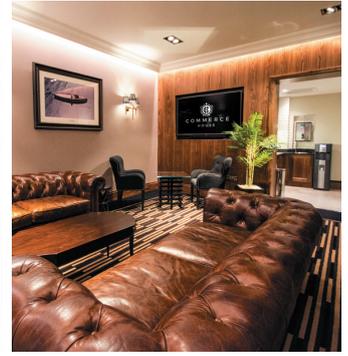
Interestingly, it is thought that 40% of co-workers are women and centres in London like The AllBright certainly highlight this choice. Commerce House is the perfect environment for ladies and men, with luxury facilities, five star interior and a manned reception, offering safety and security at all times.

Christine concluded: "If you work from home, or travel a lot and are lonely, then you should consider talking to us. There are now statistics that show that co-working reduces loneliness and makes worker happier – what's not to love?"

Information on statistics taken from smallbizgenius. More information on Commerce House's co-working options is available at www.commerce-house.co.uk. If you are interested in viewing the space or make an enquiry please contact Christine@commercechambers.co.uk

READY FOR BUSINESS

And with offices
filling fast!



Commerce House, the outstanding, iconic, grade II listed building in the heart of Middlesbrough is now fully refurbished and has released the last of its stunning office space. With rooms available for two to fourteen people.

With enviable facilities, Commerce House is the perfect opportunity for a head office, satellite office or to expand operations within the prestigious TS1 area of Middlesbrough in the heart of the newest regenerated location in the region. And now we have some great deals available for a limited time only!

**To find out more and to take advantage of this offer, you'd better get moving!
Contact Christine Huntington on 01642 917 116 or Christine@commercechambers.co.uk**

Your business can be part of the growing Commerce House community!

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- CUTTING EDGE TECHNOLOGY



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CASCADE BOLSTERS CLIENT SUPPORT



Amy Bradshaw

Leading cash savings expert and fintech company, Cascade Cash Management, has invested again in growing the team, this time to extend the client services support team further.

Amy Bradshaw is the latest to boost the numbers of the ever-growing team, joining as client support assistant. Having moved to the North East from Leicester to be near friends she met whilst travelling in Australia, Amy initially joined the team on a temporary basis but has now been made permanent.

Amy's role involves supporting Client Support Manager Emma Hutchinson's client portfolio, where she undertakes daily ongoing monitoring of the rates on savings accounts within the Cascade online savings portal. Amy ensures that all clients are aware of any rate changes and offers alternative options to ensure that the best returns on cash deposits are captured.

Cascade Cash Management (Cascade) is an independent and transparent service created to generate enhanced cash returns and increase

protection on deposits through professional cash management.

The Cascade team can administer funds through their unique portal on behalf of clients or depositors can use the portal to manage their own savings with the dedicated support of Cascade. Partners including IFA's, solicitors, attorneys, accountants and many more can also self-brand the product for presentation to their own clients.

Managing Director, Dr Emma Black, is delighted at the benefit Amy's appointment brings to her team and clients. She said: "Amy really impressed the team with her performance whilst she was on a temporary contract, and when we came to create a fulltime permanent position she was the obvious choice. She has joined us at a crucial time when our deposits and client base is reaching an all new high, therefore, it is imperative that our client service

managers have the support of talented assistants. As always, we are very keen that all clients, new and existing, get the best possible service and Amy's people skills fit perfectly with this company ethos."

This is Amy's first role in finance, but she brings with her skills gained in the education sector where she was involved in customer care and administration at the National Space Academy. Amy said:

"Having joined in September on a temporary arrangement, I totally immersed myself in the company and in a role in finance and I must admit I absolutely love it. I am over the moon to have been offered this permanent position, as it is such an exciting time to join Cascade. Liaising with the clients gives me a buzz and I am enjoying learning new skills as well. I am very much looking forward to seeing the possibilities for my career in the company in the years ahead!"

More information on the company and career opportunities is available at www.cascade.co.uk



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YOUR EMPLOYEES HAVE A VOICE. WHAT ARE THEY SAYING AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Many of us wouldn't think twice about leaving a review for a product or service, and we often take note of the views of others before making key spending decisions.

Whether your hard earned cash is spent on a new smart television or a dream holiday, you are more than likely check the 'star rating' before making a final decision.

In the same way, the emergence of sites such as Glassdoor and the new employer review capabilities of recruitment site Indeed, employees can now rate their employer just as easily as their weekend B&B. If former employees are taking time to write reviews, you can be just as sure that potential recruits are reading them.

Are you confident of being rated as a great employer?

Giving your employees a voice has long been considered to be an invaluable part of a good HR strategy. It is important to understand employees' views, opinions, concerns and suggestions and it is just as important that the information gained is used to influence workplace decisions. Employee voice goes further than simply asking for the views of your employees. It describes active involvement and participation, recognising the importance of employee ideas and contributions. Forums for this tends to be face to face and very interactive, led by employees and often providing them with access to senior leaders in the business.

The ACAS productivity framework recommends seven levers for workplaces to unlock their potential to be more productive. Employee voice is one of these seven and is becoming increasingly important to both employers and employees alike.



Matthew Taylor, author of Good work: the Taylor review of modern working practices, suggests that 'Employee voice isn't just a warm and cuddly agenda – it's a hard-edged agenda about making sure your company is productive and innovative'. This is an important message for managers who may equate employee voice with trade union representatives. Employee voice, as with any new initiative, requires management 'buy in'. It is a culture shift for many organisations but with many potential benefits.

- Improved communication, often a challenge!
- Improved processes, efficiencies and productivity, a move from 'it's always been done that way'.
- Generates a learning culture, great for continuous improvement.
- More innovative approach to ideas, better informed problem solving.
- Better informed employees, greater level of customer service.
- Greater employee motivation, happier people.
- Happier employees, great for supporting good mental health.

- Better employee engagement, working to a common goal.
- Better employee retention, employees stay for longer.

Companies invest a lot of time, effort and money in recruiting the right employees, why not ensure they also harness the knowledge and experience they bring. Companies can potentially reap the benefit, and employees are often more engaged because of it.

Employees are likely to stay with you for longer, and when they do decide it is time to move on, your company is more likely to receive that sought after 5-star review.

Conversely if employees do not feel listened to, engaged at work and without a channel to speak freely they potentially could take to forums and platforms to voice their concerns in the external world.



For help defining how HR can play a key role in helping businesses to harness employee voice effectively, please contact Rebecca Finlinson, HR Consultant, at rebecca.finlinson@rsmuk.com

FUND SUSPENSIONS – REVIEWING YOUR INVESTMENTS & PENSIONS

You might have recently read about the suspension of the Woodford Equity Income Fund, one of the most popular funds for UK investors. There have also been several property funds suspended over the last few months and immediately after the EU referendum in June 2016.

What is a fund suspension?

When a fund is suspended investors are not able to buy, sell, and in some cases transfer the funds until the suspension is lifted. Suspensions usually occur due to requests for a large volume of assets to be withdrawn from the fund in a short timeframe. Funds that invest in assets that are difficult to sell quickly for a fair value, such as property, we believe are more at risk of being suspended.

Why are funds suspended?

A suspension is imposed to ensure the manager of the fund has enough time to obtain a fair value for the assets they are selling. This should ensure the remaining investors are treated as fairly as those withdrawing assets. The investment provider will continue to manage the fund throughout the suspension.

How do suspensions affect investors?

Investors will not be able to take withdrawals, income, a tax-free cash lump sum, or switch to alternative investments. Funds can remain suspended for several months and potentially years. Sometimes the value of a fund will have fallen because assets can only be sold for less than their value at the date of the suspension to meet the demand for withdrawals.

How do Prismatic Wealth try to avoid fund suspensions?

We meet regularly with investment providers and one of our key considerations



is ensuring our clients will have access to their money when they need it. We look to identify where funds could have problems if there were many withdrawals in a short space of time and what they are doing to mitigate this risk. If the answers are unsatisfactory, we won't recommend the fund to our clients.

Our Investment Committee meet quarterly to discuss our client's portfolios and there is a robust system of challenge to ensure we don't recommend funds that might be at risk of a suspension.

How Prismatic Wealth can help?

At Prismatic Wealth we have over 30 years' experience reviewing investments and pensions to ensure they are suitable for your needs.

If you would like to speak to an adviser about your existing investments or pension, contact us on 01642 661600 or enquiries@prismaticwealth.co.uk



PRISMATIC WEALTH

Providing private and corporate clients with bespoke, tailored financial solutions.

With over 30 years experience as financial planning specialists, Prismatic Wealth have the expertise to assist you with life planning, retirement planning and investments.



Retirement Planning:

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- Defined Benefit Pensions
- Pension Consolidation and Transfers
- Pension Drawdown and Annuities
- Self Invested Personal Pensions (SIPP)



Life Planning:

- Estate Planning
- Protection Planning
- Reaching Retirement
- Pensions and Divorce



Investment Services:

- Investment Planning Advice
- Investment Review

To speak to us contact:

Tel: 01642 661600

Email: enquiries@prismaticwealth.co.uk

Prismatic House,
26 Falcon Court,
Preston Farm Business Park,
Stockton-on-Tees,
TS18 3TX



www.prismaticwealth.co.uk

SIX STEPS TO MAKE RETIREMENT YOUR RESOLUTION

There's nothing like New Year to remind us of the passage of time but whether you're chomping at the bit to retire or you can't stand the dreaded 'R' word, retirement's something we all need to plan for.



Luke Watkinson, one of our Lifestyle Financial Planners

Even if you've a few years yet, it's worth making sure everything's in place so you know what you need and how much it'll cost.

Here's six ways to start planning your retirement:

1. Decide what you want

Do you want to ski in the alps, travel the world or take up a new hobby? Before you can work out if you have enough, you need to decide what you want to do.

2. Think about when you'd like to retire

Do you want to retire early or work as long as possible? A timeframe will help you work out how long your money needs to last.

3. Find out what you already have

Have you contributed to the same pension for years or do you have lots of different ones? It's important to know what you have so you can see if you've enough for the

retirement lifestyle you want.

4. Decide whether you need to increase contributions

Once you know what you have you can decide whether you've enough to retire or whether you need to boost your pot while you're still working.

5. Understand your options

You need to understand your pension options and what's best for your future, whether that's drawdown, an annuity or something else.

6. Get specialist help

An independent pension and retirement financial adviser will be able to give you clear information on your choices and help you work out how much you'll need for the lifestyle you want.

Why not let Joslin Rhodes help you plan the retirement you really want?

Pop in and speak to us at The Planning Rooms in Stockton or Newcastle. To book your free meeting or find out more visit joslinrhodes.co.uk or call Newcastle 0191 249 3828 or Stockton 01642 04 4914.

THE END OF THE TAX YEAR IS LOOMING, HERE'S OUR ADVICE

We're sorry we have to be the bearer of bad news, but we thought it'd be best we remind you whilst you still have enough time to get sorted; the end of the Tax Year 19/20 is on the horizon, and here's what you need to do to make sure you're organised for those all-important deadlines...

First of all, you need to be organised. File any paperwork as and when it comes in, and don't leave it all unsorted until the deadline looms, no one wants to deal with that amount of stress, let us tell you.

If you're a self-employed business owner, you need to be able to track each and every transaction your business is involved in, including invoices, statements and bills, so don't let it mount up, simply just divide your receipts and invoices into incoming and outgoing folders.

Next up, bookkeeping. A simple spreadsheet may do, or you may need a helping hand from our team here at KP Simpson with this one. However you choose to do it, we recommend staying on top of it, at least on a weekly basis.

Deductions is another thing to consider. Phone bills, travel costs, capital allowances on equipment and even dining, whatever business expenses need to be deducted, you need to keep track of. Now this one is for your own benefit, so we highly recommend keeping up to date with this.

Another thing to consider are simplified expenses. For business vehicle costs and working from home, sole traders and partnerships can use a system of flat rates for calculating costs, known as simplified expenses. We recommend that throughout the tax year you record your business miles and the hours you work at home, then apply these flat rates to work out your expenses at the end of the year.



Andrew Potts

If you're finding all of this a little overwhelming, we're here to help. At KP Simpson we can help you and advise you on the best practices for your business. Call us on 0191 420 0550 or email us at info@kpsimpson.co.uk.



GOOD NEWS FOR THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

By Gary Fawcett

Just over a year ago, in the final quarter of 2018, we were witnessing a synchronised slowdown in global growth and a concurrent downturn in equity markets, which meant investors were entering 2019 in a downbeat mood.

Nevertheless, we still expected that equities would outperform cash and bonds over the year, due to attractive equity valuations and a US president determined to boost the US economy.

Happily, this was the case. It has been a bumpy ride in some markets but the UK's FTSE100 ended the year up by 12%, while the FTSE250 had a particularly good year, up by 25%. The US market continued to hit record highs – its S&P500 index rose by 29% – while China's Shanghai Composite Index rose by 22%, even as its economy slowed and the trade war hit its exports.

Despite strong returns from equity markets, 2019 was a mixed bag in terms of economic growth with a manufacturing slowdown weighing on growth in the US and more severely in Germany and China. The year ended, however, with signs of life returning to that part of the market which we expect to gather pace as 2020 progresses.

Perhaps the most important factor for the year ahead is the possible resolution of the trade dispute between the US and China. Markets reacted enthusiastically to news in December that a partial trade deal had been struck, although it has yet to be signed. If completed, it will be good news for the global economy as it reduces uncertainty and should boost investment and hiring. America says negotiations will begin immediately, but China may want to wait until after the US elections in November, when there may be a more amenable incumbent in the White House.

Our base case view remains that the trade war

between the US and China will not escalate to the extent that it results in a serious growth downturn, and President Trump will want the US economy to be in good shape to boost his chances of re-election in November.

But just as it seemed that progress was being made on the trade war, President Trump has created another geo-political flashpoint by ordering the air strike that killed one of Iran's most senior military leaders. The obvious concern is that it may escalate into a conflict that could drag in other countries and involve some of the world's biggest oil producers. It is a situation that will need close monitoring as it develops during 2020.

Encouragingly, China has started the year in an assertive manner, with more measures to stimulate economic activity. It has cut the capital reserve requirement for its banks, which Chinese authorities said would have the effect of injecting 800bn yuan (£88bn) of liquidity into its financial system, freeing up cash to lend to businesses and consumers. It also changed a key benchmark interest rate to lower borrowing costs for businesses, which should boost investment and hiring.

In the UK, the end of the era of austerity, as promised in the Conservative manifesto, will provide some support to the economy, but there is still uncertainty around Brexit despite the threat of a second referendum being removed. Boris Johnson's refusal to allow an extension to the negotiating period increases the risk of a no-deal withdrawal before the transition period expires at the end of 2020.

This has already led to a sharp drop in the pound, although this in itself is a mixed blessing; with a large share of the revenues of UK companies coming from overseas, many stocks benefit when the pound falls, providing some offset to the rise in living costs that the weak pound causes. Crucially, however, the spectre of a disorderly Brexit may still deter investment in the UK, both by UK companies and by foreign investors.

Looking ahead, the outlook for the traditional elements of economic growth are mixed. The household sector is by far the biggest part of the UK economy and house prices have historically been an important driver of retail spending. National average house prices are still rising, but only just. If the past is a good guide, retail sales growth will fall.

There are enough positives as we enter 2020 for equities to outperform bonds and cash once more. While some notable risks remain, we are alert to the opportunities and challenges that these present. That is why we manage diversified portfolios of asset classes and geographical regions which can capture the opportunities that are thrown up by any market corrections or price shifts in particular assets, creating selective buying opportunities for our clients.

Following such a strong year in 2019 we have to be realistic about the prospects for 2020 but that doesn't mean being pessimistic. As legendary investor Peter Lynch pointed out: "Far more money has been lost by investors preparing for corrections, or trying to anticipate corrections, than has been lost in corrections themselves."



A NEW RECRUIT AT RUTHERFORD HUGHES LIMITED

The directors of Rutherford Hughes Ltd, David Hughes and Peter Rutherford, are delighted to welcome a new adviser and wealth manager, Denise Graham.

Denise brings 20 years' experience in financial services and great enthusiasm to look after her clients and to put them first.

"We were introduced to Denise and were impressed by her drive and commitment," said Peter Rutherford. David Hughes added, "Denise very quickly grasped our investment philosophy and business process identifying the value of what we offer to her clients. We are looking forward to working with her and developing the firm into the next decade and beyond."

David further explained, "our investment proposition was conceived over 15 years ago as a solution to biased stock picking, ensuring healthy diversity with a growth bias. The investment strategies have delivered some very impressive

returns through all market conditions to the delight of all involved".

"The investment management and the back-office functionality are business process systems that we are looking to offer to other advisers who may, in due course, be seeking to exit their business. We could then, seamlessly, provide them with that exit and provide their clients with the proposition they have become used to."

Rutherford Hughes Limited provides advice to individuals, business owners, trustees and Court Deputies. The service covers gathering the facts, establishing the objectives, researching the solutions, providing cash flow modelling, agreeing and implementing the financial plan.

The firm is independent and is not tied to any

provider, unlike many advisory firms in the region.

"Our independence is at the very heart of what we are and what we do. We want the best solution for our clients, no matter who provides it," Peter confirmed. He added "We specialise in investment and wealth management, IHT planning, pensions and retirement income planning, trustee investment and Court of Protection investment."

Denise interjected, "One of the real attractions for me is just how approachable the guys are. They take their roles very seriously but there is lots of humour bouncing around the office."

David added "We provide any potential client with a first meeting free of charge. It is important to establish if we can be of assistance and that both parties feel they can work together."

Peter Rutherford, 07717 205 988 • peter.rutherford@rutherfordhughes.com

David Hughes, 07803 777 760 • david.hughes@rutherfordhughes.com

Denise Graham, 07957 660 493 • denise.graham@rutherfordhughes.com

office: 0191 229 9600 • www.rutherfordhughes.com

GETTING TO KNOW DENISE GRAHAM

Rutherford Hughes Ltd's new wealth manager.

How did you get into or what attracted you to financial services?

I would love to say that when I was at school, I dreamed about working in financial services. However, that's not true and who does? I fell into it back in 1996 and stayed because I loved it. Things have changed so much over the years, but I am still as passionate as ever.

What do you enjoy most about the job?

Every day is different. No two clients are the same. I get to meet so many wonderful people every day, whether it be new clients or working with other professionals. The relationships you build with your clients is so strong because you are so involved in their business and personal lives, that you feel almost one of the family.

What do you think you do really well?

I have been told that I have a great way of explaining complicated, or what some people may describe as dull subjects, in very simple terms and can actually make talking about Pensions and the Stock Market interesting and fun.

What do you enjoy least?

Like any heavily regulated role, the least enjoyable part of the job is the paperwork and regular exams. I have been doing it so long now that I accept that it is what it is and although that is the downside it is at the same time extremely important for both clients and myself.

What are your hobbies?

Well, as you can imagine, as a full-time working mum, I don't have an abundance of spare time. My daughters, Charlotte and Harriet, are my world so when they are home, we do lots of fun activities. We all enjoy crafts, so my house is always full of glitter. In my free time I enjoy catching up with my friends. I read a lot and I also love to cook. My friends constantly joke about how I am a feeder.



Denise Graham

Tell us about your family.

I am a mum of two gorgeous little girls, Charlotte aged seven and Harriet aged four. Charlotte is a little fashionista, very creative and stylish. She loves making up dance routines and putting on performances. Harriet is a little princess, with a cheeky grin and mischief written all over her face. She is full of life and such good fun to be around. She is always overdressed, wearing head to toe frills and sparkles. They are amazing and without a doubt they are my greatest and proudest achievements.

What attracted you to Rutherford Hughes Ltd and excites you about joining the firm?

When I was first introduced to Peter and David, I instantly warmed to them. They are both very experienced in the industry and extremely knowledgeable. They have a wonderful sense of humour and I instantly felt comfortable being around them. I did my due diligence of course and everyone I spoke to told me nothing but positive

things about them and their business. They have a very relaxed and friendly style to giving advice and this is very much my style too. They have an investment strategy which is very different. A strategy they have designed and implemented themselves; it's tried, tested and it works. I was blown away with the returns they have achieved. Clearly, as an investment strategy it can go down as well as up, but I was extremely impressed. I felt this investment strategy would be something clients would love to get involved with.

I'm excited for the future of Rutherford Hughes. We are looking to grow so that more clients and professionals can take advantage of the service and investment strategy we offer. I'm a bit younger than Peter and David and with my knowledge, experience and connections I'm looking to offer a new dynamic to the business. We have recently refreshed the company logo and website to reflect this.

Denise can be contacted on 0191 229 9600 or email denise.graham@rutherfordhughes.com

MAVEN CAPITAL PARTNERS INVESTS £8.5 MILLION IN NORTH EAST BUSINESSES IN 2019



Maven continues to drive economic prosperity creating over 80 jobs last year.

Maven Capital Partners, one of the UK's most active SME finance providers, has invested £8.5 million in nine dynamic growth businesses across the North East in 2019, driving economic prosperity, and creating over 80 jobs. Since opening offices in Newcastle and Durham in 2017, Maven has invested over £17 million in businesses across the region, providing funding packages tailored to the growth needs of local companies.

Appointed to manage the £20 million Finance Durham Fund in April 2017 and the £27 million NEDCF in May 2018, Maven can provide investment capital to support the growth of innovative and ambitious businesses across a wide range of sectors and in a variety of funding scenarios. We have participated in investments ranging from £150,000 to £7 million in local businesses across the North East and also successfully leveraged an additional £7 million in private sector finance last year. Since launching our North East operation, we're increasing flexibility in the type of funding available to local, smaller businesses and producing

greater levels of investment to those businesses.

Notable transactions in 2019 include a £7 million deal in electric vehicle specialist AVID Technology to enable the business to increase production volumes of its current product range, a £1.2 million investment into innovative employee engagement Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) platform, Hive HR, to invest in its sales and marketing activities and create a number of new roles, and a £750,000 equity investment into innovative ecommerce platform, Aero Commerce, to invest in its sales and marketing activities and open an office in Newcastle.

Many viable, dynamic SMEs with innovative products and services, strong business plans and highly capable management teams are struggling to access the funding that will allow them to develop their businesses and market offering. Our funds are addressing that situation with a particular focus on supporting the growth aspirations of high-potential SMEs that contribute to regional economic development, job creation and innovation.

Maven has significant experience of managing regional growth funds across the UK, including on behalf of the Northern Powerhouse and the Midlands Engine, and since 2009 has invested over £340 million in more than 180 UK SMEs to support their growth strategies.

Michael Vassallo, Investment Director at Maven, said, "Maven's North East operation has had a fantastic year investing in some outstanding businesses across the region. Since opening offices in the North East we've invested over £17 million and we are delighted our range of regional and client funds have made such a significant impact on the region's economy, and that we have been a key player in supporting the creation of jobs across the North East.

"Reaching this key milestone in 2019 demonstrates the appetite and need for this type of growth finance and we look forward to working with more innovative, fast growing small businesses to help them achieve their growth plans in 2020."

If your business is in need of finance to help unlock its growth potential, Maven may be able to help. Contact our team today or visit mavencp.com to find out more.

CREATING VALUE

Maven offers flexible debt and equity funding options to support dynamic SMEs across the UK, investing up to £15 million in a single transaction.

Maven funding can support a business at any stage of its growth cycle and cover a wide range of corporate activity including MBOs and buy-and-build strategies, as well as the provision of acquisition finance, development capital and replacement capital.



If your business is in need of finance to help unlock its growth potential, we may be able to help. For more information please contact:

Salvus House, Aykley Heads, Durham, DH1 5TS. T: 0191 731 8595

Earl Grey House, 75/85 Grey Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 6EF. T: 0191 731 8590

SEEING CLEARLY NOW



After prolonged periods of uncertainty, businesses can refocus on key investment decisions knowing that there is a Brexit deal agreed with the EU (Withdrawal Agreement) giving them a clearer picture of the potential outlook for the UK economy.

Although a trading agreement with the EU post Brexit has not yet been concluded, the certainty of Brexit occurring at least provides businesses with some clarity for planning purposes.

After the recent general election, a majority government was formed which also gives businesses more clarity in terms of the direction of economic policies. This has restored some confidence across the business community and for businesses in the infrastructure sectors such as water, utility and rail companies, such as Deutsche Bahn (owners of UK transport company Arriva) which could have potentially been taken into public ownership under a Labour government. Arriva plans to undertake a listing of the business in 2020 now there is a more stable policy outlook.

2019 saw a poorer year for UK public markets with companies only raising \$8.5bn from 30 company listings, down from \$11bn from 69 in 2018. More businesses left the main market of the London Stock Exchange in 2019 than joined resulting in a net contraction. 2020, however, is shaping up to be a better year. In December 2019, UK-based companies announced a flurry of deal-related announcements, including Cineworld, the movie-

theatre chain, agreeing to buy Cineplex of Canada for \$2.1bn evidencing renewed confidence from investors.

This is in contrast to the previous two and a half years, which saw some businesses scale back their investment and growth plans, whilst shareholders were more reluctant to consider exit planning due to the fear of value deterioration. Since the prospect of a Corbyn led government has receded, bankers and other dealmakers are now hoping that a new degree of political certainty could revive the IPO market and trigger a wave of mergers and acquisitions.

Despite the general trend of deal volumes being lower during this period of instability, private equity markets have remained robust and active with trends dictated by the numbers of sellers rather than appetite to invest. As we have reported on there is a huge supply of equity in the markets making this a great time to consider private equity as an option. Cavu Corporate Finance has had a buoyant period, advising on a number of high-profile deals including advising Fastflow on the merger with United Living – creating a £400m turnover combined business on acquisition;

advising the shareholders of Pacifica on the significant development capital investment from Synova; advising Infinity Works on an investment from Growth Capital Partners; and advising Avid on the investment from Maven and existing shareholders NVM and Downing.

Things are also looking up for sterling with the GBP having been on a downward trend against most currencies for many months. This stabilization in GBP is important for business planning both in terms of certainty around input prices and sales prices. Volatility in these markets has hampered business planning, investment decisions and M&A. Volatility in FX has reduced somewhat as discussions on hard/soft Brexit and political manoeuvring have receded, at least for now.

Following the result of the election in December, we have seen an increase in regional businesses and shareholders wishing to re look at investment and growth plans, M&A and review of exit options and we look forward to a more stable backdrop in 2020 and working with exceptional businesses to assist in delivering their objectives.



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YEAR-LONG CHARITY DRIVE RAISES £20,000 AT MHA TAIT WALKER

Leading accountancy practice MHA Tait Walker celebrates the team’s fundraising efforts which raised thousands of pounds for North East charities throughout last year.

A total of £20,000 was donated to local charities, through fundraising by the firm’s charity committee, made up of volunteers across its four offices and individuals nominating charities closest to their hearts.

The firm’s efforts benefitted a variety of North East charities and community projects. These included the Great North Air Ambulance, The Sir Bobby Robson Foundation, The Sunshine Fund and Young Minds. Further money was raised through cash donations for smaller initiatives such as an

‘Odd Socks Day’, bake sales, foodbank collections, clothing donations and a ‘Wear it Pink Day’.

Individuals and small teams also raised money for causes close to them personally. These included events such as CEO Sleepout events and the Great North Run. The proceeds of which were distributed among a wide range of local causes.

Andrew Moorby, managing partner at MHA Tait Walker, said: “Focusing on what is important to our team and what is closest to their hearts is

what makes our fundraising and CSR efforts so worthwhile. The team have done a great job and really given their all to raise money for worthy causes.

“I am extremely proud of them all for supporting so many local charities and community projects. The charity team and lots of others work very hard to help as many community causes and initiatives as they can throughout the year. We look forward to another great year of working together for our community.”

A STRONG YEAR AHEAD FOR MHA TAIT WALKER CORPORATE FINANCE



Steve Plaskitt

2019 was another strong year for MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance with the number of deal completions reaching 20, the second highest volume for the firm in the last ten years.

The team which specialises in corporate acquisitions, disposals and finance raising had a record year and worked on some noteworthy deals, including three management buy outs and eight fundraising or development capital assignments:

- FW Capital investment in Beanies
- MBO of Site and Field Services
- Sale of Geocore to RSM
- FW Capital investment in Cadworks Engineering
- Palatine Private Equity buy out of Lucion Services
- Synova Capital investment in Pacifica Group

The team also clinched 'Deal of the Year (under £2.5m)' in the 2019 Dealmaker Awards with the Management Buy Out of Quanta Fabricom and Michael Smith was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award to reflect this outstanding contribution to the region.

Furthermore, the team was strengthened with three new recruits including Lee Humble who has arrived as another Corporate Finance Partner.

Looking ahead to 2020

With Brexit hanging over the UK, it is an uncertain landscape for 2020. Uncertainty does have the ability to dampen appetite for M&A however the MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance team remain optimistic.

Steve Plaskitt, Partner at MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance said: "Our clients are planning for the future and looking for opportunities to grow and develop their businesses. Our view is that good management teams and businesses with strong cashflows, underpinned by a sound business model will continue to attract domestic and international interest from trade buyers in 2020.

"We expect to also see private equity investors continue to push their deploy capital for growth, as

well as buyouts, which will likely keep transaction multiples at near record highs."

"Now that the General Election has given a decisive majority for the Conservative Party, and with many new Tory seats in the North East, there is finally hope that Brexit uncertainty will disappear, and economic and investment conditions improve."

MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance is an award-winning corporate finance advisory team. Our specialists work with entrepreneurs, owner-managed businesses and large corporates to help them to achieve their goals.

We provide local expertise and national insight and opportunity through our association with the MHA national accounting association. We help clients with local projects, UK transactions and cross-border deals. Since inception we have advised on over 300 transactions and have been the leading dealmakers in the North East since 2000.

Steve Plaskitt is Partner at MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance and has advised on many management buy outs. He has over twenty years of experience in the North East market. Steve.plaskitt@taitwalker.co.uk

NEWCASTLE DOG & CAT SHELTER FETCHES RMT ACCOUNTANTS' ADVICE IN SUPPORT OF NEW FACILITIES PLANS



Jenna Reece, Deputy Chief Executive, Judith Longmore (RMT) and Leyla Rutter Chief Executive.

Newcastle's best-known animal rescue centre is homing in on advice from RMT Accountants to help support its planned investment in new facilities.

After building a new cat maternity suite and kitten creche at its Benton North Farm shelter in 2019, the Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter is planning to create an equivalent facility for puppies this year, as well as a new 'quiet kennel' in which older and more nervous dogs can live while the charity works to rehome them.

And it is also putting new resources in place to support and advise customers who adopt animals from the shelter and get used to having them at home.

Judith Longmore, Head of Charities at Gosforth-based RMT, is now working with the Shelter's management team on developing and implementing its growth plans, as well as ensuring the right financial structures are in place to help deliver them.

Originally established in 1896, the Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter helps thousands of lost, unwanted, neglected, abused and abandoned animals every year and covers the whole of the North East from its Benton North Farm and Claremont Road facilities in Newcastle.

It aims to reunite lost animals with their owners

and find loving new homes for those which, for whatever reason, are no longer wanted, and needs to raise around £1.5m every year to cover its running costs.

As well as dogs and cats, the Shelter also looks after rabbits and other small animals, and has a number of larger animals, including horses, ponies, donkeys, pigs and sheep, living in retirement at Benton North Farm, where there is also now a coffee shop.

All of the animals it rehomes are neutered, vaccinated and microchipped and come with four weeks' free pet insurance and a free veterinary health check to give new owners peace of mind.

The Shelter hosted a TV broadcast with Channel Four's Supervet Noel Fitzpatrick two years ago which led to a substantial increase in rehoming rates and it has remained very busy ever since.

Leyla Rutter, Chief Executive at Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter, says: "We had almost 200 kittens either born here or brought in to us in 2019 and the new facilities that we've developed so far are essential in ensuring we can look after all the animals that need our help.

"Being able to enhance the support we can provide

to families that take animals from us is central in helping to ensure that as many of our adoptions as possible are successful, but there's naturally a cost attached for us in making this additional resource available.

"We've taken steps over the last couple of years to enhance the ways in which we manage our finances and raise the money we need to meet our day-to-day costs, including opening a coffee shop at the Benton site which is proving very popular.

"Bringing in a local firm with RMT's financial and business expertise is the next stage of this process, and their advice and guidance will underpin the improvements and progress that we want to make in 2020 and beyond."

Judith Longmore at RMT Accountants adds: "The staff at the Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter do an amazing job in looking after and rehoming hundreds of animals in need and it's fantastic to be working with an organisation that delivers such positive results to both its human and animal clients every day."

To find out more about Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter please visit www.dogandcatshelter.com



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BEADNELL TOWERS HOTEL OWNERS EYE NEXT NORTH EAST PROJECTS AFTER COMPLETING REFINANCING DEAL



Starting at top: Max Birkinshaw, Corporate Manager Handelsbanken
 Ayden De Beer, RMT Corporate Finance Executive
 Neil Slade, Group General Manager Beadnell Towers
 David Wilson, MD Henson Group
 Matthew Flinders, RMT Head of Marketing and Business Development

The owners of a leading North East boutique, hotel, bar and restaurant on the Northumberland coast are planning their next projects after concluding a seven-figure refinancing deal.

After completing an 18-month, £3m refurbishment and expansion programme at the Beadnell Towers Hotel and the Towers Kitchen, Bar and Terrace in the summer, the management team at Henson Leisure is looking to identify further North East locations in which to create new high-quality, one-off establishments.

Detailed plans are already being finalised for its next project, which is expected to open next year, and others are expected to follow thereafter.

Ayden De Beer, corporate finance executive at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, worked with the Henson Leisure management team on the refinancing deal, which has been completed through Max Birkinshaw, Corporate Banking Manager at the Morpeth branch of Handelsbanken.

The Beadnell Towers Hotel features 18 individually-designed bedrooms and has already secured a place in the Sunday Times' 'Best Places To Stay' top 100 British hotels list, while the Towers Kitchen, Bar and Terrace offers a modern British menu in a large open-plan eating space on the ground floor.

It was bought by business partners David Wilson and John Morse at the end of 2017, and reopened in June after being completely redesigned in keeping with the original features of the Grade II-listed building.

Around 30 people have so far been recruited to work at Beadnell Towers, mostly from in and around the village itself, while visitors have come from all over the UK and from as far afield as Norway, Germany and North America.

David Wilson, says: "We've had a fantastic response to the hotel and restaurant, both from the visitors that we're attracting and from the local community, which has been crying out for this type of high-quality destination venue.

"There's so much happening in Northumberland and across the North East at the moment, and we want to build on this momentum by establishing more venues across the region which match the quality and style that's on offer in Beadnell.

"Each project will be a one-off development with its own character and style, and we're now

looking at a range of different potential locations around the North East that offer the right sort of environment for this type of venue.

"Plans for the first of these are now well-advanced, and we're looking forward to further enhancing the region's tourism offering by replicating the success we're enjoying at Beadnell.

"RMT works with some of the best-known names in the regional hospitality industry and has done a first class job on leading the refinance from start to finish."

Ayden De Beer at RMT Accountants adds: "Henson Leisure has created a fantastic venue in Beadnell that has quickly become extremely popular with visitors from both within and outside the region, and the management team is now well-placed to apply its expertise in other parts of the North East."

Max Birkinshaw, Corporate Banking Manager, Handelsbanken Morpeth, says: "We have had a successful, long-term relationship with David and are delighted to support his exciting development plans for the local area."

For more information on the Beadnell Towers Hotel and the Towers Kitchen, Bar and Terrace please visit www.beadnelltowers.co.uk

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MAKE 2020 THE YEAR YOU FINALLY GET TO GRIPS WITH YOUR PENSION

As 2020 gets into its stride and New Year’s resolutions already begin to crack, Paul Gilsenan, Managing Director of PSG Wealth Management is urging north east workers to make this the year they take steps to improve their retirement prospects.

Here are five suggestions to make the most of your pension pot.

1. Track down any lost pensions

If you have moved jobs, or your address has changed, you may have pensions that you have lost track of. Research suggests there are around 1.6 million unclaimed pots worth £19.4 billion – the equivalent of nearly £13,000 per pot.

Help tracking down a lost pension can be found in the form of the government-backed Pension Tracing Service which operates across the UK.

2. Consider consolidating

If you have several pension pots, it’s a good idea to combine them into one pot. This could help you avoid dealing with multiple providers and make it easier to keep track of your overall savings, as well as diversifying and switching your investments.

It is important to understand the risks of transferring out of your scheme before proceeding, such as high exit fees or loss of annuity fees. This is where professional financial advice can prove particularly useful.

3. Check your State Pension

It’s very hard to plan your retirement without



a full view of your State Pension. This can be found online where you will also be able to see your National Insurance record, and whether you can improve it. You might be able to fill gaps by

www.psgwealth.co.uk

claiming National Insurance credits, or making voluntary contributions.

4. See if you can pay in more

Pension policy is an area that has been neglected the past few years, however this year’s budget could bring with it a review. Therefore, if you’ve still got a few years before retirement, think about boosting your personal pension now to benefit from current rates of tax relief and a potentially higher income when you stop work.

5. Check your investments

Ensuring that your retirement fund is appropriately invested and sufficiently diversified is crucial.

Portfolios have a tendency to deviate from the initial weightings over time. This can make your portfolio unbalanced and riskier than initially intended. A financial adviser can rebalance your investment portfolio and get your target asset allocation back on track, and on course to achieve its goals.

While retirement may be some way off yet, by taking these steps early people across the North East can enjoy the retirement they have worked hard to earn.

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PLANNING YOUR BUSINESS EXIT STRATEGY?

Find out how to maximise your investment from day one.

Even if you aren’t thinking about selling your business for another 10 years or more, your exit strategy should act like a compass in everything you do. With advance preparation you can avoid pitfalls, maximise available tax reliefs and preserve wealth for future generations.

Every decision you make could impact the value of your business in the long run, so it’s crucial to consider how it will influence your eventual goal of selling.

PSG Wealth Management offers advice on how to maximise your investment, including:

Establishing recurring revenue streams that allow sustainable growth.

Attracting potential acquirers.

Entrepreneur’s Relief and how it affects Capital Gains Tax.

The reliefs available for your individual circumstances.

For further advice and to set up a meeting, contact our Wynyard office.

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PSG Wealth Management Ltd
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A STRONG YEAR AHEAD FOR NORTH EAST FUND

With approximately £90m to invest over the next three years, the North East Fund is starting 2020 on the back of a highly successful 2019.

More than 130 businesses from sectors including engineering, automotive, software, services and advanced manufacturing last year received investment totalling over £20m.

19 manufacturing businesses were awarded a total of £5.4m, eight engineering firms collectively received £1.8m, four companies within the telecoms sector shared £716k, 12 biotech and other science/R&D-focused companies received a total of £2.5m, and 16 companies operating within the services sector, including FinTech, were awarded a combined sum of £1m.

Companies to benefit included County Durham-based medical x-ray technology firm, Ibox Innovations, South Tyneside family-run catering business, Elsie's Kitchen, and Gateshead urban winery, Laneberg Wine.

CEO of the North East Fund, Jason Hobbs, said, "Assisting and supporting the growth of more than 200 businesses to date is a great achievement and this year will be no different. Our fund managers will continue to deliver much-needed investment opportunities throughout 2020 and beyond.

"The North East is a great place for start-up and scale-up companies. We are home to some very successful manufacturers, supply chain companies, industry-experts, creative innovators and key influencers who are working at the forefront of their respective industries, often on a global scale.

"The commitment, drive and ambition that we see is incredible, whether this be from small family-run enterprises in the local community or a major employer. I would encourage all businesses with growth ambitions, no matter what size, to get in touch to discuss what the North East Fund can offer."

Supported by the European Regional Development Fund and the European Investment Bank, the North East Fund is a £120m investment programme for SMEs at all stages of development.



Jason Hobbs, CEO of the North East Fund.

More details can be found at www.northeastfund.org

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THE VISION FOR AGE UK

Head of Charitable Services for Age UK Northumberland, Amy Whyte talks about her experience of the corporate and charity marketplace and how they can work together to achieve mutual benefits.

"If there's one thing that's certain, it's that we're all getting older every day. If you don't have family and friends who are prepared to look after you, charities like Age UK Northumberland can make all the difference.

"It's widely documented that individual giving to charities has declined considerably over the last ten years and as a result, charities have had to work much harder to ensure that every penny received is used to deliver the greatest possible impact. This has undoubtedly created a challenging marketplace, but has also driven considerable innovation and strategic development within the charity sector, making charity and corporate partnerships much more of a two way street than ever before.

"My career in business strategy and development and sales spans nearly three decades, first establishing myself within the property market and then moving into the legal sector. My experience in the corporate world allowed me to see the value that can be derived from corporate and community organisations establishing mutually beneficial partnerships that can support the growth, promotion and development of skills and resources within both organisations.

"Our vision at Age UK Northumberland is to ensure that older people living in Northumberland can enjoy later life, knowing that they can access a range of help and support services that are designed to meet their needs. The services currently available include: information and advice, advocacy, personal care, exercise and falls prevention classes, befriending services, lunch clubs and day centres. However, we don't receive any Government funding to help us operate these charitable services. We rely solely on grants, legacies, donations of time, money and resources, and our in-house fundraising activities.

"There are so many different ways that businesses can give something back to their local community, whilst benefiting from increased employee engagement and shining a light on your organisation's values and commitment to making a difference within the community.

"As a starting point, it's important to identify what your business wants to get out of their charitable giving and how that can fit with your chosen



Amy Whyte



Joan Ellison who received the Sir Donald Irvine CBE award for outstanding contribution at the Age UK Northumberland Volunteers' Thanksgiving.

partner. Employee secondments provide a great opportunity to get your team working together outside of their working environment - for example completing a garden or office makeover, helping out with our lunch clubs and day centre activities, mentoring teams, regularly volunteering or just joining us for an hour or two on the occasional bag pack.

"If your focus is to support your local community, you could consider launching a charity of the month or year. For £10,000, you could sponsor our Information and Advice Service every day for a month, directly helping older people, their families and carers. In 2019 we supported 1,225 people and secured £1.83 million in welfare benefits.

"In instances where your teams are keen to find a way to give something back, Payroll Giving could

be an easy, tax effective way for your employees to make a difference.

"If you've got a counter or reception area, a counter collection box is the perfect addition to collect those loose pennies and make it easy for your customers and employees to support a good cause.

"Alternatively, if you're really looking to connect with a charity or a good cause there may be the opportunity to become the brand behind an event or campaign. At Age UK Northumberland, the funds raised from our last two events have enabled us to launch and expand our Befriending Services, helping us contact more people who are alone and unable to get out and about to meet new friends.

"And there's always the opportunity to make a small, one-off donation. It might not feel like it's making a difference, but if every business in Northumberland gave just £5 per year we could make 25,000 Friendship Calls - alone we can make a difference, together we can make a change.

"And everything that we raise in Northumberland stays in Northumberland!

"In my experience, the reward that businesses can gain from putting their name to a charity or community group and showing their support far outweighs any costs that may be incurred. The key is to find an organisation that strategically fits with your core business, represents your values and reaches your target audience.

If you'd be interested in discussing opportunities to work together to benefit our older generation in Northumberland, do get in touch on 01670 784 800 or email amy.whyte@ageuk-northumberland.org.uk



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ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM WELCOMES NEXT COHORT OF SCALE-UP LEADERS

The Entrepreneurs' Forum has unveiled the fourth cohort of its dedicated scale-up programme, the Scale-up Leader's Academy.

Launched in 2017, the Scale-up Leader's Academy supports ambitious business owners with their growth journey, helping them to build an actionable 'One Page Strategic Plan' to achieve their goals.

As in previous years, the entrepreneurs on the programme hail from a variety of sectors, and include Samantha Read of APM Cleaning, Lee Quarzi of Lumo.Tax, Michael Beaton of DRS, Ben Tansey of Re:Heat, Sally Marshall of the Marshall Robertston Group and Nick Salloway of Status Digital.

They are joined by Kim Binks of Apricity, Richie Gledson of Sky High Sports, Martin Wakefield of Wakefields, Dan Parker of Aspect Facades, Alisdair Beveridge of The Build Directory and Keian Sanchez of A Greener Solution.

Since its launch, the Academy has supported almost 30 entrepreneurs across the North East to focus on achieving sustainable high growth by creating a blueprint for future business success.

The second cohort of businesses, which were the subject of research conducted by Newcastle University, reported a 140% rise in operating profit, with an average increase in turnover of 13.2% and a rise of 8.6% in employment. A quarter of scale-ups participating in the programme also increased their level of export sales over the past 12 months.

Among them was Steven Rawlingson, founder of recruitment business Samuel Knight International. Headquartered in Newcastle, the firm has scaled into a £13m-turnover, 70-employee enterprise with offices in Bristol, London and Chicago.



Ian Kinney, Gazelles International Coach

Commenting on the impact of the Academy on his business, Steven said: "The Scale-up Leader's Academy allowed me to reassess and learn how to keep the four key plates of my business – people, strategy, execution, cash – spinning in the right way.

"Every day I was practising what I was learning on the course. The Academy really changed my mindset and helped me get the business back in line. I learned to think like a CEO."

Jonathan Lamb, Chief Executive of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, said: "The Scale-up Leader's Academy is delivering a toolkit of invaluable knowledge to business owners that allows them to prepare for rapid and sustained business growth.

"For each cohort, we refine the programme to reflect our members feedback and to address the key challenges faced by scale-ups in our region such as access to talent and leadership development.

"On completion of the Academy, our members are

fully equipped with everything they need to grow sustainable companies with the ongoing support of their senior leadership teams."

With access to talent and markets being the principal barriers for North East scale-ups, the Scale-up Leader's Academy has addressed this in its programme through targeted workshops, resulting in it being named 'One to Watch' by the Scaleup Institute in its 2019 Scaleup Review.

The review also revealed the number of high-growth businesses in the North East has surpassed the 1,000 mark.

Jonathan continued: "Taking into consideration the recent reports and statistics on scale-ups in the North East, then 2020 promises to be an incredible year for businesses in the region.

"We're delighted to welcome the latest cohort to our Scale-up Leader's Academy and are confident this cohort boasts many of the most promising scale-ups in the North East."




CITY LADIES NETWORKING LAUNCH

Three North East business ladies have collaborated to launch a new networking and support organisation for other women in business, which is being run across three UK cities.

Launched at Newcastle Gateshead Hilton with over 50 of the region's best female talent, City Ladies Networking is set to deliver events in Newcastle, London and Middlesbrough.

The well received inaugural event speaker was Dr Joanna Berry of Durham University Business School, Durham Energy Institute and North East & Yorkshire Institute of Directors.

Owned by Antonia Brindle, Natalie Turner and Sophie Milliken, all of whom have extensive networking and event experience, City Ladies Networking's main aim will be to foster a fun, pro-female environment for women in business to create outreaching relationships and drive superb business practice.

www.cityladiesnetworking.com
team@cityladiesnetworking.com
 Photos taken by Jeanette of The Bigger Picture.



An Entrepreneur Interview with...

PETE WATSON

Chief Executive, Atlas Cloud

Tell me about your background in business

From the age of eight growing up in Newcastle I used to go down to the Quayside market and buy toys and jokes and then sell them on at school. In those days I always seemed to have a venture on the go. I certainly possessed an entrepreneurial spirit, but it wasn't until I had matured and in my mid 20s that I knew I wanted to go into business on my own terms.

I'd worked for other people and it quickly dawned on me that whatever they could do, I could too. There was no doubt that I wanted to chart my own course in life, it was just finding a business that I was interested in – and that proved to be technology.

Having returned to university to do an MBA, I started my own company, Sherpa Business Consultancy, helping businesses in the technology sector, including digital and IT, raise finance – with sums typically ranging from £100,000 to £1m. In all, I acted as a consultant for more than 20 companies throughout the North East and North West.

How was Atlas Cloud formed?

It arose from a friendship with someone I'd met at Durham University who was looking to start an IT management services provider in 2010. We researched and wrote a paper together in 2008 as part of the MBA on utility-based computing.

When he contacted me about starting Atlas Cloud, much of our thinking was based on the groundwork and analysis that had gone in to developing that research paper as well as the practical experience we had both gained in business, he in the corporate world and myself in sales and finance.

For me it was the perfect opportunity and it allowed me to put into practice the theory of an MBA and felt like a logical progression. I had the correct understanding, had the experience of working with businesses to secure the finance necessary for growth and then had the opportunity to put all that knowledge into practice with Atlas Cloud.

In those early days I was able to use my experience to raise the necessary funding as well as secure our first customers to get the whole venture off the ground.

In 2012, I was asked to join the board as commercial director and shortly afterwards I became chief executive and was tasked with focusing on the growth of the business – which marks its tenth anniversary this June.

In your own words, what is it that Atlas Cloud does?

We are a UK managed service provider based in Newcastle which performs the role of a trusted advisor, working with companies to help them transition securely to the Cloud – improving security, reducing costs and maximising productivity. Atlas Cloud provides hosting solutions for any sized company, but it typically works with businesses that are multi-site, going through mergers and acquisitions or are ambitious and growing.

Our services include hosted desktops, disaster recovery, file sharing, email security and resilience, network connectivity, telephony and managed infrastructure.

What is your proudest moment with the company?

We were very pleased to receive the Growth Explosion Award in 2018 by Dynamo, the not-for-profit group established to grow the North East's IT economy and promote the region as an IT and digital hotspot.

As an industry-led organisation, it was a huge morale booster to

receive such a vote of confidence and to be recognised for a period of sustained growth. Atlas Cloud has grown by 52% on average year on year for the past three years and has gone from employing 17 to 35 staff.

Is there a particular mistake you have made while in business? And how did you overcome/learn from it?

We haven't always recruited the right people and could have been quicker to act upon it. As we have matured as an organisation, we have hired more intelligently and now have a natural ability to recruit someone not only with the right level of skill and expertise but who reflects the culture of the business.

During the early years, we hired a few people who were simply the wrong cultural fit and the more we focused on our core values and how we remain true to them, the better we are at employing the right people who are able to help take Atlas Cloud forward.

What is the USP of Atlas Cloud?

We offer bank-grade security and can deliver any application globally to any end user device on a pay per user per month model. Our highly accredited business operates a 'security first' philosophy using experienced and expert solutions architects and engineers. We are also proud to say that the company has never failed to implement a new IT solution.

How has the firm grown and what do you attribute this to?

Up until 2018 the growth was predominantly executive led. Just over 12 months ago we employed 13 people in sales and marketing and that fuelled a new period of growth. Now Atlas Cloud is gearing up to the next level.

The reason for our success is a loyal customer base. We have a 99% customer retention rate and a range of quality clients, including more than five PLCs plus many high growth SMEs. The customers we target and those wishing to work with us are generally growing businesses which are opening offices, buying other companies, going international - fast growing and ambitious organisations.

Of course, that customer loyalty is founded upon Atlas Cloud's valued service, its technical expertise and an ability to get the job done.

Do you live by/do business by a certain motto?

We are a service provider, so to repeat an often-quoted mantra, the customer is king, and we do whatever it takes to keep our customers satisfied and on the front foot to technology that will improve their operations.

What are the future plans of Atlas Cloud?

We are preparing to raise £2m worth of investment and are in the process of creating another 30 jobs to bring our total headcount to 65. As well as our head office in Newcastle, we also have offices in Glasgow and London, and we intend to expand our base in the Capital.

Atlas Cloud already serves major clients including Experian, HS2, the Environment Agency and Sage – for which we are the only independent hosting provider for its UK and Ireland operation and the only certified Citrix provider globally. As part of our future strategy, we are very much looking to work with ambitious clients and have many prospective deals in the pipeline.

We are an ambitious company which is determined to continue to grow and offer the latest in effective hosted IT solutions for the multi cloud world we live in.

Pete Watson is a member of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, a group of like-minded people who come together at inspirational events to share best practice, create valuable connections and help each other to grow their businesses. For more information, visit www.entrepreneursforum.net



Pete Watson

IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT FREE FRUIT ON FRIDAYS

How you can improve wellbeing in your business.

Free fruit on Friday, gym memberships, an office pet. These are all great ways to improve the wellbeing of your people. However, it takes more than this to keep your employees happy and healthy at work. First you need to lay the foundations: Training, effective management and clear policies all need to be in place to ensure your wellbeing initiatives have the desired effect.

Here we have four ideas that you can apply in a business context to have a genuine impact on wellbeing, engagement and productivity in your workplace.

Establish boundaries

People are often reluctant to switch off their work emails after office hours, fostering an 'always on' mentality. To manage this, try encouraging people to map out their working week and block out when they aren't available. Having this time scheduled in gives them more freedom to say 'no' and fully switch off.

Introduce a wellbeing allowance

Cost is a common barrier for many people when it comes to wellbeing activities. Perhaps someone wants to take up meditation classes or buy a pair of walking boots. This is something you can help them achieve by setting aside a budget for each team member to use towards their mental and physical wellbeing.

Rethink breaks

We all know that taking time out at lunch to switch off helps with productivity but sometimes, getting your employees away from their desks is the hardest part. Many companies choose to schedule activities for lunch breaks such as a team game, a walk or collaborative learning opportunities.



Train your managers

When it comes to great management, empathy is an essential quality. It comes naturally for some, but for others, training in active listening and facilitating conversations about wellbeing is a great way to ensure employees are voicing their concerns and stressors.

Google use Nudge theory to encourage their employees to switch off when not at work and focus their free time on personal goals. Employees are asked to share a personal goal with their manager and from there they work together to make it happen. This is an excellent way to demonstrate your commitment to your staff's wellbeing.

If you are thinking of how you can improve productivity, engagement and wellbeing in your team. Please don't hesitate to contact one of the Holgate HR team at info@holgatehr.co.uk

NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR NCFE IN SUNDAY TIMES TOP 100 LIST



David Gallagher, Chief Executive at NCFE

For the past 170 years, NCFE has thrived as a not-for-profit organisation, helping to promote opportunity and social mobility through learning, ensuring that people from all walks of life have the means to achieve their goals. In this time, we've seen a lot of changes, in the education sector and the world at large, but also within our own four walls with the introduction of our new leadership team and our reimagined Core Purpose.

In the past year alone, we worked with over 3,000 organisations, issued almost half a million certificates to learners, provided more than 8,000 learners with the opportunity to progress to higher education, launched 50 new qualifications to market, achieved a 99% pass rate for the 1,100 apprentices who completed End-Point Assessment with us and much more. That's not to mention being selected by the government as the delivery partner for six of the new T Levels, supporting the FE sector to deliver these new technical alternatives to A Levels from 2021.

It's of huge importance to us that we continue to expand our reach into new and growing

market sectors in order to make a difference to more lives and to ensure we have a positive impact on life chances. We absolutely could not achieve this however, if it weren't for our talented and dedicated workforce.

Our people are central to our success at NCFE. Each and every member of staff is passionate about our Core Purpose to 'Promote and Advance Learning' which can mean only good things for our learners, which is why we are delighted to share that for the 11th year running, we have been shortlisted in The Sunday Times 100 Best Not-For-Profit Organisations to Work For 2020.

Designed to showcase the very best in workplace engagement, places on this prestigious list are hotly contested each year, with eligibility measured against eight key areas including Leadership, Personal Growth, Giving Something Back, Fair Deal and Wellbeing. We are immensely proud to have once again made the cut and while we eagerly anticipate our results later this month, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our amazing employees, customers and suppliers for helping to make this possible.

To find out more about NCFE, including our current job vacancies, visit www.ncfe.org.uk

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Michelle Rainbow

NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP WEEK

February sees the arrival of National Apprenticeship Week, putting this important route to employment in the spotlight.

Michelle Rainbow, Skills Director at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, highlights the benefits that apprentices can bring to businesses and new support that's on offer from 2020.

If you're a business planning for 2020 and beyond, it's likely that staffing and skills will be on your list of priorities.

Apprenticeships can be a great way of bringing fresh talent and skills to your business, by employing an apprentice or upskilling staff via an apprenticeship scheme, with qualifications going all the way up to degree-level.

From 2020, larger employers who pay the Apprenticeship Levy can transfer up to 25 percent of their funds to smaller businesses to support them to take on an apprentice, which is great news for SMEs.

However, smaller businesses often tell us that they struggle with 'where to start' when it comes to hiring an apprentice; from how to fund an apprenticeship to recruiting the right person for the job.

To support businesses in that situation, we've just updated our Apprenticeship Toolkit on the North East Growth Hub to offer simple and clear advice

on where to start and where to get support.

The Toolkit brings together useful information to help businesses find, recruit, train and develop an apprentice. It also includes case studies from local businesses that have benefited from employing apprentices.

On a national level, a significant development for 2020 is that all employers in England will soon have access to all the benefits of the National Apprenticeship Service - including greater choice of quality training providers, more control over how they pay for training, and how they access and recruit apprentices.

The transition of non-levy paying businesses onto the full apprenticeship service will take place from early 2020 and extra funding will be available to support up to 5,000 new apprenticeship starts through the service every month until March 2020.

If you're not able to offer an apprenticeship, you might want to consider offering a Traineeship instead, which consist of 20 percent on-the-job and 80 percent off-the-job training.

Traineeships help 16 to 24-year-olds get ready for a job or apprenticeship if they don't have the appropriate skills or experience. It involves a

minimum of 100 hours of work experience over a maximum of six months. Employers need to deliver a meaningful work experience to the trainee, but it's a much smaller time commitment than an apprenticeship. It's a great way to give someone their first step onto the career ladder, and your business gets to benefit from an injection of fresh ideas and talent too.

During 2018/19, we saw over 15,500 apprenticeships start in our region. By offering an apprenticeship or traineeship, businesses can help to improve skills across the North East, boosting the economy and creating more and better jobs. It would be fantastic to see these numbers really grow from 2020 onwards.

Visit northeastgrowthhub.co.uk to access the updated Apprenticeship Toolkit for North East businesses.

For advice on using the National Apprenticeship Service from 2020, visit the Education and Skills Funding Agency YouTube channel – search for 'Using the Apprenticeship Service'

You can find out more about traineeships online at gov.uk

For more information, please visit www.nelep.co.uk



Colin Bell

We find out what Colin Bell, Business Growth Director at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), gets up to on a typical weekend.

Do you ever have to work weekends?

Yes – I have three young children who seem to do every sport and activity going. I'm a pretty restless person so always need to do something, so if a spare 30 mins appears then I will find the laptop. I've always been in the habit of spending time on a Sunday evening preparing for the week ahead.

Are most weekends the same?

Pretty much, my eldest Ethan plays football Saturday morning and my youngest Esme has contemporary dance followed by gymnastics. Ethan also plays rugby and my middle child Oscar plays in Carlisle United's Academy so I'm normally travelling to an away rugby or football match on a Sunday (my wife Sarah does the home games!).

Do you find it hard to switch off?

Yes, I'm always doing something. Over Christmas I got a bit bored, so I cut down a rather big tree. I love doing manual stuff, my Dad used to be a builder so I can put my hand to pretty much anything. I also have a dog Milo and love taking him for a good walk. It provides a good opportunity to clear my

head and think. Whenever possible I hit the Lakes or Peak District as climbing up a hill is unbeatable.

What do you do at a weekend which you can't fit in through the week?

I like a nice IPA or a glass of red wine from the Rhone Valley on a Friday night (I can't really drink on a Saturday as I'm usually traveling to an away game at 7am Sunday morning). Alcohol isn't really conducive for a school night so I leave it until the weekend.

Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

Normally morning exercise, I try to run 15 miles a week but recently have picked up a knee injury which won't shift and is very frustrating. I value time running, it's a great way to get stuff out your mind and to think clearly - my best ideas definitely come when I run. I live in the countryside which is great as Milo normally comes with me and he can run freely chasing pheasants. He's just getting a long walk at the moment though.

Big night out or a night in the house?

I used to like a big night out but it's now firmly a

night in the house, watching a film with the kids, I really value family time. Occasionally I will pop down the local but it's pretty rare these days.

Do you watch or play sport at a weekend?

Most of my weekend is spent watching the kids play sport. I did have a season ticket for the mighty Carlisle United but didn't renew it this season as Saturday afternoon is the only free time we have as a family – probably a good decision considering the season they're having!

Where do you like to eat out at a weekend?

The local pub in the village is our destination of choice, great food, always people we know. The kids like Nando's. Most often it's a takeaway delivered on a Saturday night.

How important is the weekend to you?

Very important – I love spending time with the kids, we have a great laugh together.

Of a weekend, you'll usually find me...

Freezing on the side of a football pitch!



WEDNESDAY 11TH OF MARCH 2020

THE NORTH EAST'S ULTIMATE CYBERSECURITY EVENT

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Some of the world's leading cybersecurity and technology experts are set to arrive on the banks of the River Tyne for what is set to be the North East's ultimate cybersecurity event.

With headline sponsorship from Cisco and Advantex Network Solutions, the North East's leading and award-winning technology firm, the event will take place on Wednesday, March 11th, where over 150+ business leaders, IT and cybersecurity professionals will rub shoulders and be inspired at the famous Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead.

The 'Cybersecurity Summit: North East' is the first of its kind in the region and has already attracted sponsors and speakers from some of the world's leading cybersecurity and IT companies, with Cisco, Axis, Zerto and Veeam to name a few, already signed up.

The event's platinum sponsors, Advantex and technology conglomerate, Cisco are proud to bring such an event to the region, with Advantex Sales

& Marketing Director, Steve O'Connell adding: "To bring companies like Cisco, Zerto, Axis and Veeam to the North East is huge!

Whilst the North East is booming with technology and talent, it's often neglected with things like events, usually, they're overseas or the closest being in places like London, Manchester or Edinburgh, so to have something of this scale in the region is something we're extremely proud of.

We've had a fantastic response from the public so far, tickets are flying off the shelf, so we urge anyone wishing to go to sign up as soon as possible!"

The March event will see technology and security experts discuss the current cybersecurity landscape, highlighting the threats, what's at risk, and more importantly, how to prevent the imminent threat of an attack.

Farana Cheema, Cybersecurity Channel & Distribution AM UKI at Cisco added: "With a presence in four corners of the globe, having the opportunity of sharing insights and showcasing the technology of Cisco to the North East is fantastic, something we're very excited about and can't wait for March 11th."

Attendees will leave the summit with notepads full of ideas they can action as soon as they get back to the office, not to mention brag to their co-workers they've attended the cybersecurity event of the year, and if endless inspiration isn't enough, attendees will get the opportunity to network and talk all things cyber with some of the brightest and most talented people in the region – there's even complimentary food and drinks across the day.

To find out more and to get your ticket, head over to: theybersecuritysummit.co.uk



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Ammar Mirza CBE

INCLUSION BY DEFAULT

Crazy, how we appear to have got to the end of January in the blink of an eye, especially when I am still saying Happy New Year to people and working on my goals.

From contending with the Bubonic Plague which I contracted in the first week, to dealing with sickly children and then delivering a range of workshops, surgeries and seminars, to say January was busy would be an understatement. However, it certainly has been successful, through achieving a number of personal and professional goals within the first few weeks.

One of these goals has been on how to help make our amazing North East a more welcoming and inclusive place. With the advent of Brexit – I must admit how glad I am that there is now some certainty and by the time you read this, we can legitimately say we are coming out of the European Union – there appears to have been some legitimisation of racial hatred which has provided a very small minority of our community the nerve to racially abuse people both online and in public.

This is particularly sad as my North East, the place I call home, is filled with the most hospitable, have a go, happy people I know. The vast majority of us North Easterners work hard, encourage and support

one another, so when I hear stories of shopkeepers, doctors, accountants, nurses, taxi drivers, takeaway owners and actually anyone of colour, other than white, being asked “when will they go back home”, it pains me.

However, with every cloud there is a silver lining, and given the focus of Asian Business Connexions (ABCs) work over the past 11 years has been to connect, support and promote the Asian and wider communities, I am delighted to share that the focus this year is inclusion. Front and centre.

The relaunch of the corporate membership is a great mechanism to support organisations of all sizes to become truly inclusive. Not a simple tick box approach, but meaningful engagement with and through to the community they are trying to connect with. Through the provision of workshops, design sprints, seminars and focus groups ABC is able to ensure that every organisation is equipped to engage, enable and empower its workforce and customer base to make a bigger and more positive impact.

What this means literally is that any organisation connected with ABC will be able to identify its inclusion challenges, work on these by engaging and involving the very community they are trying to connect with, so that recruitment programmes, customer service and any other aspect of an organisation is fit for purpose and inclusive.

As organisations we need to stop doing to people and starting doing with them. Interventions have never created long term sustainable partnerships. As an observation, who better to inform you on how to become more inclusive, how to tackle poverty, or how to address homelessness than by involving and engaging those that have had those experiences? Let’s stop taking a tick box approach and start by normalising inclusion, making it by default rather than design.

To find out more about ABC and how you can work with the foremost inclusive Asian Trade organisation in the North East please drop Jess@abconnexions.org an email.

Ammar Mirza CBE is the founder and chairman of Asian Business Connexions, Board member of North East LEP and holds various other positions across the private, public and third sectors.



ABOUT US

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LISA VESCIO, BUSINESS COACH AND STRESS-MANAGEMENT EXPERT



Entrepreneur Lisa Vescio is a qualified mental-health professional. She has more than 19 years of experience in mental health and 12 years as a company founder and managing director.

I have a lifelong passion for bringing out the best in people, encouraging them to discover the life balance that is right for them. I draw on my mental health qualifications expertise and experience, to coach and mentor directors and business owners, helping them remove the underlying causes of stress and burnout. They can then find the equilibrium they need to move their business and working lives to the next level.

I've always had a passion for helping people and in 2006 founded Milestones Hospital. This is an innovative and independent mental health hospital in Norfolk and is designed to help women patients feel autonomous and valued, treating them with respect, dignity and sensitivity.

Stress and burn-out made me decide to resign as managing director at Milestones in 2018. I needed to rest and recover and made the decision to return to my hometown in the North East.

Stress is a real entity and, if not managed early, can be a destructive illness. As a high performing individual myself, I failed to acknowledge the symptoms initially. I just continued running on empty - until one day I crashed.

Once I had returned to the North East, I felt

regenerated and inspired. I have taken time out to fully recover and now have a drive and passion to use my skills to help people.

I truly believe that my own experience of recovery, coupled with my mental health knowledge, skills and training plus my entrepreneurial background make me uniquely positioned to help others be the best that they can be in work and business.

Since January 2019 I have been working as solopreneur, combining my tool kit of crucial skills developed over the years, designed to help, heal and inspire others.

As well as my professional qualifications in mental health, I am also a master coach, clinical hypnotherapist, havening, NLP, psych-k and reiki practitioner.

If I had found the help I needed earlier, I would have avoided the turmoil of the past few years. I have a passion for coaching, helping and inspiring people and want to use my skills and experience to help people manage their stresses so that they don't have the same experience. With the right help, lives can be made so much easier and brighter.

Prolonged exposure to stress can lead to burnout,

where mental and emotional strength are exhausted. This can have a significant impact on physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. Left unresolved, it can ultimately lead to long term consequences such as disease, family breakdowns, loss of employment and financial instability.

Many people suffer in silence and try to carry on without asking for support. High achievers, leaders and business owners are the worst culprits for not identifying stress. They often fear the consequences of acknowledging it, wondering what will happen to their business if they try to deal with it. I take a good look how this denial presents itself in my eBook available to download from my website home page.

Ignoring stress symptoms can take a heavy toll on your health and your business.

Over the coming months I will be talking about what happens if you ignore stress and providing strategies to manage stress and overwhelm - for yourself and your organisation.

Contact me now if you would like more information about how I can help you manage stress, avoid burnout and move forward to a healthier more balanced lifestyle and a more prosperous business.

Get in touch at www.lisavescio.com or email me lisa@lisavescio.com

ARE YOU READY TO CHANGE JOB?

Bryony Gibson, managing director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, talks about the difference between wanting a new job and being ready for one.

There can be any number of reasons to kick start a new job search but, whatever the trigger, the most important thing to do is to understand your motivation for change.

It might sound obvious but in order to find the right move you need to be clear about what matters most in the long-term; and what you believe is missing from your current role.

If you find yourself in the position where you're continuously unhappy, before spending hours updating your CV (something a good recruiter will help you with!), I'd suggest you take a few moments to ask yourself four seemingly simple questions:

- What is it you are good at?
- What are you passionate about?
- What do you like about your current job?
- What is important to you inside and out of work?

In truth, each question is deep and it's important to be honest with yourself. Equally, don't be afraid to take the time you need to come up with your answers, especially if you've never asked yourself these before.

The knowledge and insight this exercise brings will almost certainly be worth any wait. The ideal result is that your aspirations and drivers match your strengths. If that is the case, then choosing the best path forward should be fairly straightforward.

If, however, you're not that fortunate, armed with a new understanding of your motivations, the next step is to contemplate why you feel so miserable at work.

Usually, being unhappy comes down to one of three things: people, your role, or the environment. If this is the case, then I have good news. These are all common causes which have the potential to be improved through an open dialogue with your employer.

Having said that, an internal conversation isn't guaranteed to solve your problems so, if you're



still failing to move things forward positively after that, then I would say the time has come to begin exploring the job market.

To be successful, research is key. Start by making a list of the pros and cons. Decide the nice to have's and the non-negotiables and begin your investigation.

Changing job is an emotional time and, if you have sought-after skills in the current market, it's highly likely you will be invited for an interview and offered a new job quickly. You need to be prepared for this, as you don't want to look back with regret at a move that was made too quickly or dismissed without due consideration.

In summary, we spend half our waking life at work, so job satisfaction should always be a priority. If you aren't happy, it's time to weigh up your options but, at the same time, I'd always encourage you to think carefully before you act.

Of course, people can grow out of even the best jobs over time and sometimes you need a change

or a new challenge to reinvigorate yourself but, whenever you feel a career itch, make sure you pause to consider - or revisit - these questions.

Not only will they bring clarity to your planning they will also prepare you psychologically. All too often people join the job market ill-equipped and when the time comes to move, it's too much too soon.

An ensuing counter-offer flatters and puts doubt in an uncertain mind and, if you haven't got the strength of character or the courage of your convictions, the result for you is a withdrawn resignation and a damaged reputation with all involved.

Put simply, you need to know what you want and be prepared to take the leap of faith when it's offered. There is always an element of risk with anything new but understanding what drives you and how you feel about your current role, employer and future prospects is the only way to find happiness at work.

For public practice advice and expertise, get in touch:
bryony@bryonygibson.com | (0191) 375 9983.



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L-R: Michaela Reaney, Kate Temple-Brown.



WE BELIEVE TALENT IS EVENLY DISTRIBUTED BUT OPPORTUNITY IS NOT

The 40-year career is gone, replaced by lifelong learning and diverse career paths; the talent economy has arrived and the traditional, linear career path is a thing of the past. Learners are moulding education to suit their long term knowledge needs and adapting it to our modern lifestyles.

Opportunities to support a lifetime of learning need to be provided in ways that are flexible and adaptable, ensuring accessibility for all.

To achieve this, the full capabilities of digital and virtual learning must be realised. They will become the new normal this decade: people are using technology in every aspect of their lives and are now embracing and in fact expecting it whilst they are learning. From online degrees, artificial intelligence (AI) tools used to extract core learning from every online interaction and smart devices delivering apps for everything, people expect the future of learning to be made easier and more engaging with technology.

Whether you are a customer-centric or an employee-focused company, success hinges on sustaining this culture of lifelong learning. It's often believed that our employees are motivated primarily by money, benefits, bonuses, etc. Whilst these benefits are of course important, employees are increasingly motivated by the opportunity for them to develop, learn and expand their minds – alongside having access to essential tools to do their job and to know what is expected of them.

People want to be involved and to have the opportunity to advance in their career. What we must do is tap into their knowledge base, giving employees the ability to think critically and creatively, able to communicate ideas and concepts, and to cooperate with other human beings in the process of inquiry and action. These are the critical skills for the digital Future of Work.

The concept of lifelong learning is about opportunities to learn without boundaries defined by their role, in different settings, and through different mediums. It calls for innovation, as well as a more holistic, flexible and open-minded way of looking at education. And most importantly, it's not a linear process with a simple start and finish.

At Gradvert, it has always been our mission to enhance business performance, by improving people through lifelong learning. In 2012, we set up the business with the initial aim to support graduates and help organisations through creating bespoke training programmes to provide leadership development. We've

evolved to ensure we enable people at all life and career stages to 'graduate' to the next level of their potential.

We have worked with a range of clients over a range of industries, but there was always one key theme that appeared. This was that talent is evenly distributed, but opportunity is not.

That's why in 2020 we're stepping forward as - The Opportunity Group.

We are a talent development business, and work with organisations to ensure that their existing and aspiring talent are ready for the future of work. We do this by helping clients to maximise their training budgets and apprenticeship levy funds so that they can develop critical skills, and also attract a wider pool of talent for their organisation.

Kate and Michaela, founders of The Opportunity Group, said: "We created The Opportunity Group to dispel the myth that apprenticeships are old fashioned, basic ways of learning."

"We believe that apprenticeships are a brilliant way to develop employees and support individuals throughout their learning journey."

The Opportunity Group message will roll out over the coming months, including our new website, new logo and more learning opportunities so we can build on our success we've had over the last eight years.

Moving forward we'll be adapting with the times, not only helping our clients and learners to step ahead, preparing them for the future of work, but also preparing ourselves for the future of work in the world of learning.

With the current demand for upskilling and reskilling existing workforces to close the skills gap, many organisations are waking up to human and critical thinking skills becoming the driving force of future talent. There is an urgent need for companies to invest in their people strategy by developing their existing employees to become future leaders in this time of unprecedented change, as well as upskilling them to work more digitally in the future.

Are you ready for the future of work that is happening now?



Dr David Cliff

UNCOMMON COURTESY

Anyone who knows me, knows that I'm a great believer in courtesy in business, and indeed all other aspects of life. Modern courtesy does not amount to Victorian forms of ritualised etiquette, but instead forms the basis of stable social relationships where people are valued.

In the commercial world this is really important as the push for ever cheaper, yet higher quality goods and services has resulted in the expression of individual need and identity being cast almost as a luxury that negatively affects the bottom line.

Courtesy, whether in the business or wider social sense involves individuality and respect. It also can be very positive for business by clarifying decisions and strengthening ties. Take for example, the courtesy of a polite decline of a product or service rather than simply someone not getting back to the seller and leaving those doing the offering in a state of uncertainty. Imagine the sheer wasted time and effort across the whole spectrum of industry as people are contacted again, not for the sale of goods or services, but simply to clarify whether there is a basic dialogue to be had!

Having time to understand people and see

them as individuals is also extremely good as an overall mental health in the workplace policy, as well as leading to happier customers who are more individual and believe they have a relationship that embody some value with you and your organisation. It may take a little extra time, a little more thought, perhaps more person centredness. It may also involve acting with particular discretion to respond to uniquely individual needs.

Most of all it involves a discourse that is polite, but immensely clarifying. Courtesy is not about "soft touch", "letting people down gently," without hurting their feelings. It's about valuing others whether they are friends, partners, customers, family, the list goes on. If we are too busy in our businesses to actually see other people, favouring instead the deal or distraction of the moment, we will very quickly find that our customer base falls apart. Courtesy has at its heart human interest, compassion and respect. These are the very

component parts of long-term relationships with customers and others. So, think about courtesy in your life. Do you really get back to people quickly enough? What does your delay communicate to them about their importance to you? Are you clear and unequivocal about your position with them whilst being polite and respectful? Can you see them as unique customers with individual needs or do you simply try to "pigeonhole" them into what you offer? Most of all, how does courtesy reflect in your corporate social responsibility as an organisation, your business ethics, your wellness strategies and the overall culture of the organisation?

Yes, courtesy may sound like a cultural artefact of bygone Victoriana without a place in the modern world and yet at its heart are vital business practices and social skills all too often neglected.

Thank you so much for taking the time and trouble to read this.



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TEESSIDE RECRUITMENT FIRM GROWS

Teesside based recruitment firm Howie White Resourcing has made an addition to the team with the appointment of Robby Bailey.



David Taylor

Robby joins them from Wynyard Golf Club after deciding that a career in recruitment was the path he wanted to take.

Robby says "Once I realised that recruitment was the career I wanted, I was straight away drawn to Howie White, mostly due to the way that they work, in terms of having a key focus on understanding businesses and people as well as doing things the right way and accepting that results will come without compromising on quality. One of the biggest appeals of the recruitment industry for me is being able to go out and be client facing."

David Taylor, Associate Director said "I am delighted to welcome Robby to the team. A key focus of the business is building for the future and with the appointment of Robby, we are ensuring that 2020 and beyond are going to be exciting times for Howie White Resourcing".



Robby Bailey

www.howiewhite.co.uk

LAUNCH OF NEW DIGITAL AGENCY ALL ADDS UP

A new digital marketing agency has been launched in Sunderland with its sight firmly on creating jobs throughout 2020.

Adel Fitch (Adds) is the man behind new exciting company Brand Ctrl, along with business partners Dave Macmillan and Sean Lavender.

Based in Hope Street Exchange the company is immediately creating roles for two apprentices, with a business plan which sees rapid growth to the agency.

Adds has launched the business to build on his ten years experience in the digital marketing sector where he has held positions across a range industries, including corporate construction. He has vast experience in running marketing campaigns and creating a strong online presence.

Well known in the area for his successful Community Interest Company, Adds Lad TV, which he launched at just the age of 20, Adds is now turning his skills to new pastures as well as still discovering musicians up and down the country and putting them on main stage. His previous campaigns reached hundreds and thousands with digital promotions, a practice he is confident will work within any industry when delivered right.

Adds said: "I have had a great career with both inhouse corporate experience and running my own organisation. With those two things combined and the results I have gained for others in digital marketing, it just seemed the right time to utilise my tools more. Adds Lad TV is still a passion and a focus,



but I am now really keen to help other people to set up business and market themselves digitally too."

Focusing on content strategy and marketing management, Brand Ctrl is positioning itself as results driven. The team currently have direct experience

in construction, food, hospitality, recruitment and property, but firmly believe their skills across digital platforms, community management, influencer management and content creation of photos and videos can help any business with or needing an online presence.

Adds, who is from Sunderland, is aged 30 and lives with girlfriend Abby. Having lost 7.5 stone he is also known for the impact he made when he launched Man v Fat in the North East, helping men to lose weight through training, meal and nutrition advise.

He concluded: "Our aim at Brand Ctrl is to build the right team around us, to support the new businesses launching in Wearside and further afield. We are already on the look out for talent within graphic design, digital marketing, web and sales, as well as appointing two apprentices."

Brand Ctrl now offers nine different services ideal for young or new businesses. Through a dedicated brand manager, companies can have access to social media management including evaluation on performance, social media design and content creation, advertising, photography and video production, strategy guidance, analytics for digital performance, community management to help you build relationships and introduction of your brand to influencers that can reach consumers you may not be able to.

More information is available at www.brandctrl.co.uk

IN CONVERSATION WITH...

HELEN FRAME

Director of Product and Project
Management at NBS

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I had aspirations of being an air hostess and then running my own business doing some form of graphic design. Clearly, that never transpired but coming from a working class background I wanted to find work sooner rather than later and secured a role in a high street bank. In my early 20s I realised I wanted something more, joined what is now a large global technology business in the North East and developed a wide skillset that now enables me to add value, be flexible and adapt to changing roles and circumstances within NBS.

Tell us about your role at NBS

Looking after product and project management is about ensuring we provide solutions that solve problems for the different audiences within the construction industry and address market needs globally, as well as the UK. It involves understanding customer requirements and working with them to help shape new products or continuously improve existing ones. We have to collaborate with a number of teams across the business from development, customer experience to sales and marketing to ensure the product, communications and experience are the best in the market. It's diverse, exciting and when it all comes together, extremely rewarding.

What services does the company provide?

NBS is a technology business in the heart of Newcastle, providing an online specification platform for architects, engineers, designers



Helen Frame

and contractors, enabling them to be more efficient and reduce risk. For building product manufacturers we can connect them with different audiences within the construction industry across the project timeline, by exposing their products and ultimately support them in growing their business. Combined, we provide an information platform for the global construction industry.

What's your proudest business achievement?

Most recently, it would have to be working with a great team of people within NBS to launch NBS Chorus, the online specification system for construction individuals. We had a tight timeline, new people in new roles and an existing customer base that we needed to ensure had the best possible experience. Collaboration at its best.

What challenges have you encountered?

There is sometimes a perception that you have to be highly qualified and knowledgeable in the industry you work in. I'm fortunate to work with some great people who recognise that what I bring is a different skillset that, combined with experienced professionals in the industry, ensures we do what is best for the customer and the business.

How do you like to unwind?

I'm an outdoors person through and through and I try to keep healthy and fit (some might say I'm a little obsessed with that!), so I love to put on my trainers and go for a run. It gives me fresh air and time to think and reflect. We have a bit of a menagerie at home, so a mixture of dogs and horses keep us entertained and provide quality family time together in a busy schedule, like many others I'm sure.



DevHub NORTH

The Developer Community



THE NORTH'S BIGGEST DIGITECH MEET-UP

DevHub North Meet-ups brings together the region's most passionate developers, testers, coders and tech whizzes under one roof!

A remarkable community, DevHub North Meet-ups create a hub for Digitech professionals of all levels. **You can share knowledge, gain insights and network in a relaxed environment.** Plus, every attendee looks forward to the pizza breaks. They're always a hit! There are **over 20 boxes of pizza** each event so you can have a quick bite while you socialise and network between quality presentations delivered by top influencers.

In November, **Tesco Bank's headline presentation created such a buzz** that it was standing room only at Tuspark, Newcastle. With the launch of their **new tech hub at Quorum Business Park**, attendees were able to network with their Head of Engineering, Tristan Brown, who delivered a talk on test and development culture.

Tesco Bank was welcomed back in January to discuss cloud migration and strategies. Rod, Head of Cloud Engineering, and Gareth, Head of Infrastructure, provided real-life examples which were a huge success across the community!

"Being part of the DevHub community can make such a positive impact on your future career..."

Not only will you walk away with great contacts, but **you will also take away some game-changing industry tips.** Past guest speakers include Phillip Johnson, BGL Group's Technical Lead, who spoke about S.O.L.I.D design principles. With an engaging Q&A at the end of his talk, Phillip kindly gave out **freebies** for every person who asked a question.

Hosted by Ronald James Group, you can expect future events to get bigger and better - with more pizzas, drinks and prizes to be won. There is currently a shortage of tech talent in the North East, so bringing everyone together as a community brings fantastic value for companies and professionals across the region.

Something HUGE is coming May 2020. Make sure you follow DevHub North's social pages to be the first to know. If you'd like to speak or get involved in future events, feel free to contact the DevHub North team on 0191 620 0123 or hello@devhubnorth.com



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WHY EVERY COMPANY NEEDS A BUSINESS PSYCHOLOGIST

By Michelle Minnikin, Chartered Business Psychologist, Insights Business Psychology & Inspiration North

What is Business Psychology?

According to the Association for Business Psychology – “Business Psychology is the study and practice of improving working life. It combines an understanding of the science of human behaviour with experience of the world of work to attain effective and sustainable performance for both individuals and organisations.”

We also call ourselves work, organisational, occupational, industrial, career Psychologists – it can get a little confusing.

We ensure organisations are designed to make the most effective use of their people and these employees are able to do their jobs to the best of their abilities, and they are happy, engaged and productive.

Why do we want happy and engaged people? Because they are the most profitable, productive, sell more, are sick less and tend to stick around for longer! So happy people are the aim.

How can we ensure the people in organisations are happy?

1. Understand what good looks like in your company; what the values are, what behaviours

people are expected to display, and recruit and reward based on this.

2. Train your managers, ensure they know how to lead people, manage people and role model the behaviours they would like to see displayed. People aren't born knowing how to lead people – it is a skill that can be learned.

3. Create a culture of psychological safety (the belief that they will not be punished, shamed or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes) and a sense of belonging.

4. Manage the performance of those who are not meeting the expected behaviours of your organisation – even if they are performing, chances are that the people around them won't be!

5. Understand and put into practise the fact that diversity is good for your business – not just visible diversity, but neurodiversity too – create competitive advantage by ensuring everyone does not think the same and have the same world view!

6. Listen to your people – get regular feedback and advice on how to make things in the organisation better (they are doing the job, so will know more than you!)

7. Give them regular feedback on how they are doing, what they are doing well and how they can improve.

8. Give them the freedom to make decisions, even little ones. Some control over their work environment will really help.

9. Allow them to work to their strengths and craft their jobs, there are always people in teams who are better doing tasks that others don't enjoy. Share the tasks around so people are doing things they enjoy (and are usually good at!)

10. Take an active interest in the ambitions of your people – what do they want to do with their careers? How can you help them achieve that?! Give them opportunities to grow, learn and take on new challenges.

So, why does every business need a Business Psychologist?

To ensure that you have the right people, with the potential to grow to meet the needs of the organisation and its stakeholders. Business Psychologists have the right tools, knowledge and experience to help you get the best from your people and make your lives easier!

A MONUMENT TO ANTARCTIC EXPLORATION

The connection between Antarctica and the port of Blyth grew stronger as a unique sculpture was unveiled by Her Grace, the Duchess of Northumberland.

The first land south of the parallel 60° south latitude was discovered by a Blyth sea captain, William Smith who sighted Livingston Island on 19 February 1819. A few months later he returned to explore the other islands of the South Shetlands archipelago, landed on King George Island, and claimed the new territories for Britain. His ship, The Williams was built at Blyth.

Now, Blyth Tall Ship are keeping the tradition and history alive by renovating The Williams II and giving young people the chance to learn valuable practical skills to further their career prospects.



Councillor Gordon Webb, a County Councillor as well as a Blyth Town Councillor has used his County Councillor's Local Improvement Scheme Funding to pay for the sculpture.



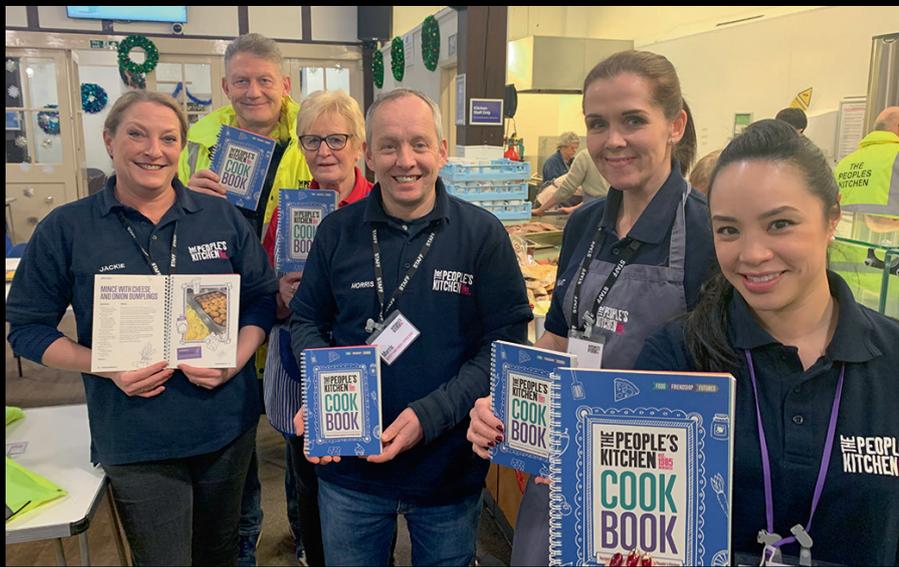
TONY'S NEW YEAR PLANS INCLUDE £500 CHARITY DONATION

A Northumberland business has decided to help a local charity this New Year after opting not to send out Christmas cards or gifts to their clients and contacts.

Planning expert, Tony Carter from new Morpeth-based planning consultancy, Carter-Smith thought long and hard about the effect on the environment of sending cards and reflecting on the fact that spending his Christmas budget on good causes would be a better thing to do.

Instead of selecting a charity himself, Tony has left the choice to social media where he has asked the general public to nominate their favourite good cause. The winning charity was Mortal Fools Youth Theatre from Prudhoe, a theatre, drama and creative learning charity. They have now been presented with £500 from Tony which will be put to good use.

Carter Smith offers a one-stop shop for all aspects of planning, including complex local development plan requirements, planning applications and appeals



KITCHEN'S COOK BOOK GIVES FOOD FOR THOUGHT

A unique recipe book has all the right ingredients to raise awareness and much needed funds for a Tyneside charity.

The People's Kitchen have created the culinary book based on economical and easy to cook meals with recipes supplied by donors, supporters, volunteers and even the odd celebrity sprinkled in to add extra flavour to the mix.

For nearly 35 years, the charity has supported the homeless and vulnerable of Newcastle and as food is at the heart of the service they provide, the idea of a recipe book was born.

As well as contributions from volunteers and sponsors the book also includes recipes from all of the charity's patron's Si King, (Hairy Biker and celebrity chef) the Duchess of Northumberland and The Rt. Rev. Christine Hardman, Lord Bishop of Newcastle.



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Chief Executive of Blyth Star Enterprises, Gordon Moore.

NORTHUMBERLAND'S GORDON MOORE AWARDED MBE

Gordon Moore, chief executive of Northumberland-based mental health and learning disability charity, Blyth Star Enterprises, has been awarded an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) in the 2020 Queen's New Year's Honours list.

Gordon has been officially honoured for giving over 40 years' service to helping thousands of people living with mental health issues and learning disabilities in the local community, and establishing much needed supported accommodation, outreach, social care and sheltered employment to improve social inclusion.

As one of the founding directors of not-for-profit Blyth Star Enterprises, Gordon has worked tirelessly over the past 30 years on behalf of individuals and their families to make a real difference and enable their voices to be heard, often at challenging times of their lives.

He established the charity in 1987 along with a small group of parents, carers and professionals with the mutual aim of raising standards of localised mental health services.

His experience, including 30 years as a psychological therapist, nurse and manager in the NHS and simultaneously 25 years working alongside the Society for Social Psychiatry and Mental Health in Greece, has led to significant improvements in the lives of many people in Greece and across Northumberland.

His drive, commitment and vision has also enabled Blyth Star to successfully develop a pathway of supported accommodation that aids people towards independent living, as well as some of the most innovative social care and sheltered work services in the UK. These being based upon the fundamental values of, somewhere to live, somewhere to work and someone to care.

Regarding his MBE, Gordon commented, "I'm truly honoured to receive an MBE, and although it has been given to me personally, it is really an award for the many people I have had and continue to have the pleasure of working with; colleagues, the users and in particular, the staff at Blyth Star who really are the heart and soul of the organisation. They all make a huge and positive difference to so many people's lives.

"I'm delighted and so too are my family. I've had an extremely privileged career that's taken me to many places, but I'm rooted in Northumberland and the local community. It is my home and I would like to think that it would make my parents proud. My father was a miner at Ashington Colliery and my mother a local dinner lady.

"Of course, it has been emotional, difficult and overwhelming at times but it is all worthwhile, and I'm especially grateful to my wife of 30 years, Christina, for her ongoing support. Around me are some truly inspiring people and being able to help people, with often lifelong disabilities to live, work and be a part of their local community is totally fulfilling."

Tim Chrisp, Chairman of Blyth Star Enterprises, added, "I won't be the only one to say that this award is thoroughly well deserved and everyone at Blyth Star offers our congratulations. Gordon has become an integral part of the organisation and has created a legacy that is held in very high regard by many, both inside and outside of the charity. It is not only his work on-the-ground however, but also his dedication, loyalty and compassion for those he works tirelessly for which is insurmountable. It's fantastic news."

Blyth Star Enterprises is a not-for-profit charity providing living support services, training and sheltered employment opportunities. It offers innovative day services to over 350 people living with learning disabilities and lifelong mental health issues across Northumberland and the North East.



Nicola Cook

SALES ENGINE BROKEN? HERE'S WHY

Occasionally at a networking event you'll hear a bunch of old sales hands (myself included) reminiscing about the days when we simply drove around the country with the precision of a co-ordinated army, visiting our customers and drumming up new business.

Then the internet came along and completely disrupted the way our customers (B2C AND B2B) want to deal with us. The advancement of both technology and free available content at the end of our thumbs, has allowed our prospects to delay entering the sales process until they are much further into their own buying cycle.

Great news for the buyer, but a potential disaster for businesses grappling with creating a sales funnel that allows the buyer to 'self-educate' through the now extended Research Phase.

The impact of this on the functionality of the Sales Engine is huge. Prospects prefer to stay in the Research Phase much longer, delaying contact with a real human for as long as possible (remember: people hate to be sold to), the challenge now is to build a 'Sales Engine' that delivers a personalised, tailored and bespoke sales journey for the customer. One that pre-empts their next move, whilst also allowing your teams to prioritise profitable prospects, whilst also helping them understand where your customer is in their own self-educated buying journey, giving your team the opportunity to ensure they continue to add value when they do reach out and make contact.

Your process should lift out from those sniffing about your website, downloading your blogs, watching your videos and following you on social media, to highlighting those worthy (and ready for) an engagement from your sales team, which these days by-the-way, are not zooming about the country burning a hole in the o-zone, they should be structured into the differing functions of your Sales Engine;

- Marketing
- S'Marketing
- Sales
- Account Management

It's likely you're familiar with three out of four of these sales functions, but the newbie in the team is 'S'Marketing' – my own word that I've coined to describe this blurring of the process in the Customer Buying Journey. So, who are they, and what do they do?

The last thing you want is your very expensive and highly skilled sales team generating and nurturing their own leads. That's a guaranteed way to burn cash and waste productivity, yet the traditional forms of marketing are not enough to take a potential Lead from the 'unknown' into becoming a 'qualified prospect', there's a gap in the middle.

Most businesses leave this to chance but good businesses, with solid Sales Engines, don't leave anything to chance, and neither should you. Therefore, your S'Marketing function is a combination of content, automated process and intelligent nurturing. The people in this team will deal with the output of your marketing team and any customer activity that generates interest. At this stage any new prospects will be unqualified, so the job of your S'Marketing team is to qualify these leads against all of the following and help move them forward to the right next step in

the sales process. They should;

- Understand where the prospect is at in their own buying cycle.
- Understand what content they've consumed and therefore what understanding of your true value proposition they currently have.
- Be able to create a picture of what that client's true pain point is.
- Guide them with content, nurture and intelligent upfront loading of your value proposition, to help move them forward in the sales process.
- Qualify out and reduce time wastage on Leads that DO NOT meet your company's Ideal Target Avatar.
- Sell-in the next step of the Sales Process, which will likely be a deeper conversation with one of your Sales Team.

This means your sales team are not getting bogged down with a lot of the pre-sales activities that could lead to nothing and stop them focusing on working the pipeline of true sales opportunities, especially when Leads can stay in the S'Marketing stage for months. Let your S'Marketing team take care of this.

So how do you do it?

1. Map your Customer Journey

Involve your Team. Find a large white wall and grab a tonne of post-its. As complicated as it may seem, map out the flow of potential touchpoints and information your prospects consume. Be clear about the 'stepping stones' you wish to create and where you can pre-empt and add value to your customer's journey.

2. Build your technology around this map

Too often people invest in a CRM or front-end marketing system such as Hubspot, Infusionsoft or Dynamics, and bend their process to fit the technology. Absolutely not! Make the technology fit around your process.

3. Brainstorm the APPs and add-ons to your process

There are so many good APPS these days that can improve micro-parts of your process, removing barriers and easing blockages in your workflow.

Aside from the widely used applications of Microsoft Office and G-Suite, here's my take on a few APPs that we use that have had a positive impact on our own sales process and customer journey.

GoCardless, Infusionsoft, Tealeaves, Adobe EchoSign, AcuityScheduling, SmarterQueue, Clickup, Reclaro, ResponseSuite.

4. Build your team, and recruit accordingly

The biggest mistake I see in my clients (usually after they've engaged me) when they're expanding their sales team, is they recruit for the Sales Role first – wrong. Build your marketing engine first, including a fully functioning S'Marketing team, before investing in more Sales Closing resource. Only when your S'Marketing team are maxed out, will you need more Negotiators/Closers to see your deals across the finish line.

Nicola Cook is the CEO of Company Shortcuts. The UK's leading Sales Acceleration agency helping Scale-ups build a profitable Sales Engine for Growth. To be added to the advanced notification list for the upcoming release of the 2nd edition of Nicola's international bestselling book 'The Secrets of Success in Selling', go here www.companysortcuts.com/SOS

THE CONTEMPORARY PA

Georgia Garland, Virtual Assistant, has just launched her own business under the umbrella of the national brand, The Contemporary PA. Here she tells Northern Insight about her journey so far.

Since completing my A-Levels and leaving Westfield school in 2014, I always knew that one day I wanted to own my business, but never did I expect to be fulfilling my dream at the age of 24.

After always having a strong interest and passion for the world of business and marketing, I decided to study Marketing Management at Newcastle Business School. During my time at university I spent a year living and working in York for the very successful travel company, Inntravel, as a Marketing Assistant. Not only did I learn and develop key skills through working in a dynamic and varied team, I also learnt how to be fully independent as well as gaining valuable life experience through living on my own in a new city.

Upon returning to university to complete my final year, I knew I wanted to continue to further my work experience and keep myself integrated within the business world. To do this I got an internship at Saddle Skedaddle, where I worked one day a week to assist the small marketing team with a variety of different exciting projects. Strong time management and organisation skills enabled me to graduate with a first class honours degree in Marketing Management whilst also continuing with the internship.

Following the proudest day of my life, graduation, I secured the fantastic opportunity to work for London based Private Members Club, Pi Capital. An exclusive organisation that convenes



Georgia Garland

extraordinary events with the world's most sought-after speakers. Gaining an insight into the world of events planning and management at such an elite top level for a year was a truly eye opening experience which I thoroughly enjoyed.

After a year at Pi Capital, I moved to a completely different and new sector of business to me and held the position of Communications and Marketing Assistant at one of the North East's largest housing associations, Karbon Homes. Not only did I have the pleasure of working with fantastic colleagues which I now consider my friends, but working within a new business sector enabled me to strengthen my marketing and communications skills, whilst also gaining new knowledge.

Upon discovering The Contemporary PA which was set up by Owner and Executive VA, Gemma

Wall, I knew that this was an opportunity I had to grab with both hands. Offering virtual assistance to local businesses and start-ups whilst working under the umbrella of The Contemporary PA license felt like the perfect fit for me.

As a Contemporary PA I can offer assistance with simple every day repetitive tasks as well as those which are more time consuming and complicated. The services that I can offer small businesses range from administration, email management and social media through to designing business stationery and project managing events.

I am excited to see where my journey as a Contemporary PA takes me and I am eager to help small businesses reach their potential so that they can continue to grow and thrive within the North East business community.

Either call Georgia on 07725263338 or email her at georgia@thecontemporarypa.co.uk to arrange a free one hour consultation. You can find out more about The Contemporary PA at www.thecontemporarypa.co.uk

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SOLICITORS



ST JAMES' SQUARE CHOOSES CHARITY FOR 2020

Commercial law firm St James' Square has announced its Charity of the Year for 2020.

The Chronicle Sunshine Fund is a North East based charity that enhances the lives of local children living with disabilities by funding specialist and adapted equipment to meet their specialist needs.

The charity applied through the firm's Charity of the Year scheme which is now in its third year. Each year, charities are encouraged to apply to the scheme, which last year received a record number of applications.

The firm, which will be turning three in March, dedicates a huge amount of resources to its chosen charity every year and launched the Charity of the Year scheme to make it a fairer selection process for any charity wishing to be considered.

A range of fundraising events have been planned for the year such as a client karting event, a black-tie ball and a family Christmas cinema event, where all proceeds will go towards the charity. There will also be several staff sponsored events, including the coast to coast cycle challenge and the Simplyhealth Great North Run.

NEW APPOINTMENT AT ST JAMES' SQUARE LAW FIRM



Commercial law firm St James' Square has appointed an experienced Solicitor to strengthen its Dispute Resolution department.

Adam Chaffer joins the firm after previously working in-house for a FTSE 250 construction company as well as other regional law firms.

He said, "I'm really excited to be joining the team at St James' Square and I'm looking forward to being part of a firm that is going from strength to strength. The team are very welcoming here and it's been a great start to the new year."

Adam will be working on a wide range of cases including contractual disputes, property disputes and contentious insolvency matters for both claimants and defendants.

Scott Cable, Partner and Head of Dispute Resolution, said, "I'm delighted to welcome Adam to the team. He brings with him some great skills and experience that will not only strengthen the Dispute Resolution team but the firm as a whole."

Adam's appointment comes at an exciting time for the firm who are experiencing increased demand for their services and have just recently announced six vacancies as a result.

NCG NAMES MUCKLE AS FIRST CHOICE LEGAL ADVISER

One of the UK's largest college groups, NCG, has appointed North East independent law firm Muckle LLP as its main legal provider following a competitive tender process.

After scoring higher than any other bidder, the Newcastle based law firm for businesses will now provide all NCG's day to day legal services and will also be able to bid for 'special projects' when they become available.

Muckle was appointed on the NCG framework to advise on a range of matters including governance and student affairs, as well as property, estates, construction, employment and pensions.

NCG is a group of seven colleges, including Newcastle College, that delivers a broad range of industry-leading training programmes including apprenticeships and higher education courses.

Mike Wilmot from NCG said: "We're delighted to announce that Muckle will be our main day to day legal services provider. We are looking forward to continuing to build our relationship with them."

Muckle LLP's education team regularly acts for schools, colleges and universities on all aspects of commercial law and is ranked top in the North for education legal services by Legal 500 UK.



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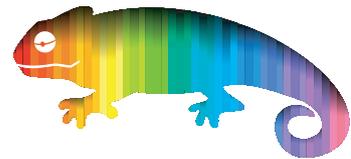


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LET'S MAKE IT CIVIL

Heterosexual couples can now too become civil partners. Tom Bridge, a Solicitor in the Private Client Team at Hay & Kilner, looks at what this means in terms of Wills & Estate Planning

It has been over five years since Rebecca Steinfield and Charles Keidan headed to their local register office to try and form a civil partnership, only to be turned away because they were not the same sex.

Their prolonged legal campaign now means that where the law previously only allowed same-sex couples to enter into civil partnerships, heterosexual couples can now too become civil partners. This follows the Supreme Court decision in June 2018 that the law banning opposite-sex couples from forming civil partnerships was discriminatory.

Following the Supreme Court decision, it is estimated that as many as 84,000 couples will enter into civil partnerships in 2020, and with over three million couples in the UK currently cohabiting as a precursor to formalising their relationships, what, in terms of Wills and Estate Planning, does this mean for couples who wish to enter into a civil partnership?

Tax-Free Allowance (Nil Rate Bands)

Transfers between civil partners are exempt from Inheritance Tax. So, if everything is left to the surviving civil partner on first death, the deceased's civil partner will have a full nil-rate band available to them, which is their Inheritance Tax free allowance.

It is also possible on second death to claim to use any unused nil-rate band from the first death, known as the transferable nil-rate band. As the current value of the nil-rate band is £325,000, this means that the estate of the second civil partner will have the benefit of up to £650,000 of tax allowance.

Similarly, civil partners can take advantage of the Residence Nil Rate Band (RNRB) which will increase to £175,000 in April 2020 (currently £150,000) to offset against their home provided that it is left to a direct descendant, such as a child or step-child.



Tom Bridge

The RNRB can also be transferred to civil partners on second death, meaning that come 6th April 2020 £350,000 can be offset against your property. However, the RNRB can be lost entirely as it reduces by £1 for every £2 that the estate is worth over £2 million. This means that by April 2020, the maximum value of an estate that can benefit from the RNRB will be £2.35 million.

Entering into a Civil Partnership

Many couples do not realise that their Will is automatically revoked by entering into a civil partnership. Whilst it is certainly not necessary to wait until you have entered into a civil partnership to draw up a valid Will, one way of avoiding this is to prepare your Will "in contemplation" of your civil partnership, naming the individual that you intend to enter into a civil partnership with.

This means that if you enter into a civil partnership and your Will has not been made in contemplation of your civil partnership, then your existing Will will not be valid when you die, and without a valid Will, the intestacy rules kick in.

If the intestacy rules come into play then a strict set of rules governing how your estate is distributed will apply. This may mean that end up playing the intestacy roulette wheel meaning certain people may, or may not, benefit from your estate.

What if my Civil Partnership is dissolved?

If a civil partnership is dissolved, whilst this will not void any Will that you may have in place, it will be dealt with as if your ex-partner died on the date that the civil partnership ended.

Regardless of your personal circumstances, whether you are single, married, cohabiting or in a civil partnership, it is important to plan ahead, especially if you own property, have savings and investments, or own a business.

There are many benefits to having a Will in place, from ensuring you leave an inheritance to friends and family, to potentially reducing the amount of Inheritance Tax payable on your estate.

Tom is a Solicitor in the Private Client Team at Hay & Kilner. If you would like to discuss any of the above, or if you have any other on personal legal requirements, please contact him on 0191 232 8345 or tom.bridge@hay-kilner.co.uk.



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PROBATIONARY PERIODS - POINTLESS OR PRICELESS?

A rise in the number of discrimination claims being brought against employers by new members of staff should encourage employers to review the ways in which they manage new recruits.

That's the advice of Sarah Furness, partner in the employment law team at Newcastle law firm Hay & Kilner, in response to a growing trend she's identified within the continuing rise in the overall number of employment tribunal claims being lodged against businesses.

While disgruntled employees have to have been in service for at least two years before they can bring most unfair dismissal claims, a discrimination claim can be lodged from the very first day that a new member of staff joins a business, even if they're still within a probationary period.

Discrimination claims can even be pursued by unsuccessful job applicants, while some unfair dismissal claims, such as where an employee alleges they have been dismissed for whistleblowing or falling pregnant, don't require two years' service before they can be brought.

The overall number of employment tribunal claims being lodged has increased sharply since a Supreme Court ruling in July 2017 which found that the fees imposed by the Government for anyone wanting to pursue a tribunal claim were unlawful.

The most recent Ministry of Justice data showed a 14% rise in the number of single employment tribunal claims being made in the second quarter of 2019, compared to the same period the year before, while the figure for multiple claims against a single employer increased by 19 per cent over the same period.

Sarah says: "The vast majority of recruits integrate into their new teams without a hitch, but employers need to be prepared, and informed for, the times when things don't work out as everyone had hoped.

"The notion that new employees who are still in their probationary period can't make serious



Sarah Furness

complaints is dangerously misleading and employers have to ensure their policies, procedures and staff awareness are all robust enough to minimise the chances of this happening."

"The cost to businesses in terms of the management time and money involved in fighting any kind of tribunal claims can be very significant, and with the overall number of claims continuing to increase sharply, it is essential that businesses ensure their employment practices are comprehensive and up to date, and their managers are properly trained."

Free Seminar

Hay & Kilner's next seminar will look at what proactive steps can be taken to manage new employees, how to tackle issues that may arise during their probationary periods and ultimately, how to avoid such claims. This free to attend seminar is on Thursday 5th March at the Centre for Life.

Bespoke training

In response to the need to address workplace situations which could lead to claims, the team also offer HR Showcase, a bespoke training package for owner/managers. This uses interactive role plays scenarios to highlight how individuals and management teams can prepare themselves and their staff to manage them.

Sarah Furness continues: "Workplace issues leading to claims often escalate to crisis point before the HR department is even aware of them, and it's essential that all those responsible for managing employees are equipped with the skills to handle and hopefully diffuse people issues at an early stage.

"Offering training on how businesses can minimise the risks inherent in managing a workforce using role play will help them make stronger, more proactive decisions when any issues arise for real."

For further information on the free Centre for Life seminar, or on the Hay & Kilner HR Showcase training package, please contact Sarah Furness at sarah.furness@hay-kilner.co.uk or on 0191 232 8345.

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LANDLORDS, IS YOUR HOUSE FIT FOR HUMAN HABITATION?



David Low

When providing rented accommodation, landlords are responsible for ensuring that the property is of a reasonable standard.

From March 2020, the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018 ("the Act") sets out new responsibilities which requires landlords to ensure that the property, including common parts, is fit for human habitation at the beginning of the tenancy and throughout.

Whilst you would perhaps hope that landlords would always ensure their accommodation is "fit for human habitation", this is not always the case and as such this new legislation has sought to extend protection for tenants to ensure they do not live in unsafe properties. The Act seeks to address issues such as: serious damp problems; unsafe layout; insufficient natural light and ventilation; problems with the supply of hot and cold water, leading to issues with hygiene, drainage and/or difficulty in preparing and cooking food; instability of the building; and general neglect.

The Act also cross-refers to the 29 'hazards' set out in the Housing Health and Safety (England) Regulations 2005, as these are matters that the Court will take into account when determining

whether the property is unfit for human habitation. Those hazards include, exposure to house dust mites, damp, mould or fungal growths, exposure to low or high temperatures, a lack of adequate space for living and sleeping, a lack of adequate lighting, exposure to noise and electrical hazards/exposure to electricity.

These obligations already apply to those tenancies granted on or after 20 March 2019, however from 20 March 2020 almost all tenancies will be covered, including historic ones.

As ever there are exceptions and defences available for landlords, including where the problems are caused by the tenant's behaviour, acts of God, the tenants' own possessions or where the tenant has not provided consent for the landlord to complete the necessary works (so long as evidence can be provided by the landlord of reasonable efforts to gain the necessary consents and permissions).

If a landlord is found to be in breach of the Act, they may be ordered to pay compensation to the tenant and/or to undertake works, including improvement

works, to the property. No limit has been prescribed on the level of compensation, therefore we urge landlords to be mindful of this.

Advice for Landlords

At Swinburne Maddison we act for registered providers of social housing as well as private landlords and tenants so we understand the complexities involved in Landlord and Tenant disputes.

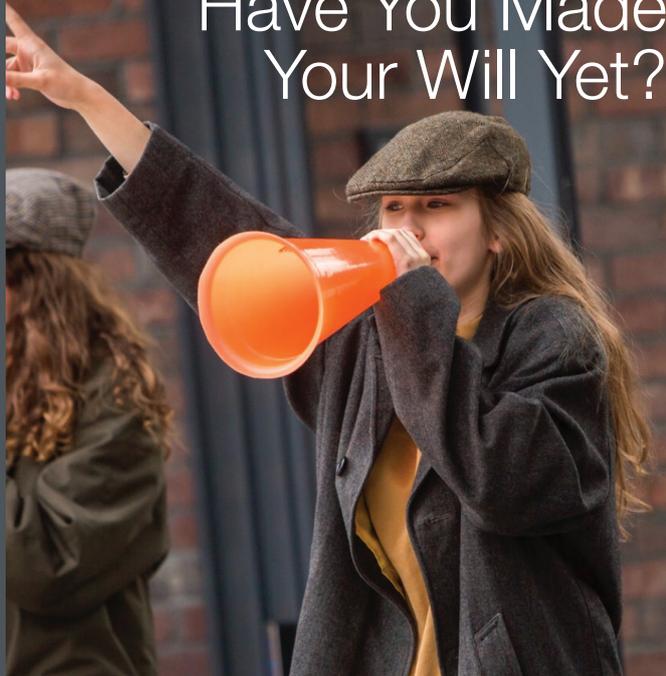
Where possible we advise landlords to review their housing stock urgently and take pre-emptive steps to address any disrepair issues. They should consider carrying out condition surveys to ensure that all properties in their ownership or managed by them are compliant with the Act.

By acting promptly and continuing to review or update processes and enforcement policies, this will help to avoid pitfalls, and it is essential that a record of reports and complaints is kept as these will be imperative in instances where a claim is made.

If you are a registered provider of social housing or a private landlord and would like further information on these important changes coming into force through the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018, please contact Partner and Head of Property Litigation, David Low, by email at djl@swinburnemaddison.co.uk or by telephone on 0191 384 2441.

Hey You!

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CONFUSED ABOUT INHERITANCE CLAIMS?

Muckle LLP solicitor Alex Blenkinsop puts the record straight with some sound advice on making or mitigating inheritance claims.

Inheritance disputes are all too common and often confusing, with lots of conflicting decisions and publicity swirling around. It's not easy to know how to claim if you feel the correct provision hasn't been made for you in a will, or you haven't been granted what you feel you're entitled to.

That's why we have an Inheritance Act. It gives you the right to apply to the court for an order against the estate of a deceased person, if the deceased estate fails to make reasonable financial provision for you.

Can anyone bring an Inheritance Act claim?

Not quite. The following people meet the criteria.

- Spouse or civil partner of the deceased.
- Former spouse or civil partner of the deceased (who has not subsequently remarried or entered into a civil partnership).
- A child of the deceased.
- A person who was treated by the deceased as a child of the family e.g. a stepchild.
- A person (other than the above) who was being maintained, either wholly or partly, by the deceased immediately before they died.
- A person who was living in the same household as the deceased, as their spouse or civil partner, for the two years immediately before they died.

If you fit into one of these categories, you may be able to bring a claim, but you should consider your position carefully and take advice before doing so.

A claim will only be successful where the distribution of the deceased's estate fails to make reasonable provision for the claimant. If reasonable provision



Alex Blenkinsop

is made (more on this below), a claim will not be successful and you could waste time and money pursuing a claim.

What is reasonable? And how much is the court likely to award?

These questions are difficult to answer. What is reasonable depends on all the circumstances including who is bringing the claim.

In applications by the deceased spouse or civil partner, the provision must be reasonable for a husband or wife to receive in all the circumstances. In all other cases, the provision must be what is reasonable for the claimant to receive for his or her maintenance.

Broadly speaking, with the exception of cases involving a husband or wife, the court will not award a windfall but rather only what is required to discharge their daily living costs at the standard that is appropriate.

Recent case law suggests that the court is becoming

increasingly reluctant to interfere with the way people choose to dispose of their property.

In the much written about case of *Ilot v Mitson*, in which a mother left her £486,000 estate to charity rather than her estranged daughter, the Supreme Court ultimately upheld the first court's decision to award the claimant £50,000.

The court will consider all the circumstances in coming to a decision, including the financial resources of the applicant, the financial resources of any beneficiary and the size of the estate.

How to bring an Inheritance Act claim

Before bringing a claim, it is sensible to take advice about the merits of your claim and the potential value of the estate in question.

Additional or alternative claims may also be available, such as a claim about the validity of the underlying will.

How can you avoid claims against your estate?

The potential for claims to be made will depend on the circumstances and what is being left, to whom and for what reason.

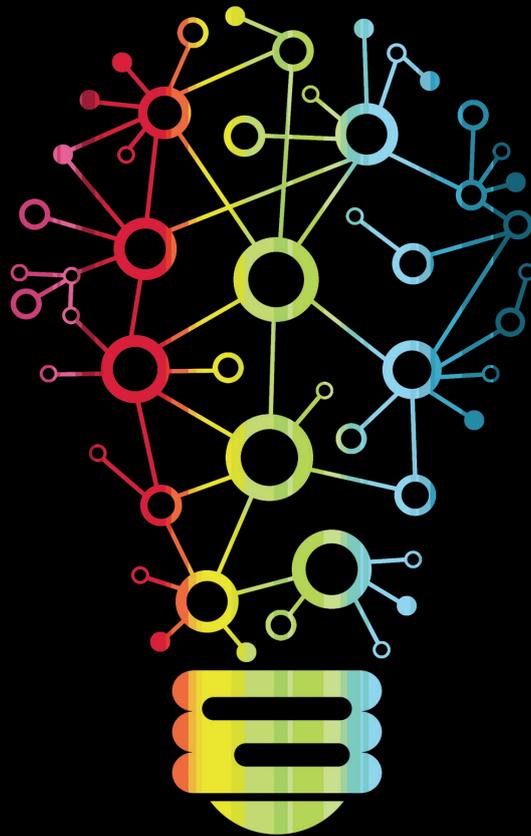
In order to minimise the risk of claims, seek advice about your will and the way your estate will be distributed.

In addition, the wishes and reasoning of the deceased will be taken into account so it is useful to include a separate letter of wishes, outlining the reasoning behind any distributions which deviate from what might be expected.

Taking these steps can help to avoid potentially costly disputes later down the line.

To speak to someone about making or reviewing your will, or for help with an inheritance dispute, please contact Alex Blenkinsop at Muckle LLP on 0191 211 7997 or alex.blenkinsop@muckle-llp.com

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CO-HABITATION AGREEMENTS AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS

As of 31.12.2019, opposite sex couples are now able to enter into a Civil Partnership. Many people ask, what is the benefit of this?

Until recently, a civil partnership was reserved for same-sex couples as they had previously not been able to marry. Since 2014 marriage has been a possibility for both same-sex and opposite sex couples, so a change in the law was required so the options of both marriage or civil partnership were available to all.

What is a civil partnership?

A civil partnership is a legally recognised relationship between two people and offers many of the same benefits as a conventional marriage.

How is a civil partnership different from a marriage?

Unlike a conventional marriage, there are no religious connotations attached to civil partnerships. This means a civil partnership may be a preferable option for those who want to legally recognise their relationship but don't have any particular religious beliefs.

The civil partnership ceremony itself only requires the parties to sign the civil partnership document.

When it comes to ending a civil partnership, the dissolution process is similar to the divorce process in a marriage.

Why enter into a civil partnership instead of getting married?

The biggest benefit to entering into a civil partnership is that the couple will acquire the same rights as married couples in terms of tax benefits, pensions and inheritance.

Many couples in this generation do not agree with the archaic terminology and practices of marriage such as being referred to as someone's "wife" or "husband", rather than equal partners.

Civil Partnership is therefore a way of gaining the financial security and family unit of a formal legal union without the more traditional religious inferences of a marriage.

We have seen a shift in how people view older practices such as marriage in our modern society and experts have predicted that over 80,000 opposite sex couples could form a civil partnership in 2020.

Previously it may have been off putting for couples who do not practice any religion and do not believe in the traditional institution of marriage to formalise their relationship in the eyes of the law. However, depending of the circumstances of the couple, there are downsides to remaining as just cohabiters or what is sometimes referred to as a "common law" marriage.

What is a common law marriage?

A "common law marriage" is a term commonly used when couple live together/cohabit but remain unmarried.

Many people believe that cohabiting couples have the same legal rights as a married couple. This is simply not the case. There is no status in English law as a common-law spouse or partner.

It is important to know your financial position if you choose to live together as the reality is that cohabitation does not provide you with any of the financial



Lindsey Christie

benefits or obligations to one another that comes with a marriage or a civil partnership. Essentially, even though a couple may live together, legally speaking they remain two single people. They have no financial obligations to one another; expect those they enter into contractually (e.g. the joint ownership of a property or an asset). Even having children together does not change this fact.

This can mean that unmarried couples have no legal rights if they separate. Without an agreement, one of them could be left with nothing, even after a very lengthy relationship.

Do I need a cohabitation agreement?

If a cohabiting relationship breaks down there is very little protection for the financially weaker partner. As a result, some cohabiting families can find themselves facing real difficulties should they split up, particularly when children are involved.

In England and Wales, when married couples divorce or civil partners break up, both parties have a legal right to maintenance and their share of marital assets, including property, pensions and other assets. Cohabiting couples have no such rights, regardless of the number of years they have been together and whether they have children.

If you wish to protect your financial position as a cohabitee should your relationship ever breakdown, you should consider entering into a cohabitation agreement.

What is a cohabitation agreement?

A cohabitation agreement is a legal document that lays out who owns what and in what proportion and lets you document how you will split your property, its contents, personal belongings, savings and other assets should the relationship break down. The agreement can also be used to set out how you and your partner will manage your day-to-day finances while you live together, such as how much each contributes to rent or mortgage and bills.

A cohabitation agreement can be extremely influential to the Court if a dispute arises, however, a cohabitation agreement is not legally binding in the same way as a marriage or a Civil Partnership.

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TGI FEBREWARY

(Thank God It's Febrewary)

Join us in celebrating the end of January with a lovely hot brew and a slice of something tasty!

The Teahouse, Newcastle
7th February, 9.30am-11.30am

We know that the beginning of the year can be a struggle for some people, that's why we've teamed up with Mental Health Matters who will help us better understand mental health in the workplace. They will be giving out handy tips on how we can help take better care of ourselves, and support others, in relation to mental health.

www.bit.ly/brewary

The event is free to attend however registration is essential.

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HOW TO LEGALLY FUTURE PROOF YOUR BUSINESS

Join us at Tuspark Eagle Lab for some free legal advice that will cover all of the things you need to be aware of as your business launches or grows.

Tuspark Eagle Lab, Newcastle
20th February, 3.00pm-4.30pm

We set up our law firm in 2017. As business owners, and lawyers, we're well aware of the hundreds of things that need to be done in order to successfully launch and run a business.

Are you confident that you have everything covered? Whether your business is just about to launch, hire employees or has been around for a while - it's never too late to make sure your business is legally future proofed.

Suitable for business start-ups, business owners, managers and HR managers.

www.bit.ly/legallyfp

The event is free to attend however registration is essential. Refreshments, including cake, will be provided.

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A MANAGER'S GUIDE TO EMPLOYMENT LAW

By Alexandra Besnard, Senior Associate
Solicitor at Collingwood Legal

It can sometimes be tough
to be a manager.

There are so many competing needs and pressures: a good manager should be an effective communicator, decision-maker, motivator, delegator, organiser, teambuilder, leader, negotiator and problem solver, all whilst having to work to both collective and individual targets and not forgetting to focus on their own personal development. It's no wonder, then, that legal issues can be less of a priority for many managers who are just trying to get on with their jobs. However, it's important that managers deal with the workplace challenges effectively as some can give rise to employment law issues. In every case, good practice will minimise risk to both the manager personally and to their employer.

This couldn't be highlighted better than by the recent case of Retirement Security Ltd v Wilson. The Claimant in this case was employed to manage a retirement community by the Respondent. The Claimant was accused of serious misconduct by four duty managers and as a result she was suspended immediately. The Claimant's manager sent her a letter inviting her to a disciplinary investigatory meeting, however this was delivered to the wrong address and the Claimant only received this letter one day before the investigation meeting was due to take place. The letter also did not give any detail of the allegations made against her, but instead listed general headings, such as "alleged theft", "confidentiality", "neglect" and "concerns from Directors".

The Claimant attended the meeting and was assigned a more senior manager as a companion, despite not having requested this. Strangely, this senior manager subsequently chaired the meeting. The Claimant was also presented with evidence which she had not previously seen. Following that meeting the Claimant concluded that the



Alexandra Besnard

Respondent had already made its decision that she was guilty of misconduct before any fair disciplinary hearing had taken place. With that view, she resigned and brought a claim for constructive unfair dismissal.

Her claim succeeded at an Employment Tribunal and was upheld on appeal, with the Employment Appeal Tribunal commenting that the process "had been so flawed that the Claimant could reach no other view than that the Respondent wanted to be rid of her". It's also worth highlighting that the employer itself described the disciplinary meeting organised by the Claimant's manager as an ambush – not a great way to be describing the actions of one of your managers.

Maybe the Claimant's manager was purposefully trying to get rid of the Claimant, and there have been other cases recently where this has happened, but it's more likely that the manager did not know how to properly conduct a disciplinary hearing in line with the company's policy so as to ensure it was a fair process for the Claimant. Had they received training on issues such as: what should be included in a letter inviting an employee to a disciplinary hearing; how to properly conduct a fair disciplinary hearing and how to implement the key principles from the ACAS Code of Practice, then the Respondent in this case may not have had to face

the time, expense and stress of an Employment Tribunal claim.

We want to ensure that managers in your organisation are equipped to deal with these issues, so that you don't face a similar situation. To help you ensure that your managers feel well equipped to deal with day-to-day HR and employment law issues, Collingwood Legal is hosting a one day interactive training and development session on Thursday 12th March 2020 at the Newcastle Eagles Community Arena on "Essential Employment and Equality Law for Managers and Team Leaders". We will cover the key principles of employment and equality law and give practical guidance on how to manage an employment relationship from the beginning to the end in terms of legal obligations and procedural requirements. The programme will consist of user-friendly guidance to complex legal concepts and interactive workshop discussions dealing with fact-based case study scenarios. Previous attendees of this session have found it extremely useful and made the following comments: "interesting and informative event" and "brilliant as always".

There are limited places available, so it is advisable to book early by contacting, Sue Graham on 0191 282 2881 or at sue.graham@collingwoodlegal.com.

If you need any employment law or HR advice contact me at alexandra.besnard@collingwoodlegal.com or at 0191 282 2886.



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SANDERSON YOUNG WINS £25 MILLION SALES CONTRACT IN JESMOND

Sanderson Young, the region’s leading new homes estate agent, has recently announced its appointment as the sole selling agents for national developer Pegasus on the exciting redevelopment of the former Central High School site on Eskdale Terrace in Jesmond.

The construction of 63 high quality apartments are expected to be completed in the autumn of 2020 and Pegasus is extremely excited to be releasing the first of its speciality and unique residential schemes in the North East of England. The Pegasus brand has a prestigious reputation throughout the country, specialising in retirement homes and bespoke apartment living for those aged 60 and above.

Duncan Young, Chairman of Sanderson Young, commented: “We are all very excited about the imminent launch of this development of new homes. The development will create a mix of one and two bedroom apartments and is conveniently located for access to Newcastle City Centre.”

Pegasus are working with Tolent Construction. The apartments will have the support facilities of a general manager and host, as well as a communal private lounge, social kitchen area and guest suite. Some will also enjoy tremendous terraces with views over the urban landscape of Newcastle.



FORMER TEESSIDE STUDENT LANDS DREAM DESIGN PROJECT WITH LEADING HOMEBUILDER

In 2017, student Charlie Dempster won an interior design project launched by Miller Homes in conjunction with Q Interiors. Two years on, Charlie is now a full-time interior designer counting the homebuilder as one of her clients.

While studying interior design at Teesside University, Charlie took part in a competitive pitch to present a children’s bedroom design. Judges from Miller Homes and Q Interiors chose Charlie’s design to be brought to life within the show home at Hunters Fold in Middleton St George.

Charlie impressed and stayed with the team at Q Interiors over the summer completing a placement. After graduating, she received the phone call she’d dreamt about with the offer of a full-time job as an interior designer at Q Interiors.

Now after almost 18 months with the company, Charlie recently worked on the show home design for one of Miller Homes’ newest developments, Hurworth Hall Farm.

She said: “To be in the job I dreamed of during my time at university is an amazing feeling. I’ve been involved with many different design projects but The Jura show home at Hurworth Hall Farm has to be my favourite. It’s special to me as it’s a Miller Homes development.”

REGION’S EXPERTS STRENGTHEN INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE TO INVESTORS



Invest Newcastle has gathered the region’s key players to discuss plans for MIPIM 2020, the world’s largest international property conference.

Plans were revealed at a recent breakfast event at The Catalyst building on Newcastle Helix. Representatives from various groups including Newcastle City Council, Durham County Council, Ryder Architecture and Morton Group all attended as part of the delegation that is heading out to Cannes in March.

Invest Newcastle also announced that Dame Jackie Daniel, Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust’s CEO; Professor Chris Day, Vice-Chancellor and President from Newcastle University; and Nicola Palmarini, Director of UK’S National Innovation Centre for Ageing, will be joining the delegation as representatives.

All three representatives will support the delegation to have a stronger international voice and demonstrate the power of multi-agency collaboration on a city and its people.

MIPIM takes place over 4-days and gathers some of the most influential players from all sectors of the international property industry. The Newcastle stand will provide a platform for partners to engage with investors and deliver an events programme that showcases the region’s strengths and expertise around wellness and sustainability.

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MUCKLE RUNNING SOCIAL

Muckle LLP's second Running Social event attracted over 40 business people from across the region, eager to get 2020 off to a healthy start.

Hosted at the Eagles Community Arena, home to the Newcastle Eagles, fitness experts David Fairlamb and Joel Brannigan shared tips on health and nutrition before leading a series of warm up exercises. Afterwards runners took part in a 3k or 5k run followed by drinks, food and chat back at the arena.

One attendee - Oasis Community Housing CEO David Smith - said: "It's fun, you get to do something you enjoy and naturally get to know people in the process."





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L-R: Amy Brice (Sanderson Young), Gill Cockburn (Sanderson Young), Vicky Fleming (Altoria Development), Alan Fleming (Altoria Development)

BUNGALOW DEVELOPERS ALTORIA ACQUIRE SISTER SITE IN STANNINGTON

Morpeth based firm Altoria Development have acquired a second site in this popular location, where demand for their first scheme outstripped supply.

Altoria was established in 2014 by husband and wife team Alan and Victoria Fleming, with an aim to produce bespoke, fully adaptable, new build bungalows.

Their first development was launched in 2016, where the first phase of eight bungalows sold exclusively off-plan. The second phase of a further six bungalows followed in 2018, and again the response was unprecedented. Many of the properties achieved in excess of their guide price as there was in fact a waiting list for the second phase.

Sanderson Young handled all the sales on behalf of Altoria at Furrow Grove and they are delighted to be appointed once again to launch the sister site. Positioned on Station Road in Stannington,

Ridge Grove will provide an exclusive development of eight detached bungalows, all of which will provide the opportunity for each buyer to customise their individual home; with a high quality internal finish and attractive landscaping, located in the Northumberland countryside yet close to nearby towns Morpeth and Cramlington.

Amy Brice, Regional Surveyor at Sanderson Young, comments "Following the exceptional success of Furrow Grove in Stannington, which was the first of its kind in the area, we are delighted to be once again assisting Altoria bring their unique product to market. Single storey living is very much on the radar for more senior purchasers looking to downsize and Altoria have certainly created a niche as a developer focusing solely on constructing bungalows."

Vicky Fleming, Director of Altoria comments: "We are very proud of what we have achieved at Furrow Grove and are looking forward to continuing this success over the road. We pride ourselves in the personal customer service we offer each buyer: from the wide choice of internal fittings to altering internal layouts. Alan Fleming, Director comments: "Our aim is to provide a luxurious home with a high specification that comes included in the sale price. There is a very high demand for this type of property within the local area."

Construction on site at Ridge Grove will commence in the coming months, with properties anticipated for completion towards the end of 2020.

To be the first to hear more about this fantastic development, please contact Sanderson Young's Gosforth Regional office on 0191 2130033 or via contact@sandersonyoung.co.uk



ORCHARD HOUSE, THE GREEN, WALLSEND



PRICE GUIDE: £750,000

Orchard House is an impressive detached Victorian villa, built circa 1890, in a mature, private garden site of approx half an acre in the conservation area of The Green. This superb family home has extensive, versatile accommodation with six bedrooms, four bathrooms, four reception rooms, two conservatories and a large kitchen/breakfast room; the many period features include decorative ceiling coving, moulding and fireplaces. The property has been extended to the ground floor creating a large bedroom, sitting room and shower room, ideal as an annexe for extended family or an elderly relative. Orchard House is ideally situated for easy access to local amenities and the beautiful Wallsend Parks for woodland walks, a cafe, tennis courts, bowling green and children's play area. There are two Metro Stations within walking distance and the excellent Silverlink Shopping Park is a short drive.



Contact rare! From Sanderson Young on 0191 2233500 ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk www.sandersonyoung.co.uk

RESIDENTIAL RESTORATION PROJECT IN NEWCASTLE SHORTLISTED FOR TWO PRESTIGIOUS AWARDS



L-R: Melanie Brown, Varsha Sehgal and Jan Dale

An ambitious restoration and conversion of an historic Newcastle building to create luxury apartments has been shortlisted for two prestigious design awards.

Byzantine House, located in Eskdale Terrace, Jesmond – and recently converted into 10 one and two-bed apartments and mews – has been nominated in this year's Lord Mayor's Design Awards.

Newcastle's Lord Mayor's Design Awards, which have been run every two years since 1994, aim to promote the best architecture, environmental design and improvements to the built environment across the city. Awards and commended finalists are given to outstanding projects in the fields of architecture, planning, urban and landscape design.

Byzantine House, converted by design-led local developer Provenance Developments, is in the running to win best conservation/refurbishment project along with best housing development in the city.

An awards ceremony takes place at the Mansion House, Jesmond, on February 6, so for many reading this, a decision will have been taken on winners and commendations.

The first show home opened to the public in October and already estate agent Urban Base has successfully confirmed reservations on 50pc of the homes.

Built in 1914-15 to a design by local architect Marcus Kenneth Glass, the grade 1 listed building showcases the style and opulence of an Art Deco interpretation of the Byzantine Revival style.

Provenance Developments and its award-winning



Byzantine House

interior designer Melanie Brown, of Design Direction, have paid respect to the unique features of the building and designed new homes that boast individually designed layouts, light filled interiors and an unrivalled level of high-quality finish.

Melanie said: "To be recognised in the Lord Mayor's Design Awards is a great tribute to the efforts of the entire planning, design and build team that delivered the project. Whatever happens at the final ceremony, it's still an honour and privilege to be recognised as being among the very best of Newcastle's residential projects in the last two years."

Her business partner Varsha Sehgal added: "This recognition along with the strong demand for the properties is proof that the City recognises and values high-end, design-led property projects.

"When we started Provenance, we knew we didn't

want to be another 'me too' developer. We didn't want to be doing what others are doing and be delivering more beige boxes to the market. We wanted our passion for design and our attention to detail to shine through."

Byzantine House was originally built as a synagogue and served the United Hebrew Congregation of Newcastle upon Tyne until closure of the building in 1986. More latterly the building was used by Newcastle High School for Girls. And now the building has been converted into luxury living.

In July last year, Newcastle City Council placed a blue plaque on the building in recognition of its historic significance. Lord Mayor Cllr David Cook said: "There's an enormous danger when historic buildings change their use that their heritage is lost but this fantastic building has been retained and I'm delighted that we still have it here in Jesmond."

Jan Dale, director at Urban Base, explained: "There has been strong demand for these luxurious one and two bed apartments. Purchasers and people viewing the apartments quickly appreciate the meticulous refurbishment that retains a classic style, while offering a superb standard of contemporary specification.

"The developer and design team have extensive experience in carefully regenerating unique buildings and pride themselves in their attention to detail, bringing historical features to life while creating elegant spaces with every modern comfort and convenience."

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NEWCASTLE CITY CENTRE SET TO SEE RESURGENCE OF NEW-BUILD HOMES IN 2020

James Platts, Partner at Knight Frank, shares his thoughts on why there is reason to be optimistic about city centre residential development in Newcastle.

While most UK regional cities have seen heavyweight levels of city centre residential development, Newcastle lags behind.

With the exception of Igloo's very successful regeneration scheme, The Malings in the Ouseburn, there have been very few completed new-build schemes in the city centre for private sale, for a long time. Prior to The Malings, nothing of note has been brought to the market since the mid 2000's.

However, there are hopeful signs of resurgence in the residential market with the 162 apartments currently under construction at the 26-storey Hadrian's Tower and 1,200 new homes at Newby Developments' Quayside West scheme. Although this scheme is a mixture of private rented and sales it does show there is demand for apartments in the city centre. This - in my opinion - is just the start of things to come.

In part, the lull of residential development is down to the controversial government policy 'Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders' which was introduced in 2002. The approach limited new builds in the city centre in a bid to revive failing housing markets in outlying urban areas. In Newcastle, for many years, much of the new-build investment went to the west of the city, to developments around Scotswood Road.

Then came the onslaught of new-build student flats schemes which was welcomed as it brought development in the downturn. But with this market becoming saturated, there are developers who have planning approval for student developments who are thinking, OK, what can we do with the site instead?



James Platts

There is an emergence of interest in bringing more PRS (Private Rented Sector) schemes to the city – also known as Build-to-Rent. A joint venture of investor Moorfield Group and developers Panacea Property recently delivered a £37m PRS project at Forth Banks. The scheme has 280 apartments available to rent and there are a number of other PRS sites under contract from developers such as the High Street Group.

So, has the time finally come for a resurgence of new-build city centre homes for owner-occupiers in Newcastle? In a word, yes.

Firstly, and most importantly, capital values are now back to a level that will attract residential developers back to the area. Values for new build will average £320 per square foot this year.

Due to the hiatus in development, there is a pent-up demand from potential owner-occupiers – what

we need now, is the supply.

Residential development in other regional cities has now reached saturation and therefore the time is ripe for Newcastle.

We have the sites. There are some excellent schemes coming to the market including Banks House on Pilgrim Street which is likely to have some residential units. There is the £200m Stephenson Quarter which will include around 150 new homes. Newby's Caulder's site adjacent to the Arena, which is currently in for planning, will have around 1,200 homes and there are several other smaller sites in the city centre, including one at St James, and a number in the trendy Ouseburn Valley. So, the message to residential developers is – Newcastle is open for business. And the message to people looking to buy a home in our wonderful, vibrant city centre is – watch this space!

James can be contacted at james.platts@knightfrank.com 0191 594 5026.



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Neil Turner

WHY EMPLOY AN ARCHITECT?

This is the first in a series of articles to simplify the process of achieving great architecture – whether the home, the office or any building.

Quite often when I visit clients to discuss their initial plans to build, one of the earliest questions I'm asked is, 'how much is the architect's fee going to cost me?' Of course, I totally understand why.

I like to explain what the architect does and the series of tasks that are required throughout a project. I hope this demystifies the role of the architect, helps to explain the level of involvement required and I find it also paves the way to a good working relationship.

Many people think the architect turns up in his corduroy jacket with patches on the arms, looks at the site, goes back to his studio and simply scribbles a quick sketch on the back of an envelope. The sketch then turns into some crude plans and the builder cracks on to complete the rest. How wrong most people are, if only it was that easy.

Since the advent of TV programmes like Grand

Designs and internet sites like Pinterest, more people are interested in design. But an architect adds something more to a project. He adds vision, experience, as well as how to deal with the builders. For instance, I've seen projects where people have added all the pieces they have seen and then been disappointed with the result. But why allow that happen?

An architect will listen to your ideas and draw them, showing you what works and, just as importantly, what doesn't! A good architect will produce further drawings to refine and improve his initial thoughts to get the right proposal.

Another question I have been asked is 'can a good building be achieved without an architect? It can, but, I can't think of any examples. However, on a cautionary note, architects are very different from architectural designers or plan drawers. I am often told they are cheap and there is good reason for this. They don't have the experience or vision of an architect, who has trained for a minimum

of seven years before qualifying! The architect should take your thoughts and budget and push them to the maximum.

If you are in any doubt whether the person you have asked is qualified to do your work, check with the Royal Institute of British Architects or RIBA, as it is commonly referred to, RIBA can supply you with the names of people in your area most suitable to the budget and scale of your project. They have an excellent Newcastle office who will help you.

So, my advice is always, employ the right people and enjoy the journey of design in the comfort of a safe pair of hands. The Architects cost should be seen as part of the investment of getting it right and enjoying your office, home or factory for the next 20 years, rather than regretting some cheap hasty decisions. It will most likely save you money!

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Damiano Rea, Director, Heaton Property

ARE YOU REALLY RENTING?

Customer feedback is important for any successful business and while we regularly ask our landlords and tenants what we can do to improve their situation it is often the informal chat which is most revealing.

A tenant popping into the office, or chatting with our maintenance crew often leads to a more wide-ranging discussion of their situation and circumstances.

One question put to young professionals almost guaranteed to raise a sigh is "How do your parents feel about you renting?" Because it seems the older generation just do not get it. Wrong conclusions include the assumption that the couple cannot afford to get onto the property ladder. A young professional couple will almost certainly be able to afford mortgage repayments on a starter home in developments like Great Park in Newcastle, or a 1st floor Tyneside Flat in Heaton. Other questions concern security of tenure but the couple will be wise enough to realise that so long as they pay the rent and keep their property in decent shape, a landlord will be delighted to form a long term relationship.

Rather than submit to the "Oh dear, you are renting" reaction from older family and friends, young professional couples find themselves offering a vigorous defence of their choice. By renting they can

live in a desirable part of town with good transport links. If they are planning a family they can afford two bedrooms with a garden and when the family grows, up-sizing to a three bedroom property is a lot less hassle than climbing back into the property market. Their boiler goes on the blink? Simply call the letting agency's on-call maintenance team then sit back and wait for the thing to be fixed rather than worry about paying for a repair or replacement. Add to this the joy of avoiding estate agency fees, mortgage broker charges, conveyancing and stamp duty then a compelling case to rent begins to emerge.

Young professionals frequently need to be mobile in order to further their career so if a job opportunity presents itself several hundred miles away, house hunting on the rental market, armed with excellent references can often be completed in a weekend.

These are all hard-nosed, practical reasons offered by young professionals to justify their decision to rent but dig a little deeper and the heart begins to speak. Quite simply, young professionals want to enjoy the best years of their lives. They want exotic holidays

before settling down to start a family. They may want a lavish wedding, a sports car or to cut a dash in the fashion stakes and they want to do this with the freedom of youth.

This attitude may result in shaking heads and tuts from an older generation but history tells us that the drive to own rather than rent is a relatively recent phenomenon. Until around 1945, renting was the norm. The post war housing boom and increasing prosperity led to generations of families choosing to buy their home. This phenomenon was ratcheted up in the 70's and 80's with home ownership seen as a right rather than a privilege.

As landlords continue to refurbish their properties with new kitchens, bathrooms, energy efficient central heating and landscaped gardens, so the attitude of young professionals will continue to reflect the comfort, flexibility and cost effectiveness of choosing to rent rather than buy. Good news for landlords and tenants, good news for areas wishing to attract young professionals with disposable income.

Heaton Property was setup in 2005 and specialises in providing rental property for professionals in Newcastle upon Tyne and the surrounding areas.

In June 2014 the company won gold in the Times/Sunday Times Letting Agency of the Year Awards.

Heaton Property website: www.heatonproperty.com Tel: 0191 240 0665 Email: office@heatonproperty.com

LEADING REGIONAL HOUSING ASSOCIATION, BERNICIA, MAKES EXECUTIVE APPOINTMENT TO SUPPORT AMBITIOUS PLANS



Andrea Malcolm, newly appointed as Executive Director of People, Homes and Communities at Bernicia.

North East housing association, Bernicia, has changed its executive team structure to support ambitious plans for the future with the appointment of Andrea Malcolm as Executive Director of People, Homes and Communities.

The newly created post aligns Bernicia's people and housing services as the organisation revises its corporate structure to work more closely with tenants to shape the business and services it delivers.

Andrea, who began her housing career 28 years ago has been promoted to her new position after two years as Director of People, Culture and Communications.

John Johnston, Bernicia Chief Executive, said: "I'm absolutely delighted to confirm Andrea's appointment into the role of Executive Director of People, Homes and Communities and I'm sure she will prove to be an excellent appointment.

"Bernicia is entering into an exciting phase of development where our service delivery models will change as we continue to ensure that we respond to the needs of our tenants, communities, staff and the marketplace.

"As a consequence of this we have reviewed our executive team structure and are now combining our housing and people functions under Andrea in the newly created executive director role."

Bernicia has developed an innovative tenant involvement framework that will raise work with tenants to a new level and ensure that the substantial investment it is making in new technology meets their needs and supports new service delivery models across the business.

Andrea said: "Bernicia is finalising bold new service delivery plans to meet all our stakeholders' needs so it's an exciting time for me in my new role to be able to drive this agenda forward.

"We've got a fantastic team at Bernicia delivering great results through their commitment to ensuring all our tenants and customers receive the best possible service tailored to their specific needs."

Bernicia is headquartered in Ashington, Northumberland, and manages 14,000 homes from Berwick-upon-Tweed to Redcar, employing 550 staff with an annual turnover of £75m.

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REFURBISHMENT OF BEDE HOUSE, BELMONT BUSINESS PARK, COMPLETED WITH £750,000 INVESTMENT



L-R: Andrew Little, regional managing partner and head of the Durham office at Baldwins Accountants, Ian Moir, managing director, AMH Workspace, Gurpreet Jagpal, chief executive, Durham Group Estates.

Durham Group Estates, a leading privately owned North East property investment company, has completed the second phase of a £750,000 refurbishment of Bede House, Belmont Business Park, Durham.

The company which operates across the North East and Yorkshire, completed the first phase of the 26,000 sq ft two-storey office building in September 2019, with national accountancy firm, Baldwins, occupying the 13,000 sq ft first floor, as part of a major investment in the region.

Durham Group Estates' overall property portfolio includes offices, retail, industrial warehouses, land and student accommodation.

Durham Group Estates' chief executive, Gurpreet Jagpal, said: "We have now completed the transformation of Bede House from subdivided small offices into large, open plan office suites, with the very latest in audio visual and IT infrastructure.

"We completely overhauled all the mechanical and electrical infrastructure to ensure the building is energy efficient as well as being suited to collaborative, flexible working. We also commissioned a design team and installed new flooring, soft furnishings and finishes throughout.

"We enlisted the advice and project management

of Marc Simpson, Simpson Property consultants and all work was completed by AMH Workspace. I have to say we are delighted with the end product.

"Located on the edge of Durham city centre, Bede House is in a prime position at the entrance to Belmont Business Park with a variety of local and national organisations on its doorstep. Durham Group Estates owns a number of buildings in Belmont which are all fully occupied and we attribute this to the fantastic location being in close proximity to the city centre and the A1.

"We were delighted to welcome Baldwins Accountants, which chose the premise as its main County Durham office. We have had very strong levels of interest in the remaining office suite and are in advanced negotiations with a national organisation, which would be a fantastic coup for the Durham area."

Andrew Little, regional managing partner and head of the Durham office at Baldwins Accountants, said: "We have signed a ten year lease having

centralised three regional offices, so that our 80 business advisory experts have an incredible new environment that is modern in appearance and offers vast open space.

"The location in Durham provides us with perfect access to the wider North East and beyond. We see this as an office of strategic importance, offering a great platform for growth. With 100 offices across the country we have become the fastest growing accountants in the UK."

Lord Wigglesworth, chairman at Durham Group Estates, said: "2019 was an excellent year for the business and with the exception of Bede House which was undergoing refurbishment, we were fully occupied across all our commercial, industrial, retail and student accommodation. This is testament to the financial investment we place in our buildings as well as the relationship Gurpreet and our property management team have with our occupiers. We look forward to making increased investment in the North East and Yorkshire during the coming year."

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RISING STARS

Paul Reed and Suzanne Blair
Associate directors at GT3 Architects

What were your career ambitions growing up?

PR: From a very early age I had ambitions to be an architect. I was always very interested in art and design, constantly drawing anything and everything. Alongside this, I have always had a strong interest in both sciences and maths. Architecture seemed to be a perfect outlet for both the creative and methodical aspects that I enjoyed.

SB: I think I went through every career possible; from air hostess to zoo keeper, but often dwelled on creative roles. I developed an interest initially in subjects like product design before finding out more about architecture through a fellow student at a school.

What attracted you to your current role?

PR: I was excited by the opportunity to join a young, agile practice with a strong culture and to play a strategic part in its continued growth.

SB: GT3 Architects had just formed following a merger which seemed like a great opportunity. I saw the chance to get involved in a growing business and be part of the team that shaped and developed it.

What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

PR: Within any role there are always going to be certain aspects that you find more difficult than others, whether it be project or people based. Personally, my biggest test is to balance both of these equally but these challenges are what keep the role fresh and interesting!

SB: Switching from non-project activities in to project mode takes a lot of mental focus and it's also sometimes tricky to get your head around the business side of things. Having trained as an architect and not in anything business related, it can take some time to understand that side of things!

What are you currently working on?

PR: My background is as a sports and leisure architect. I am the associate director responsible for supporting the growth of our work in this sector and I am leading a number of leisure schemes both locally and nationally,

alongside an R&D project into a community led leisure concept. In addition to this I am very much enjoying my lead role on the Gateshead town centre master plan which has an added incentive as it is my home town.

SB: As a team leader I oversee several projects, from a £20 million leisure centre in East London, which is on site, to a 18 storey residential tower in Newcastle that's close to going in for planning, whilst also developing a bespoke consultation strategy for a community hub near Manchester. I've also recently taken on the role of Education Lead within the practice to grow that sector.

What's the best piece of advice you've been given?

PR: When you are busy, deal with things in bite size chunks. It's one that I pass down to others I work with as I think it immediately allows perspective on a situation.

SB: Look after yourself first – it's easy to slip into the habit of always putting everyone and everything first and thinking that this is the best way to support them. However, if you're not ok yourself then you're not usually much use to anyone else at work or at home.

Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

PR: I'd like to grow our sports and leisure expertise into other sectors of higher education and elite sport, whilst positioning ourselves as a thought leader in the sector. Continuing to grow the practice in a sustained manner whilst maintaining the practice culture is important to me.

SB: I always hate this question as I like to stay open minded to what opportunities might come my way. At the moment we're undergoing a lot of strategising at GT3 to shape the future of the business and there are some exciting opportunities emerging out of that. I was born and raised in the North East and now live in city centre Newcastle and would love to become more involved in what is happening locally through the various industry groups and initiatives that are out there.



L-R: Simon Dunstan, director (sitting) with Paul Reed and Suzanne Blair.



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MEDIAWORKS LAUNCHES LEEDS OFFICE WITH FORMER BRASS TEAM



Following on from a hugely successful 2019, digital marketing agency Mediaworks has announced plans to open a new Yorkshire office based in Leeds.

Mediaworks has moved quickly to acquire the services of several former Brass senior employees, after the agency entered administration in December. Paul Mallett and Gill Ball join Mediaworks as Managing Partners to spearhead the new Yorkshire office, together with Andrew Brown,

Creative Strategy Director, and Becca Tredget, Head of Strategic Planning.

Brett Jacobson, Chief Executive Officer at Mediaworks, said: "We know how important Yorkshire is in the UK's economy, so it is essential for us to strategically invest and grow our presence in the region. The opportunity for Paul, Gill, Andrew, and Becca to join our team and to establish a dedicated presence in Leeds is a real coup for us and will help us to lead the way in the region."



RED BUTTON MARKETING ACHIEVES CPD STATUS

Darlington-based Red Button Marketing is celebrating following the news that its strategic marketing workshops have been CPD accredited.

Accredited CPD training means the learning activity has reached the required Continuing Professional Development (CPD) standards and benchmarks. The learning value has been scrutinised to ensure integrity and quality.

Delegates who are working towards a professional qualification or keeping a certification valid can now claim CPD points for attending a strategic marketing workshop with Red Button Marketing. Individuals are able to keep up to date with the latest learning on the understanding that the teaching is of a specified standard.

Margaret Bradshaw, owner of Red Button Marketing, from Richmond, developed the workshops in 2019 using a unique methodology for marketing strategy that she innovated when she started the business three years ago. Margaret identified an opportunity to empower business owners to create a coordinated and well-structured marketing strategy.



SERIOUSLY CREATIVE SENIOR HIRE AT O

Creative communications, PR and social agency O Communications has grown its senior management team with the appointment of Kirsty Ramsey as Marketing and Business Development Director.

Having invested £650,000 into a new space and staff hires in 2018 to support future growth in its creative content services, O has continued to go from strength-to-strength with significant new client wins in fashion retail, clean energy and fintech sectors throughout 2019.

Kirsty previously spent 11 years at MHA Tait Walker heading up the marketing team, with seven of those working with the national MHA business development and branding team. Kirsty brings a range of experience in marketing, branding, communications strategy and marketing measurement. She has worked with lots of regional businesses over the years, to help them better understand and develop their strategy and how to benchmark and measure success.

A CHANGE OF STATUS AS LEADING DIGITAL AGENCY BECOMES QRIOUS

Newcastle based agency Status Digital has rung the new year changes, unveiling a new status. Rebranding as Qrious, after a year of rapid growth and the announcement of eight new appointments at the end of 2019, the business will refocus on people, innovation and curiosity as it heads towards its second decade.

The team of 19 business transformation and customer experience experts, are based at Maling Exchange, Hoults Yard. The firm, established in 2011, helps ambitious businesses to better understand their customers, so they can design innovative services and digital products that deliver transformative and lasting business improvements.

The Qrious name and identity – a portmanteau of the words 'question' and 'curious' - will be rolled out in the coming months through a new website and service offering and forms part of ambitious plans to build on the successes of the previous decade as well as continuing to develop its service offering.



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ASK Silver Bullet:

“IS BRAND LOYALTY A THING OF THE PAST?”

As we enter 2020, you could easily be forgiven for doubting much of what we had believed to be true in marketing, just as in politics, given the results of December’s election – results which just a few years ago would have been unimaginable - when Blyth Valley votes for a Conservative MP, we’re definitely in new territory!

The swings we saw on December 13 were a direct result of voters rejecting their traditional political brands so why should other non-political party brands feel secure in an age in which retail habits have been turned on their head by online shopping, the traditional High Street is becoming a distant memory in places and the environmental movement is making us all feel guilty about virtually everything? Indeed, a whole new industry sector has now grown up to encourage and enable consumers to switch brands in sectors from energy supplier to motor insurance.

Of course, with brands no longer rewarding customer loyalty, and actually penalising it in many cases such as car insurance, where the entire business model seems to be built on offering the lowest possible premium in the first year to attract the initial business but hiking this up in subsequent years in the hope that customers can’t be bothered to switch. What is interesting however, is the extent to which consumers are now switching brands.

A DMA (Data & Marketing Association)/Paragon survey in October 2019 year revealed that 61% of shoppers had switched brands in the previous 12 months, with 57% in search of better value

and 31% looking for a brand that better reflected their personal needs. What was also interesting is that the switch was very much a ‘pull’ rather than a ‘push’ with 62% of consumers who switched brand in the past 12 months doing so because brands successfully attracted them, rather than bad customer experience pushing them away.

61% of consumers switched brand at least once in the last year, with automotive (70%) and supermarkets (68%) showing the highest percentage of customers willing to switch brands due to the lure of new opportunities. Only banking found previous poor customer experience to be an equally decisive factor for the switch, where it was a 50-50 split.

Whilst these are overall figures, there’s also considerable discrepancies between age groups with loyalty gradually declining from Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), through Generation X (1965-1980), Millennials (1981-1996) to the latest Generation Z (1997-2012) consumers. Again, no real surprises here as the tech savvy youngsters find switching so easy whilst older consumers often struggle both with technology and the feelings of brand loyalty inherent in their purchasing habits.

What also needs to be taken into account is the

brand itself and how strong it is. ‘Invisible’ services, such as energy, insurance and telephone contracts, for example, involve little or no personal interaction between the consumer and the provider and are often now facilitated by third party brokers who take their own cut - the brand isn’t really important as we already expect poor service, so that only leaves the price as a differentiating factor. We all, of course, know where that leads to, as the cost-cutting on Grenfell Tower so tragically portrayed, but that’s for another day...

With strong brands, however, price isn’t so important – Nike, for example, doesn’t just sell trainers, it sells the idea of you becoming a better athlete, whilst Apple doesn’t just sell Macs and iPhones – it sells the idea of changing the world with technology. Consumers pay more but have the comfort of the brand which is differentiated by quality and aspiration.

So, benefitting ourselves from the loyalty of our own highly-valued clients, I wouldn’t agree that brand loyalty is a thing of the past but would qualify this by suggesting it depends, in essence, on the demographic of the consumer, the strength of the particular brand and the sector in which it operates.

Do you need some assistance with your marketing, PR or design? Do you need to review your strategy or do you want to know how we can help your business? Talk to us. Email your questions anonymously to us today hello@silverbulletmarketing.co.uk or Tweet us (not so anonymously) @SilverBulletPR.

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WITHOUT OUR PEOPLE WE ARE NOTHING

By Veronica Swindale, Managing Director of nesma

nesma has been involved with the People Power event since its inception and we already have an exciting range of topics and speakers lined up for the marketing and communications stream for Wednesday 17 June 2020 at Northumbria University.

People Power is a fast-paced, fun and interactive 1-day event aimed at business leaders and HR professionals in the North East who are looking to develop their staff and create workplaces where their people thrive.

Veronica caught up with Lyndsey Morrison, Director at The Projects Studio, to find out what inspired her to create the conference.

What was the catalyst that brought People Power as an event to life?

There is so much negativity in the press and on social media about the current jobs market and workplace. We're bombarded with 'robots will take our jobs', 'skills gaps will hamper growth', 'the apprenticeship levy is failing', 'the changing expectations of millennials' and 'the challenge of an ageing workforce'. We felt that there was a real need in the region to address this head-on.

People Power provides an environment where business leaders and managers can understand the practical steps, they can take to address all these challenges, future-proof their business and ensure they are ready and fit to compete. We want visitors to leave the event feeling inspired, with fresh ideas about people development and with a suite of tools to help them implement positive change.

Why do you think it is such a popular and bustling event?

It's simple really, People Power is all about People. We work hard behind the scenes to create a programme of quality content that is driven by the needs of the workforce in the North East – offering solutions to the real challenges that employers face in the workplace. The fluid format of the event, which gives delegates a choice of keynotes/seminars/workshops/training throughout the day means that there really is something for everyone and helps to create a relaxed atmosphere.

A critical message that runs throughout the event is how employers can make positive changes, whether



this is through new leadership styles and strategies, improving communication, embracing new technologies or focusing on health and wellbeing within the business. The conference and exhibition supports companies in the North East to be places where people really want to work and become more productive.

What were the highlights for you at last year's event?

The positive and buzzing atmosphere at the event was fab – we were delighted that people battled through horrendous weather and made a real effort, not just to turn up, but to turn up with purpose and a genuine desire to learn. We had some fantastic speakers from a range of industry backgrounds. The marketing and comms room sponsored and curated by nesma was busy and lively throughout the day including speakers such as Paul Hutchins (TEDx speaker & author) discussing employer branding and Andy Green, who spoke about storytelling in business.

What can delegates look forward to at the next event?

We've taken the best bits, added some tweaks and new additions. It's about evolution not revolution. Our themes this year (Lead, Innovate, Communicate and Care) are again driven by demand. We are working on curating a fantastic programme of

industry leaders and keynotes who will share their stories of success and the challenges that they have met along the way. We feel that it is motivational for people to hear directly from people who have faced similar challenges to them, and how they have found solutions within their own organisations.

Expect some well-known leading brands as well as experts, trainers and coaches to be on hand to offer advice and support.

The new 'training hub' will also provide training in business meta skills such as presentation skills, negotiation, managing conflict, assertiveness – you know, the skills that we all need in the bank to make our working lives easier!

How would you explain where the marketing and communications theme fits into the overall programme?

Following the past People Power events (in 2018 and 2019), we surveyed all attendees to find out what key challenges they faced in the next 12 months. One of the key themes that came out of this was the challenge of marketing their business. People Power addresses the people side of marketing, such as employer branding and internal communications and gives people training in the everyday skills that they need to develop and market their brands effectively.

What do you think are going to be the most popular employer issues under discussion this year?

There's no real single 'stand out' issue – Business success is really the sum of lots of moving parts, all working together harmoniously. Even if you have excellent leadership skills, if you don't have the right culture in the business, a great brand, the right technology or a happy and healthy workforce, then you won't achieve your ambitions. The range of topics provided at People Power enables visitors to focus on their particular area of interest or need.

If this sounds right up your street, you can book your tickets now using a special 20% discount code **INSIGHT20** from www.peoplepowerevents.co.uk



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Christian Cerisola

MEGHAN AND HARRY PROVE TAKING ON THE MEDIA IS A HIGH-RISK STRATEGY

I genuinely hope Harry and Meghan are having a peaceful time in Canada. Somehow, I doubt it.

If the media world was expecting a quiet easing into 2020 in early January, they were rudely awoken in that first full week when Mr and Mrs Sussex announced, via their Instagram feed, that they planned to eventually step back from full time Royal duties and split their time between Canada and UK. The resulting Tsunami of negative opinion was enough make even Brexit a mere side issue.

The signs had been coming. In previous columns in this publication, I'd warned about whether Meghan Markle was right in taking on the Mail on Sunday and her legal battle with them for the publication of her letter to her father. Morally and ethically, of course she has every right to insist letters to her father stay private. But if the move was to try to leverage some sort of control over the media, I just can't see that same media being particularly forgiving in the months and years to come, regardless of the outcome of that case.

This latest move only seems to have served to heighten the media's desire to 'do a number' on her. Its depressing stuff. Piers Morgan, of course, leapt all over it. He's never been shy in having his opinion on Meghan and her influence on 'our' Harry.

Other high-profile media figures weighed in too. Eammon Holmes, some-time presenter of This Morning and former Sky News presenter, when

quizzed on TalkRadio, said: "I just find her incredibly irritating." Then came his zinger. "I've never met her, but I look at her and think 'I don't think I'd like you in real life.'"

I've never met her, but I'll make this judgement anyway. It's a staggeringly stupid, crass and hurtful thing to say about anybody. Even the once untouchable Philip Schofield has had his squeaky-clean name muddied in the aftermath when put to rights by lawyer, author and black activist Dr Shola Mos-Shogbamimu when he questioned whether she could point to any instances of racism in the press relating to Meghan's treatment. Her takedown of that statement is worth a watch.

Harry and Meghan; two (relatively) young people with a new family, trying to do the best they can to figure stuff out. I've been there. Many of us have. Not as Royals, of course, but even us mere mortals know how bloody tough the new dynamic can be when a child arrives. Any other vocation, any other couple with a young family and they'd likely receive widespread praise for simply trying to do the best they can for their family.

Let's not forget the signals had already been made clear in Meghan's revealing interview with ITV News in that she was having a real struggle to come to terms with her new life in the Royal spotlight.

But if the couple believe this will be the end to the press intrusion, then sadly I fear this may just be the start. Taking on the might of the media is a tough call. Their decision, of course, won't have been taken lightly, and you can surely sympathise with someone who blames the media for chasing his own mother to her own tragic death.

To get what they really wanted from this – some peace and tranquillity – one wonders if they may have approached this in a less confrontational manner. Their advisers, surely, will have told them that its an unwinnable fight they were picking with the media and that to try to take them on only serves to throw fuel on the flames.

A slow and gradual retreat from the Royal frontline may well have served them better and not caused such an incredible stink, both with the media and with the general public who have suddenly found an unfathomable sense of ownership of the Royals.

As it is, MailOnline and the rest will report record numbers on any story they run on Meghan and Harry. Piers will let everyone know his Meghan rants on Good Morning Britain had record viewing numbers, and as a result, the stories will rumble on and on. I don't think Harry and Meghan will have a chance to slip on their comfy trakkie bottoms to dash to the shop for a pint of milk just yet.

Christian Cerisola is head of W North, part of W Communications. www.wcommunications.co.uk. @wcommnorth on Twitter and Instagram.

VALENTINE'S GREETINGS *from* HIGHLIGHTS PR CLIENTS

We love getting our clients into the media spotlight at Highlights PR. As Valentine's Day is here this month, we asked our clients what they love about their jobs.



"I love that as a location independent business my business allows me the ability to work and travel. I've managed to spend three summers in Greece because of it. I can set my own hours and work to my schedule, not someone else's."
Claire Hunter, The Social Media Concierge



"I love the fact that I regularly get to inspire children (& often their parents) when they read my stories and that it empowers them to be grateful, be kind and reach for the stars."
Eleanor Baggaley The Snowdrop Story

"Falling in Love is a leap into the unknown, it's about being passionate and bold in times of change. Being creative is having the freedom and permission to be different."
Kym Drady of Creative Solutions



"I fell in love with North Tyneside Business Forum 10 ten years ago when it was launched and I was asked to sit on the Management Group. Since then, we've met and supported thousands of businesses from start-ups to larger more established companies and helped them to be the best they can be in their sector and I'm looking forward to many more years to come."
Karen Goldfinch, Vice Chair North Tyneside Business Forum



"I love our members. They are MINT. They inspire me every day to be better myself. It's a privilege to work with them and see them live their business joy."
Nicola Jayne Little, MINT Business Club



"I LOVE that I'm helping people make a difference to their businesses which in turn makes a difference to their lives as a whole! Who wouldn't love that?"
Moira Barnes, Moira Barnes Sales Consultancy



"In my business I love helping people that other agents or landlords may refuse to assist with housing. It gives me a huge sense of job satisfaction and pride to be able to help people when they feel all hope is lost of securing a tenancy."
Nicky Middleton, Usworth Property Management



"2020 is a leap year so ladies can officially pop the question. Not only does that cement their relationship, it also protects their inheritance, their right to live in their home and saves them some tax."
Neil Fraser Director Northumberland Wills and Probate



"What I love about my job is that it isn't a job. I haven't worked a day of my life as a business owner. How can you call it work when you love fixing people every day and making a difference?"
Paul Hobrough, Physio and Therapy Hexham



"What I Love About My Business - Every day I get to be a change maker transforming lives for good & seeing people flourish as they develop new, positive ways to think, feel, be & do in their personal, professional, business or community lives!"
Chris Forrester, The Mindzone

For forward thinking PR ideas that you will LOVE, contact Keith Newman keith@highlightspr.co.uk 07814 397951 highlightspr.co.uk



TOP TIPS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA CUSTOMER SERVICE

North East-based social, digital & design agency Curtis Gabriel share their top tips for managing customer service across your social media accounts in 2020.

For many of our clients, social media customer service forms a key part of their social strategy and is often their biggest headache when they initially approach us. Throughout 2019, Curtis Gabriel managed over 225,000 customer service interactions on behalf of our clients and registered over 5.4 million social media engagements.

If you are yet to consider how your business can utilise social media for improved customer service and connection, it's definitely time that you did.

80% of consumers now use social platforms to engage with brands. Social media is faster than traditional telephone outreach, can be more responsive, and is available on the platforms where people are increasingly spending their time. In combination, the data shows that customers want your business to be providing a certain level of support via these networks.

It's time to meet them where they're at.

Respond faster

Integrate customer service platforms to redirect

customers to the correct platform for their query. Always give highest priority to technical problems or complaints for quick resolutions. Customers expect a response within a matter of minutes and a maximum of three hours.

Be proactive

Utilise social listening tools to identify potential dissatisfied customers and respond before situations have the opportunity to escalate.

Personalised services

Be social, no one wants to receive a generic response. Make customer service interactions human and personable, not robotic and automated.

Empathise with customers

Understand the customers' issue, detect their tone of voice and then reply with empathy. Often frustrated customers can be turned into loyal fans with well executed customer service.

Don't auto-respond

Auto-responses and social media chat bots can put

customers off. Instead, it's key to create tailored templates for common enquiries which can easily be personalised for each interaction.

Stick to the right channel

Be available to your customers on the right social media channels and address their needs accordingly. For example, on LinkedIn, you require a more professional approach in comparison to other channels like Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram.

Take things offline

Sometimes it is easiest to take things offline or 'behind the scenes' to manage a customer service enquiry, this allows customers to share sensitive information or for the correct member of your team to manage the enquiry via email or telephone.

Maintain consistency

Provide customers with the same level of quality, accuracy and professionalism on social media as you would on the phone or via email.

For more information or to discuss how Curtis Gabriel can support your Social Media Customer Service visit www.curtisgabriel.com



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ONYX HEALTH LAUNCH 'GAME-CHANGING' NEW DIGITAL OFFER



Newcastle based healthcare marketing communications specialists Onyx Health are set to unveil a new digital offering to supercharge the digital presence of the pharmaceutical and healthcare industry.

In an exciting new venture developed in partnership with NE6, clients will be guided through their new digital strategy journey with a series of bespoke digital design workshops and training from industry experts.

Onyx Health will offer clients a powerful range of digital communications tools such as content strategy, automated marketing, meaningful platform design and social media campaign strategy, with a strong emphasis on customer experience. This new range of products and services aims to give healthcare and pharma businesses the insights they need to drive their future growth.

Commenting on the new range of digital services, Onyx Health's Managing Director, Karen Winterhalter, said "Our new digital service offer is a game changer for the business. The healthcare and pharmaceutical industry has historically been behind other sectors in embracing the new digital revolution. Having a strong presence across multiple digital platforms is an absolute must for firms to get themselves seen and heard with key target audiences."



APP HELPS CUT CARBON FOR PACIFICA GROUP

A North East development firm has helped one of its longest-serving clients implement a new technology solution that will benefit the environment and the productivity of its nationwide team of engineers.

Stockton-based Sapere created a bespoke web application for support services organisation Pacifica Group to help it streamline its work on a national scheme to reduce carbon emissions and reduce fuel poverty.

Pacifica, whose work centres around the electrical appliance and domestic heating markets, is supporting energy suppliers to install more eco-friendly options in qualifying homes as part of the Government's Energy Company Obligation (ECO) scheme. But now the process is even more efficient after the six-figure project delivered by Sapere.

The new task management software, which includes a mobile app to allow surveyors and installers to record jobs while carrying out work in customers' homes, has so far received a near 100 per cent accuracy rate according to Pacifica's customer satisfaction tests.

Paul Drake, Operations Director of Sapere, whose other clients include Invista, part of Koch Industries, Absolute Antibody's and Hisense explained: "The processing of jobs for this particular workstream was manual with little automation. Many reports became out of date quickly due to the time it took to produce them.



CELLULAR SOLUTIONS DEMONSTRATES COMMITMENT TO CYBER SECURITY WITH NEW CERTIFICATION

Sunderland-based business communications and systems specialist Cellular Solutions is leading the way in cyber security, after being awarded the UK Government's highly coveted Cyber Essentials certification.

The Cyber Essentials scheme was developed based on guidance from the National Technical Authority for Information Assurance (CESG), the information security arm of GCHQ.

Achieving Cyber Essentials certification demonstrates a company's commitment to cyber security and reassures its customers that it has measures in place to guard against cyber-attacks.

Cellular Solutions works with businesses to improve communications, operations and processes. The company provides communications and business systems – including mobile, landline, broadband, software and digital solutions – to companies ranging from start-ups and SMEs to large, multi-site organisations, supporting them at every stage of their business journeys.

Mike Bowers, managing director at Cellular Solutions, said: "As a provider of telecommunications services and business software, our customers rely on us for much of their operational infrastructure and support. They therefore need a partner who they can rely on and which takes cyber security seriously, in order to ensure continuity of service and support, and which has data protection measures firmly in place.



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CAN FEAR PROTECT YOUR BUSINESS FROM CYBER CRIME?

Given the majority of all successful cyber attacks involve some form of human error, ITPS explores whether you can really scare people into better online security

It's often assumed you can change the way people behave using fear. The fear of making a mistake or creating the security issue within the business we try to relate this to something other than security. Think of the tumours depicted in anti-smoking ads. Or the car crashes that feature in campaigns against drink-driving. In the security realm, think of pictures of faceless cyber criminals in hoods, or tales of single clicks inverting people's lives.

The tactic seems simple: say something scary, change how people behave.

But does the tactic actually work? Can a big dose of fear really make people more vigilant in relation to security online?

What the experts say

In an effort to understand how fear impacts people's online behaviours, ITPS recently consulted human cyber security experts CybSafe, whose multi-award-winning software is currently revolutionising the human aspect of cyber security. "The answer isn't black and white," CybSafe Head of Behaviour Science Dr. John Blythe initially said. "In a small number of cases, fear might change people's behaviour. But in the overwhelming

majority of cases, fear appeals are worse than useless."

When you share a scary message, Dr. John explains, the majority of people actively avoid it. Particularly vulnerable people are especially likely to bury their heads in the sand. That might seem counterintuitive at first. Why would vulnerable people ignore messages that could, when heeded, prevent a great deal of heartache?

It turns out there's a very good reason.

Why fear isn't as powerful as we think

Every day, the risk of catastrophe looms over all our lives. It's omnipresent and it's never going away. "We could ruminate on every impending catastrophe we face," explains Dr. John. "Or we could decide not to worry too much until we absolutely must."

Constantly worrying is detrimental to our mental wellbeing (picture waking up every day in a pit of despair). So, to keep us functioning, humans are blessed with what psychologists call an "optimism bias". We accept catastrophes happen. But we find it difficult to accept that we might experience a catastrophe first hand.

"So when IT heads explain the horrifying

consequences of cyber attacks, we pretty much just ignore them," CybSafe CEO Oz Alashe notes. "We all already have a lot to do. And we're going to get it all done before 5:30pm."

What works instead?

Fortunately, just as scientific research reveals what to avoid in security training, it also reveals what to do instead.

"IT teams are better off empowering people," advises Dr. John. "To change how people behave online, people must feel capable of preventing cyber attacks. And they must feel capable of preventing cyber attacks while getting their jobs done."

According to CybSafe, empowered people become a formidable cyber defence. And CybSafe would know: their platform continuously measures human cyber risk to ensure its in-built security interventions actually work.

"We can't scare people into preventing cyber attacks," says Oz Alashe as a closing remark. That might be so – but perhaps it doesn't matter.

Through empowering messages, people can still become a cyber defence.

CybSafe is an official partner of ITPS. You can find out more about CybSafe and their next-generation security awareness software through an ITPS security event, or by contacting an ITPS expert at contact@itps.co.uk or calling 0191 442 83 00

DIGITAL MARKETING – WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

In an increasingly digital business landscape, online marketing can be the key to greater success.

As we begin our journey into a new decade, it feels like a suitable time to reflect on just how much things have changed over the last ten years for businesses of all shapes, sizes and sectors. As our lives have moved online, so digital platforms have seemingly eclipsed many of the traditional forms of marketing.

While I'm certainly not one of the marketers who believes that offline efforts are futile or that the only way to promote an enterprise is solely through digital, the truth remains that if you want to be taken seriously in business, you have to create and maintain some form of online presence in 2020.

Digital marketing and digging for data

I've been part of the North East's digital marketing scene for more than a decade, and in that time, I've worked with hundreds of businesses looking to reach their customers efficiently and cost-effectively. And the question I am asked more than any other is this: what can digital marketing do for me?

I've seen far too many marketing companies in Newcastle fall into the trap of merely listing the services they provide and assuming that this means something to an organisation. But what businesses really need to know is what they are getting for their money from the likes of SEO, PPC, social media or email marketing.

Whether it's a brand awareness campaign, sales funnel, or customer service effort, the only thing that an organisation is really interested in is getting a tangible return on investment. And the one key advantage that digital marketing holds over the likes of traditional PR or media advertising is how measurable digital marketing is and how targeted a company can be.

Data is king in 2020, and if you know how to gather it, understand it and apply it, there's a good chance you can succeed in a campaign.

Learn more about your audience

One of the great aspects of digital marketing is that there are cold, hard facts to be found if you know where to look. Once your content is out there, don't feel you have to sit back and cross your fingers. Unlike more traditional marketing methods, there are some great tools out there for collecting and collating data.

By measuring your campaigns in real-time, you can gain a clear idea of which tactics are working and which aren't. This means you can adjust your campaigns for increased success and take insights on board for future campaigns. Analytics allow you



Michael Knowles

to answer some of the most important questions around your business, such as:

- Who are my customers? What age groups, genders, locations and industries am I engaging with most?
- What does the audience want? What kinds of posts are gaining the most interest?
- How are my audiences interacting with my business? Are they landing on my website and browsing multiple pages? Are they bouncing away because I'm not keeping them engaged?
- What touchpoints brought them to me in the first place, and which touchpoint got them to convert.

The possibilities of going digital are endless. Leveraging social media platforms gives you access to billions of potential customers; working with Google – both via organic SEO or pay-per-click – makes you visible on the world's most powerful search engine, and running email marketing campaigns helps you re-engage with followers and historic customers.

Scalable

Unlike print marketing and television marketing, digital marketing can cost you as little or as much as you like. In the days of traditional marketing, it could be extremely difficult for small businesses with limited budgets to compete with larger brands when it came to ad space, but digital tactics allow smaller organisations to get more from their marketing spend.

Research from US company Lyfe Marketing found that, on average, social media can reach over 1,000 people for around \$2.50. This compares to print marketing (\$57) and broadcast television (\$28). Similarly, Google Ads can cost as little as 1p per

click...although be aware that there are many search terms that can cost significantly more too!

Boost your sales

When you boil a business down to its component parts, it's really very simple: get prospects through the door (be it literal or metaphorical) and convert them into paying customers. One of the great things about digital marketing is that you can continuously refine how you approach, engage, and sell to clients as you go – often using real-time feedback to help you optimise your sales funnel. Rather than waiting for weeks to see how a TV campaign performs, you can quickly and proactively change your strategy based on the data in front of you to optimise those sales numbers.

Take social media as an example. According to a recent study, 74% of consumers now say they rely on social media for the information to help them decide on a purchase, while an estimated 43% are thought to be more likely to purchase a product they've found out about on social.

Find out what's in it for you

Whether you're a brand new organisation or an established brand looking to make your mark on the web, I'm always happy to talk marketing options and help you understand what's in it for your business. As one of the leading digital marketing companies in Newcastle, My company ROAR Digital Marketing provides a tailored, transparent and no-nonsense approach to getting your brand noticed.

We cut through the fluff to deliver Real opportunities and Actual Results for our clients, so if you're looking for digital marketing services, get in touch today and find out what's in it for you and your business.

LOVE YOUR PROCESSES

With Valentine’s Day just around the corner, we’ve had love on the brain.

It is so impactful when you love what you do and by improving your processes, you can love more of the day to day aspects of business. With improved onboarding and optimised everyday processes, employees are happier and empowered to work more productively, reducing turnover – what’s not to love?

So how can you improve your processes?

Process Management

Manage your operations. Map and plan your business processes in a highly visual fashion. Define your business processes. Gain visibility into your business. Better understand your process inefficiencies. Identify process owners. Whilst achieving this all may sound overwhelming, it can be anything but; by utilising leading process management tools, such as Nintex Promapp, mapping and managing your processes can be simpler than ever before. Rather than jumping headfirst into the capabilities of such technologies, it can be incredibly beneficial to undergo some deep dive learning and define the processes your business most relies upon. This allows you to focus your time and energy on visually mapping these processes, so they are as impactful as possible. This may all seem like a lot of work, but that’s where a digital solutions partner can come in. Let those who have dedicated themselves to the implementation



Justin Short

of refinement and streamlining solutions, help audit and map your processes and find ways for you and your team to work smarter, not harder.

Process Excellence

Where process management is all about viewing and understanding your processes, process excellence is more focused on empowering your teams and optimising your processes.

A major component of process excellence is process automation. Automation is quickly becoming a business essential. Organisations can now implement easy to maintain process automation using clicks not code, empowering teams to work with, maintain and update the automation as businesses change. This can be done using leading solutions such as the Nintex suite or the Microsoft Power Platform. Automation is grounded in reducing manual tasks, freeing time for users to complete important tasks. The reduction in paper forms that comes from the switch to mobile apps and forms, is more efficient, promotes the collation of rich, detailed information and can even boost consistency and compliance.

Another important element of process excellence is process optimisation. Optimisation tools allow you to leverage the data created through your automated processes in order to improve your business processes. You can obtain detailed insights into your process, helping you to identify and resolve bottlenecks and pain points. You can also measure the efficiency of your workflows, track their performance and see the difference they’re making to your business. Teams can use all this information to respond more efficiently to inefficiencies and to continuously optimise their processes.

If you’re wanting to find out more about how a digital solutions partner can help you love your processes, head to www.teamsynergi.co.uk and keep an eye on our events calendar. Get in touch with Synergi today on 0191 4770365 or send a message to enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk if you have any questions.

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Steven Gibbons

DIGITAL SOLUTIONS TO HELP BUSINESSES GROW

Companies are increasingly turning to digital agencies to help them design solutions to automate functions and improve productivity. Steven Gibbons, director at NE6, explains how his fast-growing Newcastle agency is creating bespoke digital products to help clients transform their business.

A rising number of companies and organisations are seeking ways to automate process, improve user experience and increase productivity.

There's rarely a week goes by at NE6 when we're not being called on to help a client or new prospect with a business problem.

While we still design and build websites, we're becoming more of a digital solutions studio, creating products to help clients transform the way they do business and engage with their customers.

Our relationship with Pin Point Recruitment is a good example of our direction of travel. Pin Point is a fast-growing business, headquartered in Gateshead but with a national reach through nine branches, offering a range of recruitment services to a broad spread of industry sectors.

The company realises they must make greater use of technology to provide added value to clients while better supporting an expanding business network.

They originally started looking for an off-the-shelf software solution for several processes that included HR, wages and client engagement.

They were unable to find anything that was suitable. We stepped in and suggested they'd probably be better creating a bespoke solution and one that could scale and develop with them as a business.

We got to work and after a few months we developed Pin Point's own pay slip portal, built in React JS. They're already delighted and are seeing some immediate business benefits, including time and money savings.

A typical data input process originally took around three hours can now be done within a minute.

Already, we have automated a previously time-consuming process that has made life easier for their own staff and importantly, their clients.

We're now developing their own customer relationship management (CRM) module and eventually a healthcare roster. Ultimately, we're providing Pin Point with a highly bespoke digital solution that wraps around the needs of the business.

We're also been called on to help with complex, data-drive business platforms. A good example of

this is seen in the work already done for Ludlow-based Premier Medical Group.

During this summer, Premier Medical partnered with NE6 to streamline the company's digital evidence reporting process for helping customers win clinical negligence cases. Within three months a specialist Digiportal was developed, slashing report creation time from 1-2 days to just five minutes.

Premier Medical continues to work with NE6 and we're looking at several new projects that include mobile apps, web platforms and other digital tools to transform their business.

We are carving out quite a niche in the MedTech sector with a range of projects and clients that also includes bio-medical company Tecrea.

But, whatever your sector, if your business is experiencing process inefficiencies, looking to expand in innovative ways or reduce costs via digital transformation then NE6 may be able to help. Please give us a call and drop by for a coffee and a chat.

For more details about NE6 and their work visit www.ne6.studio

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For many years, polywrap has been the "go-to" material for wrapping direct mail, magazines and catalogues. However, with growing environmental concerns from consumers and businesses alike, the print and mailing industry has seen a shift away from single-use plastics.

As a result, MetroMail are happy to launch our brand new Paper Wrap service. This new enclosing service is an environmentally-friendly alternative for our clients who are looking to become more sustainable. There are many benefits to Paper Wrap, but don't just take our word for it - see how this service has benefitted our client Saga.



Saga Holidays were looking at ways to reduce their environmental impact and mail more sustainably. To trial paper wrap, Saga sent out 415k mailing packs, with 290k using paper wrap and the rest poly.

Within the first week of mailing, Saga Holidays received 384 bookings from paper packs. Of these bookings, 41% were new customers, helping with Saga's acquisition.

Benefits

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IS BRITISH BEHAVIOUR A CLICHÉ?

By Kieran McLaughlin,
Headmaster at Durham School.

There are some well-established stereotypes of the British. We like to queue, we say sorry to other people even when it is their fault and there is nothing we like more than a nice cup of tea.

I am not going to argue with any of those, but there are some clichés of British behaviour which are becoming less true over time, and one of those is complaining.

According to conventional wisdom, we British hate complaining and will do almost anything to avoid it. "Yes, the food is lovely," we will reply to our waiter, despite it being cold and scarcely edible. We have a long tradition of suffering in silence rather than make a fuss and cause an embarrassing scene.

Is this true? Well, it's not easy to get hard and fast evidence, but if you talk to anyone working in the service industries, I think many would say that Brits these days are quite prepared to raise a concern if they believe they are in the right. If you extend the category to include schools, then many staff would echo that view; parents do seem to be much readier now to come forward when they are not happy with some aspect of their child's school or education.

Of course, a readiness to raise concerns with a school is to be welcomed in many ways. Schools are hugely complex organisations; even a relatively small one such as mine has over a hundred employees and five hundred children. Mistakes do happen, often through a lack of communication internally or miscommunication with pupils or parents. Very rarely is the cause of a complaint more serious; most staff working in schools are committed to doing the best job that they can. As a Head, I want to know if there are any issues or weaknesses in what we are doing; I can't do anything about them if I'm not aware they exist.

Having said that, there are ways and means of raising concerns that are more effective than others. It's not hard to see why, but complaints in the contexts of schools can quickly become highly emotive issues. That can apply to parents who are hugely invested in their children and their education (and in the case of an independent school, an investment which has a considerable financial aspect too).

It is worth remembering too that it is also true of the staff at the school. Of course, that's because



Kieran McLaughlin

they take their jobs seriously but it's something more than that. Teaching is a remarkably personal profession. Perhaps we're oversensitive, but a complaint about a teacher seems to strike at the very core of our being and can produce an emotional, highly defensive response.

So, if you do have a concern about something at your child's school, how should you raise it? Obviously it depends on the nature of the issue and its severity, but I would offer a few general tips which should lead to the situation being resolved as amicably as possible.

First, and most important, is stick to the facts. Report your understanding of the issue neutrally and objectively, tempting though it may be to present the view entirely from your child's perspective. Don't exaggerate and don't allow

the WhatsApp chat to distort your perspective; comments such "I am not the only parent who thinks this," aren't particularly helpful as you are rarely a representative for the parent body as a whole. Give the school time to respond to your concerns and accept the fact that some problems may not have easy solutions – parking around the school site, for example, is not an issue the school is likely to have much control over. Allow the school to follow its own procedures and accept that you won't always get feedback about the outcome if it needs to remain confidential. Finally, and most importantly, do what is best for your child. Sometimes that is to support them through difficult times; sometimes that is to accept that they too have made a mistake and encourage them to learn from it.

For further information about Durham School, or to arrange a visit, call 0191 731 9270, email admissions@durhamschool.co.uk or visit www.durhamschool.co.uk

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FAIR REPRESENTATION

By David Tickner, Headmaster at Newcastle School for Boys

Read any mainstream news article about independent schools and a number of things are almost guaranteed.

If the article mentions a particular school, there will be an instant reference to its fees: St Aloysius, a private day school charging £4,000 a term. Better still if it's a boarding school, the numbers are larger: £30,000-a-year Greyfriars.

If there's any whiff of scandal, former pupils are referenced - the grander the better: whose alumni include Tory grandee, Sir Montague Carmichael and actress, Dame Camilla Lumley.

The article is also likely to be accompanied by an image of the impressive frontage of a large, gothic-style building; an ornate quadrangle or a pupil in idiosyncratic uniform comprising at least one of the following: a boater, a bow tie, breeches, knee socks, tails, some form of knickerbockers.

This is how news editors like to portray, or think this is how the public view, independent schools.

These are, of course, stereotypes and not ones that I recognise having spent 26 years working in independent schools in London, Cambridge and Newcastle.

Let's be clear. Independent schools sell an expensive product that, on the face of it, will not be affordable for many families. However, it is not true to say that all independent schools are only attended by children from fabulously wealthy and privileged backgrounds.

The reality of the independent sector is somewhat different to the lazy and loaded stereotypes peddled in the media.

Many independent schools are more diverse and accessible than imagined or portrayed. The sector is more aware than it has ever been – certainly during the period of my career – of its social responsibilities.

There are around 2,600 independent schools in the UK educating just over 600,000 children, roughly 80% educated in schools that, like Newcastle School for Boys, are members of the Independent Schools Council (ISC).

One in 13 pupils at ISC schools receive some form of financial assistance. Like many schools, Newcastle School for Boys does not have large endowments to



David Tickner

draw on but through careful financial management and the support of one or two local donors, we work hard to make our education as accessible as we can through the provision of means-tested bursaries and scholarships.

It is also often assumed that children who attend independent schools are all super bright. The reality is that only about half of all ISC schools are academically selective and about a quarter of the remainder have academic selection only for some age groups. Newcastle School for Boys is in this latter category. Recent demand for places has exceeded the number available meaning that entry into our Senior School, in particular, has become increasingly selective in the past few years. For now, entry into our Junior School is currently a little less selective.

Over 15% of pupils at ISC schools have special educational needs and/or a disability (SEND). At Newcastle School for Boys, this figure is 17%. Our Support for Learning staff at our Senior and Junior Schools do fantastic work supporting the achievements of these boys and making their experience of school a positive one. Again, demand for places can present a challenge. It would be wrong for us to admit boys who would be unable to

access our curriculum successfully or whose needs we couldn't meet.

An increased demand for places for children with SEND appears to have arisen, at least in part, out of the funding shortfalls in the maintained sector. The economies of scale pursued to alleviate those shortfalls has created larger schools and classes leading to children with specific needs feeling lost or overwhelmed.

ISC schools are generally smaller than their maintained sector counterparts. At now just over 400 boys from ages three to 18, Newcastle School for Boys is slightly larger than the average size of around 300 pupils. It is rare that any of our class sizes exceed 20 boys. Overall school and class size are important factors in being able to meet the learning and personal development needs of all children, including those that are more vulnerable or who may face particular challenges.

Newcastle School for Boys, like most other independent schools, is very aware of and committed to its social responsibilities. We are keen to work in partnership with the maintained sector and its schools and to seek to make the excellent education we provide as accessible to as many boys as we can.

For further information, please visit newcastleschool.co.uk or contact admissions@newcastleschool.co.uk

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LOVE IS IN THE AIR

By Simone Niblock, Headteacher, Durham High School for Girls

Now that the Christmas decorations have been stored away, and the Cadbury's Crème Eggs are starting to make an appearance in your local Tesco's (!), our thoughts might be turning towards that paean to romantic love that is Valentine's Day. It has its origins in the Roman festival of Lupercalia, which was held in mid-February. Lupercalia celebrated the coming of spring, and included fertility rites and the pairing off of women with men by lottery- a Roman equivalent of *Married at First Sight*. At the end of the 5th century, Pope Gelasius I, in his infinite wisdom, replaced Lupercalia with St. Valentine's Day, with a view to banning notions of such ribaldry. The day was not associated again with love until the Middle Ages, where it was commonly believed in both France and England that February 14th heralded the beginning of the bird's mating season, as mentioned by Chaucer in his *Parliament of Fowls*:

**For this was on Saint Valentine's Day,
When every fowl comes there his mate to take**

In the 21st century, amidst worries about the decline of handwritten letters, it is, perhaps, heartening to discover that, according to the Greeting Card Association, an estimated 145 million Valentine's Day cards are sent each year across the countries that celebrate this festival. With a western society saturated with the commodification of what could - sometimes very loosely - be described as 'love', there is something reassuringly old-fashioned in the notion of sending a Valentine, particularly if the recipient is unaware of the sender. Therefore, as the nation will, allegedly, still be waiting to see which pneumatic, botox-injected young woman and artfully-coiffed and pumped-up young man emerge as the 'winners' of *Winter Love Island*, a Valentine's card could be an antidote to modern representations of relationships in all their celluloid and online manifestations. As a foil to 'fast love', a piece of cheap cardboard, with a clichéd message, that might be conveyed by 'snail mail, may be just what is needed. As Bacharach and David opined: "what the world needs now is love, sweet love."



Simone Niblock

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Caroline Preston, age 19

A VOYAGE OF RE-DISCOVERY

By Caroline Preston,
www.thejarvisjotter.co.uk

I recall my first voyage at sea, a ferry crossing enroute to a family holiday to Spain, hardly glamorous but exciting to a seven-year-old non the less.

Fast-forward to 1998, a naïve 19-year-old and I'm waving goodbye to my worried parents as I head for life on the ocean waves as a cruise ship crew member. I still remember that day vividly, looking in awe at this giant gleaming white ship, Italian by design and notably stylish, and about to become my home for the next 6 months.

I'd joined MS Seawing part of the Airtours Sun Cruises fleet, small really by today's standards, just 800 passengers but thrilling for me and the start of a seafaring career and lifelong love affair for travel. These days sadly I'm more of a 'landlubber' but I still reminisce about those heady days at sea, the fun and frolics that came with being part of a floating family. What happens at sea stays at sea...they say.

The facts remain, having grown exponentially the cruise industry is booming and a whopping 30 million* of us will have cruised by the close of 2019. Now a mainstream holiday choice for many I decided it was high time checked out cruising as a passenger.

Searching for the perfect cruise was a task in itself, so many deals, fares, itineraries I certainly clocked up the internet hours. Eventually we chose a 10-night Southern Caribbean cruise with Princess Cruises, we actually booked cruise only and booked our own flights, just for kicks we hired a Ford Mustang Convertible for a pre-cruise stay we'd spend touring sunny boulevards. Princess's marketing tag line incidentally is 'come back new' certainly appealing, time to test it out!

Embarkation was a slick and impressive 10 minutes as we stepped into Crown Princess's magnificent atrium a live steel band switched us immediately into 'tropical mode'. Our cabin, cosy but comfortable featured the 'Princess Luxury Bed' and picture window for some necessary daylight. The in-cabin entertainment featured a Netflix style TV system which allows you to order pizza or extra pillows via the TV. So far, it's all good.

Although pricey we purchased the premium drinks package, this meant for me a no cocktail restriction... but it's worth checking what packages are available with your cruise as some lines offer similar packages as incentives.

As we waved goodbye to Fort Lauderdale, we soaked up the atmosphere of the sail-away party, a vibrant party of singing, dancing and music. Excitement built as our next stops would be Princess Cays, (Bahamas), St Thomas (USVI), St Kitts, St Lucia, Barbados then Antigua with a few sea days in between.

It's impossible to be bored here, day and night there's a packed schedule of entertainment from full-size theatre productions to deck parties, comedians, quiz shows and musicians of all genres the choice is vast but pleasantly you could also choose to avoid it all.

Stopping at each island we bathed on pristine white beaches, explored luscious green landscapes, snorkelled colourful reefs and even made our own chocolate high in the Piton Mountains of St Lucia. For independent travellers it's totally possible to do your own thing in port just make sure your plan gets you back to the ship on time! For the not so independent a full selection of Princess Tours are available.

As each exotic day passed, we'd dine. The ship's two restaurants, buffet and snack dining are all included with the Crown Grill, Crab Shack, British Pub and Italian dining options costing extra. We did the Crown Grill, a 22oz Porterhouse and Lobster tail... what a steakhouse! (\$29pp). Despite this I actually found the included restaurants to be just as good, indulging on hand dived scallops, beef wellington, cheddar souffle...the list goes on, we were spoilt rotten by our fabulous waiter Ramil, we miss him. If you prefer something less formal pizza under the stars is also totally an option.

Incidentally there were two formal nights on this cruise, gowns and tuxedos all round but if this isn't your thing it's absolutely avoidable. Most nights after dinner we'd head to the 'Good Spirits' bar where our favourite Mixologist Felipe would demonstrate mixing cocktails. This was a great place to chill and meet fellow passengers.

Summing it all up this cruise experience was luxurious, relaxing, exciting and fun in one package, so much so part of me really wanted to stay...I'm not saying it's the case on every single ship, but Princess is a well-oiled machine with the formula right and I did in fact 'come back new'.

Caroline travelled on Crown Princess in November 2019 www.princess.com/ships-and-experience/ships/kp-crown-princess with pre-cruise stay in Lauderdale by the Sea, Florida www.plungebeachhotel.com

Caroline booked with British Airways www.ba.com from Newcastle via London Heathrow to Miami with a Ford Mustang rental car provided by Avis www.avis.com at Miami Airport. *cruising.org



OUT & ABOUT - YARM, TEES VALLEY



Yarm, on a peninsula almost surrounded by the River Tees, is at the southern extremity of places reached by these articles.

It is an interesting place for a day out by train, avoiding the problems of parking on the High Street by not bringing your ton of metal with you. The town of Yarm is served by two railway stations but there is not a single service between them, which raises the interesting possibility of a walk between the two stations, Yarm is only served by the hourly TransPennine Express from York and beyond to Middlesbrough and (newly introduced) to Redcar Central. Passengers from Darlington and Newcastle can change at Thornaby.

So what's in Yarm, to make it so interesting? Diane, a local, suggested the following on the Visit Yarm website: the oldy worldy charm, the cobbles, the meandering river, the stone bridge, the viaduct, the diverse quaint shops, the town hall, the food choices, the ale houses, the castle, the fair, the history, the flood, the people!"

Well, the fair is only on one week in October, and the flooding happens, we hope, less often, although the mark on Flood Cottage shows the height of the flood in 1881 higher than the top of the garage. A walk from the Town Hall, built in 1710, east past the octagonal Methodist church beloved of John Wesley, and along the river bank on the town side, passing under the 1400 bridge of Bishop Skirlaw and the railway viaduct back round to West Street will show the extent of the flood defence scheme. A walk up to the parish church will reveal the miniature Yarm Castle erected as a folly.

But we jump ahead. Print off a little map of Yarm at streetmap.co.uk.

The better served station is Eaglescliffe, to the north of the town, served by Northern twice an hour each direction between Saltburn, Middlesbrough, Darlington and Bishop Auckland, plus five Grand Central trains a day between Sunderland and London King's Cross. If ever you decide to walk (the posh title is an "urban transect") between two stations with different levels of service, always walk towards the one with the more frequent service, to minimise your waiting time. Buy a return to Yarm, making sure it is also valid on Northern trains from Eaglescliffe.

Leaving Yarm station turn right eastward towards the roundabout, and go straight ahead, turning first right to Kirklevington Grange prison where the inmates will serve you (outside the prison fence) with the cheapest cup of tea/coffee in Yarm, and the garden centre is worth a visit too. (The car valet is no use to rail travellers.) Then walk down into the town, exploring the Georgian architecture, and later head north over the road bridge, admiring the 43 arch railway viaduct with seven million bricks, built by the Leeds and Northern Railway in 1849-51. A watering hole is available at the Parkmore Hotel on the way to Eaglescliffe. Total walk, three miles.

The significance of Yarm as a railway centre will be marked by the 200th anniversary of the Promoters' meeting for the first locomotive hauled railway

in the world. That opened in 1825 but it was a 1820 meeting in the George and Dragon pub in Yarm which set the process of bringing together land, labour, capital and enterprise, and to petition Parliament. I will next be in Yarm on the evening of Wednesday 12th February when the meeting will be re-enacted. I have some tickets available - email me if you would like to be there.

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SCOTTISH BALLET RETURNS TO NEWCASTLE WITH A STUNNING SEASONAL SPECTACULAR



The ever-popular Scottish Ballet will make a dazzling return to Newcastle Theatre Royal with a seasonal treat for the whole family. In celebration of Scottish Ballet's 50th anniversary year, The Snow Queen will be playing its only tour dates in England from 12 – 15 Feb 2020.

Inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's much-loved tale, which was also the basis for Disney's hit film Frozen, Scottish Ballet's The Snow Queen is a story of love and friendship that will delight audiences of all ages. The action is driven by three central female characters: the brave young Gerda on a quest to rescue her true love, the enigmatic pickpocket Lexi at her side, and the powerful Snow Queen at the centre of it all.

Created in collaboration with multi-award-winning designer Lez Brotherston, The Snow Queen will include a colourful cast of characters dressed in a total of 111 custom-made costumes. Set to the music of Russian composer Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov, the specially adapted score by Richard Honner will be performed live by the full Scottish Ballet Orchestra.



SUNDERLAND EMPIRE LAUNCHES THE 1907 CORPORATE CLUB

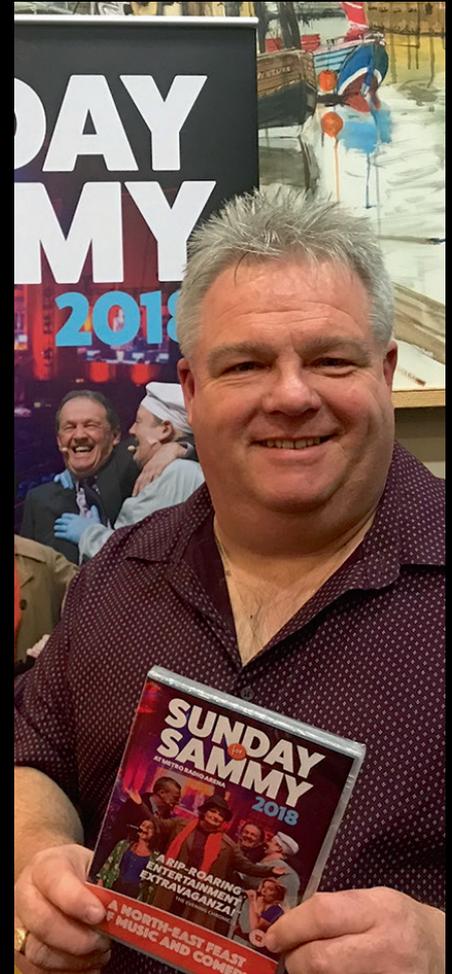
Sunderland Empire, the biggest theatre in the North East, has launched the new 1907 Corporate Club, a yearly membership scheme giving businesses access to a host of key benefits.

The three membership bands, Gold: £199, Platinum: £999 and Premium: £1,907, aim to support businesses to take centre stage and align with the theatre's iconic and established brand. Membership includes generous show ticket allocations, hospitality, house programmes, company logo inclusion on various advertising platforms and ad hoc staff ticket offers.

In addition, Premium and Platinum members will be part of the 'Wall of Stars' which includes brand recognition in the main theatre foyer, dedicated advertising in the What's On Guide, Ambassador Lounge access and discounted event room hire.

The Grade II listed theatre welcomes in excess of 300,000 visitors each year and therefore benefits from a highly engaged and receptive audience from across the region spanning from Northumberland to Teesside.

With a busy 2020 in the pipeline including the only North East date for The Phantom of the Opera and the return of Mamma Mia the Musical, it is an optimum time to enjoy spectacular theatre experiences whilst also building brand presence.



ONE OF THE HIGHLIGHTS OF KEITH'S PR CAREER

The Geordie Command Performance, Sunday for Sammy, will be held at the Newcastle Utilita Arena on Sunday 23rd February 2020.

A whole host of celebrities from the world of music, comedy and TV will perform in front of two packed out audiences but behind the scenes, Keith Newman of Highlights PR will be busy preparing press releases and liaising with the region's TV and radio presenters.

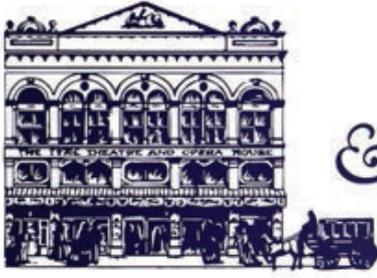
Keith, who has been working with the charity for the past five years, said: "I love the Sunday for Sammy shows. All year round, I help to get important messages out about the good work that that the charity does to assist up and coming young entertainers.

"I get to meet a lot of talented people and enjoy seeing their careers blossom and I'm proud that some of my PR stories about Sunday for Sammy have helped them gain media recognition. I'm looking forward to the shows and I'll make sure I'm one of the first to get the 2020 show DVD when it comes out in the spring."

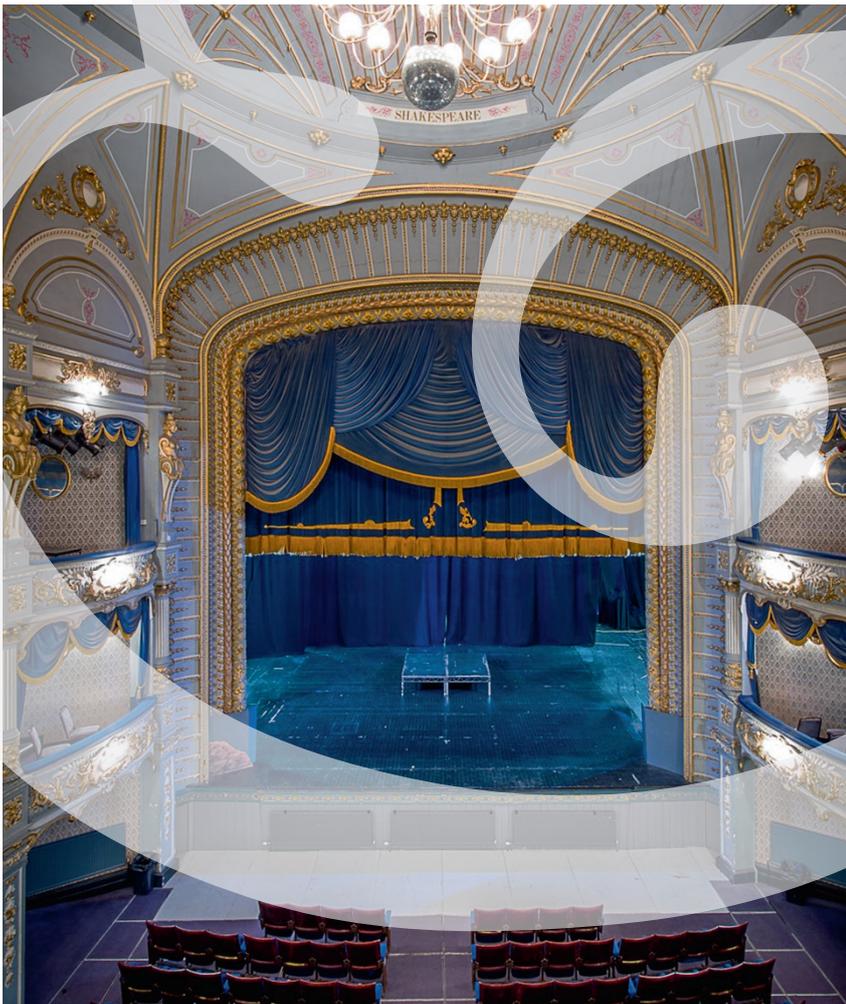
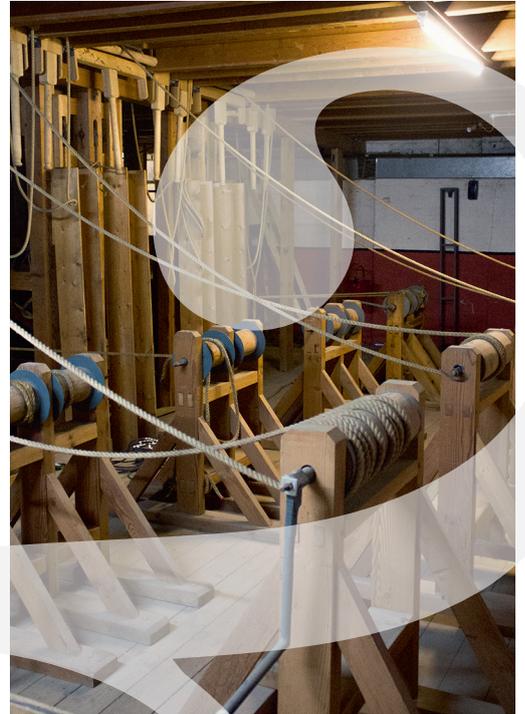
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TREADING THE BOARDS OF HISTORY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Did you know that the Tyne Theatre and Opera House in Newcastle is one of only seven Grade I listed theatres in England?

And did you know that it is owned and run by a trust which pumps every single penny that the theatre makes back into its running and upkeep?

Oh, and it's now enjoying more success in terms of number and frequency of shows and arguably the quality of shows, than this proud theatre has seen over many decades.

A hugely successful pantomime season has just concluded and the 2020 programme is packed full of shows to suit all. Coming up are John Bishop, Viv Reeves and Bob Mortimer, the Russian State Opera presenting Aida, an evening with Status Quo legend Francis Rossi and, if you enjoy some R&B, there's the Average White Band. Over recent years there have been appearances by many leading personalities such as Sir Roger Moore, Joan Collins and Michael Palin and local stars Alan Shearer, Joe McElderry and Chris Ramsey have taken to the stage.

Driving the Tyne Theatre forward are Jo Johnson, who as director of the company is in charge of the day to day operations and for planning shows for the next twelve months and beyond...and Mike Wilmot who is the Chairman of the Trust and who looks after the finances and controls the upkeep of the building.

"The theatre opened in 1867 and we are proud of the fact that it is still seen as a hugely valued piece of North East's culture," said Mike. "Joseph Cowen founded the theatre and his vision was to provide a "Theatre for Everyone" and we're proud to be presenting a programme that reflects that. Whether you love drama, dance or drag; ballet, ballroom or bagpipes; Shakespeare, stand-up or sensational stories, music or musicals the Tyne Theatre & Opera House offers it all.

We're also proud of the fact that, bearing in mind we had a serious fire in 1985, the theatre still retains much of its original architecture. Our backstage area and the wooden machinery below the stage are almost identical to the day when they were installed in Victorian times."

You can go on a tour of the Tyne Theatre and see everything for yourself. It's fascinating to see the plethora of levers, pulleys and platforms some of which are still used in stage performances today.

You'll also see how the Tyne Theatre, in terms of preservation and restoration, is very much a work in progress. 60% of the seats in the stalls and grand circle have been refurbished and funding is assured to

complete this refurbishment over the coming months. The ladies toilets have been refurbished and the trust has set aside funding to refurbish the remaining toilets. Crucially however, the Trust have concentrated on retaining the charm and history of the building. Slowly but surely, the Tyne Theatre and Opera House is being restored back to its former glory.

"The Trust now owns the building. In 2015 we decided to run the theatre ourselves following the departure of our lessee. Obviously I'm biased, but it's the best thing that could have happened to this lovely old building," said Mike. "It's also an important source of employment and we are proud that we employ all the theatre staff directly. We have twelve core staff and circa 130 people for staffing events."

Mike has just celebrated his 5th year as a Trustee of the Tyne Theatre Trust and was recently appointed Chairman, but he's certainly not new to the theatre. His whole family was heavily involved in the theatre and, in the 1980s and 90s, a very young Mike Wilmot could be found helping out. He's performed in numerous shows and he's probably done every single job either behind the scenes or front of house. It's in his blood.

It's a similar story with Jo Johnson too. She's been with the Tyne Theatre since 2004 and is one of those people who plainly has the knack of organising things.

"The feedback we get from performers and the general public is wonderful," added Jo. "Brian Blessed was here and because he was so passionate about the Theatre, he urged people to donate and we collected a record number of donations. Sarah Millican played eleven nights with us during her last tour and said that she couldn't wait to return. It's that sort of place...it gets to you. We have a hugely enthusiastic amateur productions company who regularly put on shows which raise money for the theatre. It really is like one big family who are all working to help preserve this truly valued piece of history."

In other words, the Tyne Theatre and Opera House is in safe hands. With Mike and Jo leading from the front, the future is decidedly rosy.

Try to support the theatre whenever you can. Shows are excellent and represent good value too. A tour behind the scenes is well worth it and the chance to see what is probably the most complete, working, wooden stage in the country, is something to wonder at.



Mike Wilmot – Chairman: Tyne Theatre Preservation Trust
Jo Johnson – Theatre Director. Photo credit - Kim Bainbridge



Kirsty Bell



THE AVIARY, A NEW ART HUB FOR NEWCASTLE AND THE NORTH EAST

Fresh on the scene is The Aviary Gallery situated on Brentwood Avenue in Jesmond, Newcastle. Expect to find a refreshing mix of unique and iconic artwork, sculpture, books and curiosities, with some international "firsts" and a mix of established and emerging talent on show.



The creative space is available for selected launches and events offering something a little different to the city. The gallery has been designed and founded by North East entrepreneur Kirsty Bell who is the CEO of Goldfinch (a leading British independent Film & TV production and finance company with offices in London and the North East) with the space available for events and launches by negotiation.

Trevor Read, Director and Curator of The Aviary gallery said, "Visitors to our contemporary gallery can explore a diverse medley of art and design with many of the pieces one of a kind and unique examples of rare artistry at work. Expect private showings, artist led evenings and an amazing line-up of exclusive shows, talks and competitions planned across the year".

The launch party was a huge success with visitors and artists from London, the region and around the UK. Many of the artists were at the launch talking personally about their inspiration and artwork. There was huge interest from a "never before seen in public" iconic photographic collection of Warhol imagery, insect inspired art from Jess Albarn (sister of Damon Albarn) and politically charged pop art

from Violeta Sofia. The Aviary has a constantly evolving array of artwork and pieces on display - so regular visits are highly recommended - the newest of which is set to be an extraordinary collection of pieces from psychedelic artist David Vaughan.

Founder of The Aviary Gallery, Kirsty Bell chose to set up the concept space in her hometown of Newcastle when the much in demand space came free on Brentwood Avenue in the trendy, upscale suburb of Jesmond, Newcastle.

Kirsty Bell said, "as a NE family we know the welcoming atmosphere, modest aspiration and thriving business community that has drawn so many individuals and companies to the region. Trevor, myself and the team will continue to add to the roster of artists and talent that we have discovered, some of whom will not be seen anywhere else in the UK. We hope that everyone will love the relaxing and aspirational feel to the gallery".

With regular events, pop-ups and launches The Aviary aims to showcase talent, nourish and develop emerging artists and become a nerve centre to champion creativity in the city.



To keep updated with all things 'Aviary' including invites to an exciting schedule of events in the coming year, sign up to the mailing list at www.aviaryart.co.uk or follow on Instagram @theaviary_art www.aviaryart.co.uk

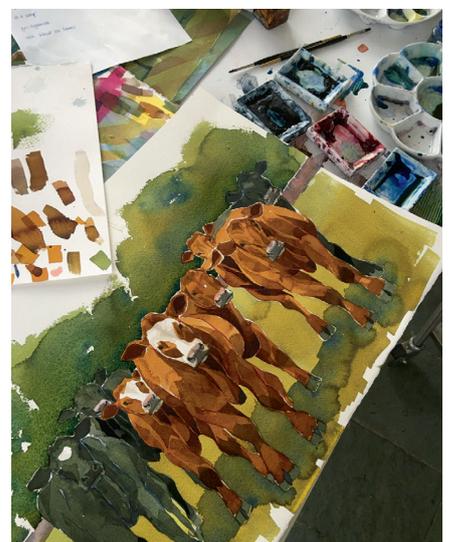
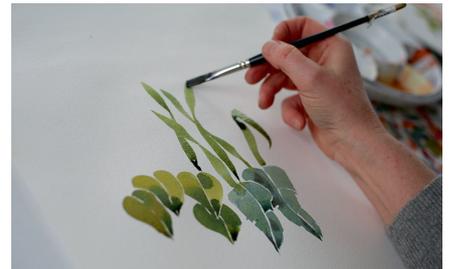




Mary Ann in her studio.

DIARY OF A RURAL ARTIST - MARY ANN ROGERS

After the busiest Christmas period ever, the Mary Ann Rogers gallery walls have quite a lot of empty hooks, so we have re-hung some work from the previous few years.



This reminds me of other times, places and subjects, including the fact that the summer will come eventually, and with it, all the beautiful flowers bringing intense colour to my palette.

After many years of using one particular brand of paint, I have introduced something new to my painting trolley! I met a chap at Spring Fair last year, who has developed a range of pure pigment watercolour paint. They are not mixed to create colours that many artists expect to find on the shelves in art material shops, but consist of the pure pigment alone, plus a stabilising agent. It is slightly different to use, but I find the clear pure intense colour suits my style of painting, and I've agreed to act as a sort of 'ambassador' for the brand, which I am very enthusiastic about!

Spring Fair at the National Exhibition Centre has come round again, and we 'up sticks' and head down to Birmingham for six days, hoping to attract new and old buyers for the prints, cards, stationery and gifts.

It is entirely for 'trade', ie, buyers from shops, galleries, department stores, interiors shops, heritage centres etc. This is the fourth year we have done Spring Fair, and the advice I was given was certainly useful - it really does take three years to get 'accepted'. I was told that in the first year, buyers might notice you, in the second year they might stop and look round at what you have to sell, then if you make it to year three, their confidence is gained, and they decide to buy - if you are a fit for their particular outlet.

On a more personal note, this is the second winter that I have regularly swum outdoors and experienced the temperature dropping down to as low as one degree. It sounds mad, but is extremely invigorating. Claims for the benefits of cold water swimming may be exaggerated, but I haven't had a single cough cold or sniffle, and love the challenge of getting into the river Rede, when there's frost on the ground, and experiencing the flow of the cold water, the wildlife of the river and the cold water on my skin, even for just ten minutes or so.

Cattle are the current theme on the drawing board. My next-door-neighbours breed some of the best cattle round here, and I'm very lucky to have them model for me, although they are in sheds for the winter, and it will probably be May when they get put back out in the fields behind my studio, joining the pregnant sheep who have the place to themselves at the moment!

www.marogers.com

MEET THE ARTIST

KIERAN FLITTON

Voice-over artist

When did you decide to pursue a career in voice acting?

I knew I wanted to be an actor before I knew what an actor was. It was never enough to be told the story – I wanted in on the adventure! Embodying characters, exploring worlds. Theatre was my way in, and I was doing stage productions in my adolescence. Around then, I discovered there was this growing field of performance – Voice Acting. There were no limitations in set, or physicality. You could voice it? You could be it. It was empowering. It clicked. I bought my first mic around seventeen.

So, I knew it was my dream, but somewhere along the way I told myself the lie many of us do – that our dreams aren't possible for us. I doubled down on a 'safe' education, graduated university with top laurels, and founded a software company. Weirdly, in doing so, I had disproved my doubts. I could build, I could achieve. At 27, I realised how ridiculous it would be not to spend the rest of my life devoting these qualities to what was truly important to me. I went all in. I'm still amazed at what has come from that.

What are you currently working on?

At the moment I am providing voice over for Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, and PC video game titles; narrating several audiobooks in the non-fiction genres; performing character work for educational activities for the young; and being the voice in a series of commercials. Every new week sees wildly new and different opportunities! I'm tremendously grateful.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

The expression. Voice acting funnels a whole performance into the sound of your voice. It needs to be at once more extravagant, more bombastic, and more subtle than live action. A character is brought to life and defined by the identity of a vocal performance. You give a piece of yourself to that performance, and get something back. It could be as simple as the experience itself or as profound as a lesson. And – of course – in this field you get



Kieran Flitton

to work with some of the most talented, creative individuals, who invite you to be a part of the works of a lifetime. It's humbling, and inspiring.

How do you practise your craft?

Not a day goes by when I am not voice acting – announcing, roaring, or whispering. So consistency plays a tremendous part in refinement. You get better by doing, and doing a lot. But, it's always important to expose myself to new experiences. Engage with material that moves... or do something new and exciting! Acting, as it was described to me, is the process of drawing from a well – and you want to make sure the well is always full.

What is the most challenging aspect?

Voice Acting is a competitive field. Talent is the start, though there is a world full of talented people. Having the capacity to devote, sacrifice, and strive with unerring consistency is what makes a difference.

Do you think the North East offers a good platform for voice artists?

A great voice actor can come from anywhere. I think the North East – certainly where I grew up – offers unique challenges. There is a culture of practicality and pragmatism, that can be counter intuitive to taking great leaps like pursuing a life devoid of traditional security. Many of those I grew up alongside, as I did, have a hard time to this day believing there is ground to land on if they jump too far.

How could this be improved?

Encouragement. It all boils down to belief. By example, by inspiration, by opportunity. Showing

people that you don't have to give up on those visions of one day being an accomplished actor, a successful musician, or anything else. It's not an easy life, but everyone should be allowed to believe they have the option, and given the guidance on how to get started.

Who are your voice acting heroes?

Interestingly enough, the field was still young when I was. Take video games for instance. They were largely unvoiced, and characters relayed story via text-based dialogue. In many ways, my heroes were the unvoiced potential of these characters. Wanting to give a voice to these fictional heroes. What would they sound like? Perhaps me? Though I'd be absolutely remiss not to mention the Disney and Don Bluth classics – or my friends in the industry who continue to inspire me with their work ethic and talent.

How has the medium developed?

Immeasurably. When I was a child, the mediums I am working in just were not there yet! They didn't exist. Audiobooks have boomed in recent years, becoming an exclusive way some people consume literature. Video Games are now wildly popular and voiced. There are new avenues everywhere – from phone apps to CGI movies, that require voice acting which only came into existence in the last couple of decades.

How do you like to unwind?

Fantasy and fiction are huge loves of mine; recently I've been devouring *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Overall, in my downtime, I like to cultivate experiences. I always want to be growing as an individual; trying new things.

kieranflitton.com



#UNLIKENEWHERE

New Film Celebrating the Angels of the North East premieres at Tyneside Cinema.

A new film championing the unsung heroes of the region premiered at Tyneside Cinema in January as part of the NGI backed #UnlikeNEwhere campaign.

Created by local video production and animation agency Three Motion Media, 'Angel' captures the people and places that make our region special and explores what the word 'angel' means to different people.

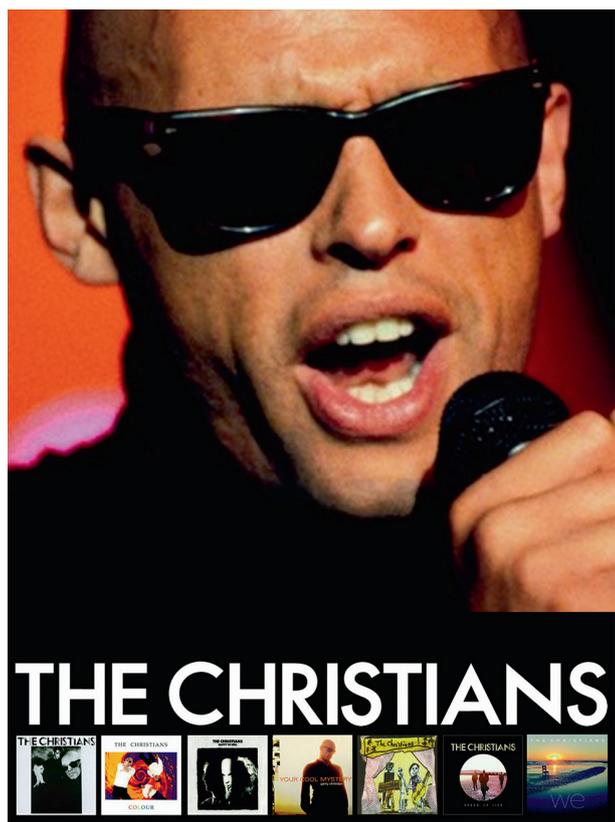
The film follows six stories from across the North East, involving people and organisations from the business, public and charity sector including the Sick Children's Trust, RNLI, Great North Air Ambulance, Kaylee-Ann Davidson-Olley - local hero and global ambassador for the World Transplant Games - and World War Two RAF Veteran, Wilson Taylor.

Since its premiere, the film has been added to the #UnlikeNEwhere website, a library of content that can be shared for free.

Visit unlikenewhere.com to see the film.



THE CHRISTIANS PLAY WHITLEY BAY PLAYHOUSE



THE CHRISTIANS who were famous for a string of soul-inspired hits in the late 80s and early 90s are set to return to Whitley Bay Playhouse on March 6th 2020.

Fronted by lead singer Garry Christian (easily recognised with his smooth head, raybans and imposing height [6ft 4]) he seems unchanged in both voice and appearance since THE CHRISTIANS sold many millions with no less than seven singles back in 1987.

Garry said: "We're one of those bands a bit like Crowded House - until we start playing you forget how many hits we had and how many of the words you know...our live set goes down really well - 90 minutes of all our songs from the more recognisable ones such as Harvest for the World, Ideal World and Words to some buried a bit deeper in peoples youths...Forgotten Town, Whats in a Word, Greenbank Drive, Born Again...there are so many".

"People sometimes seem surprised that we're still going but just because we're not on Strictly or Dancing on Ice doesn't mean we don't still tour and sound amazing.

Garry Christian goes on to explain that such is nostalgia at the gigs that people often break down in tears on hearing their old favourites...I think it's the original videos coupled with hearing the tunes again - it makes people really emotional and kinda happy - which is great."

So where have THE CHRISTIANS been all these years I hear you ask? The answer is "just doing our thing...we tour France and Spain where we also sold millions and there are countless festivals such as Rewind to keep us busy...there was a quieter period following my solo album Your Cool Mystery and I was doing other projects but for the last 15 years we've been pretty much touring solidly! We're so lucky that people still want to come and see us."

Originally from a very large Liverpool family (near the famous Anfield and YES Garry is a massive lifelong LFC fan) the boys grew up harmonising to the various vocals in the Temptations and were known as 'The Temptations in ripped jeans.' "It was just in us to mimic the vocals of the greats...Marvin Gaye, The Temps, Sam Cooke, Ray Charles etc - it was only time before someone spotted that we were talented," Garry concluded. Island Records were the lucky label to sign them and it paid huge dividends.

www.thechristianslive.co.uk

THE CHRISTIANS

PLAYING WHITLEY BAY PLAYHOUSE

FRIDAY 6TH MARCH 2020

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FEEL GOOD THIS FEBRUARY AT HOLYSTONE COOKHOUSE AND PUB

Holystone Cookhouse and Pub on Edmund Road is encouraging customers to feel good at the start of 2020 with a range of vegan dishes and some great low alcohol drinks deals.

From family meals to catching up with friends, the cosy community pub has a wide range of seating and an extensive menu to suit all occasions.

Vegan choices include The Sloppy Joe Burger (£9.79), a tasty meat-free patty topped with mixed peppers, green lentils and chipotle chilli. Also on the menu is the popular Fake 'n' Ale Pie (£8.99), filled with chestnut mushrooms and butternut squash in a rich vegan ale sauce.

For those cutting back, Holystone Park also has plenty of drinks deals. Whether you're craving a refreshing soft drink, an alcohol-free beer or something with a little more zing like Gordon's Ultra Low Gin and Tonic, there's something for everyone.



PAINT THE TOWN LOBSTER-RED

A trio of American stars will perform in the region for one night only, when they entertain guests at a popular North East fundraiser.

On Friday 1 May, Hardwick Hall Hotel, Sedgefield, will once again play host to the Lobster Charity Ball, sponsored by the Great Annual Savings Group.

And organisers have revealed that singers CeCe Peniston, Crystal Waters and Julie McKnight will take to the stage to entertain the crowd with their much-loved hits.

Guests will be greeted with a welcome drink and canapés on arrival and enjoy a four course gourmet lobster surf and turf menu created by the award-winning chefs at the Rib Room Steakhouse and Grill, with complimentary beer, lager and wine all night.

The event, which takes place from 7pm to 12:30am, raises money for Daisy Chain, which supports families affected by autism, and is compered by Steve Walls.



NORTH EAST'S FIRST LUXURY TREEHOUSES OPEN FOR BUSINESS

The luxury treehouses at Durham's award-winning Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa are now preparing to welcome guests, marking a new era in accommodation in the North East.

The first two of the multi-million pound project, Peacock and Cuckoo, are now open, with the third treehouse, Woopecker, launching this month.

Each treehouse features three bedrooms which can be divided up and booked as a one bedroom studio, as two bedrooms for smaller groups, or as the entire property which can sleep up to 12 by using a range of sofa beds. This means that they are the perfect option for everything from family get togethers to corporate away days.

Guests can enjoy private dining with food prepared by one of the hotel's chefs and can also create packages allowing them to use Ramside's other facilities including the spa and golf courses.



NEWCASTLE WEDDING VENUE TAKES THE TOP SPOT IN NATIONAL AWARDS

Jesmond Dene House, an award-winning hotel based in Jesmond, Newcastle, has been announced as Wedding Venue of the Year by a The Luxury Travel Guide (LTG) for 2019.

The boutique hotel, restaurant and hospitality venue offers a selection of high-end wedding packages in their Grade II listed building. There is a choice of four private rooms, holding up to 120 guests, as well as outdoor space on the terrace and within the Secret Garden.

The highly reputable award from the LTG places Jesmond Dene House above its respective competitors from across the globe, bringing the spotlight firmly back to the North East.

The LTG awards cover a broad range of categories from weddings and spas to food and hotels. The award-winner's guide is distributed to over 500,000 professional and affluent people world-wide.



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A RAY OF SARDINIAN SUNSHINE

By Michael Grahamslaw

As a firm family favourite of mine, I recently decided to treat the family to a Friday evening of fine food & drink at Sabatini.

From its prime riverbank location, Sabatini is owned and managed by restaurateur Fabrizio Saba and his family. The restaurant, which plays big brother to fellow Italian frontrunner Fratelli (Ponteland), has operated on Newcastle Quayside for over 25 years, yet continues to offer a unique and innovative approach to Italian cuisine.

After a quick livener in the venue's adjacent Signor Italian cocktail bar, we arrived at the restaurant. Since our last visit, the chic dining area has been stylishly refurbished with chocolate brown walls, floor to ceiling mirrors and exposed filament bulbs combining to create a sophisticated and contemporary space. The convivial atmosphere is coupled in the venue's warm hospitality. It had been a little while since my previous visit, yet the staff remained friendly and attentive with impeccable service throughout.

There's myriad choice available at Sabatini as the eatery combines authentic Sardinian dishes with funky happy hour fare. Showcasing traditional Sardinian cooking methods, flavours such as ricotta, salami and ham are all in abundance and combine to make some tasty specialities. Larger parties can even enjoy the roast suckling pig, a sweet, unique dish accompanied by traditional Sardinian trimmings. Despite providing only the



finest cuisine, happy hour at Sabatini also offers fantastic prices with pizza/pasta dishes available daily from £7.

Of course, great cooking like this demands an excellent Italian red wine. Kicking off proceedings with a bottle of Barbera d'Asti, we tucked into our delicious starters with gusto. As a die-hard chilli fanatic, I was delighted by the gamberoni soaked in a zingy arrabiata sauce, whilst my son Jack enjoyed the king prawns coated in a tasty garlic butter. Meanwhile, my wife Lisa devoured the Bruschetta Mista, which offered a taste of Sardinia

with toasted bread, spicy salami and traditional Sardinian pecorino cheese.

Whilst offering the usual pizza/pasta favourites, Sabatini also provides some standout meat dishes. The restaurant allows you to choose your desired meat and sauce individually, fusing them together to make some exquisite combinations. Jack savoured the succulent fillet steak 'al pepe' whilst Lisa sampled the delightful pan-fried salmon served with green olives, capers and plump vine tomatoes.

I meanwhile opted for traditional Italian fare with the seafood spaghetti. A tasty fusion of prawns, calamari and mussels tossed in a piquant garlic and tomato sauce, the dish certainly got the taste-buds tingling.

Feeling replete, we settled on coffees and liqueurs over desserts although next time we will be sure to sample the restaurant's authentic selection of Italian sweet treats which includes Cannolis, Sfogliatella and Tiramisu.

Due to the emergence of so much competition in recent years, it's a real testament to Fabrizio and his team that Sabatini remains one of the region's premier Italian restaurants. With innovative cuisine, luxury dining and excellent hospitality, Sabatini really does bring a ray of Sardinian sunshine to the bleak midwinter.

**Sabatini Ristorante can be found at 25 King Street, Quayside, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 3UQ.
For more information visit www.sabatini.co.uk or call 0191 261 4415.**

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NEW LEASE OF LIFE FOR THE WHEATSHEAF

By Jackie Marston

Now under the new ownership of Lauren McKirdy and her partner, Gary, the couple have transformed the Wheatsheaf Pub in Corbridge into a foodie’s paradise.



From authentic Italian-style pizzas, cooked in a ‘proper’ pizza oven to their high-end gourmet food. The couple have made food, service and ambience their number one priority.

We went along for a traditional Sunday lunch, as we’d heard that they were good and boy were we pleased we did.

Veggies all served *al dente*, which consisted of broccoli, peas, green beans and oven-baked cauliflower-cheese. Delicious pink roast beef, crispy crackling on the pork and chicken was tender and very tasty.

Be warned though, if your appetite isn’t like that of a farmer, then you’ll be stuffed to the gills! Portions are good for big-eaters, but no shame if you want to take the rest away too, they’ll gladly package it up for you. I’m a Yorkshire lass, and we don’t do waste!

It was lovely to be able to take our old pooch with us too, this is a place that loves and welcomes dogs with open paws!

This place deserves the support of the locals, but it is worth travelling to, too. It took us 45 minutes to get from Boldon, but that won’t ever stop us going back. Next time though, we might stay in one of their rooms they have above the pub! Make a day/night of it!

Wheatsheaf Pub and B&B, St. Helen’s Street, Corbridge, NE45 5HE – Telephone 01434 409 588.



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SPICE UP YOUR VALENTINES DAY WITH A DATE NIGHT AT SACHINS

This February, fire up the month of love with a visit to one of Newcastle's favourite Punjabi restaurant; Sachins.



Sachins is the perfect place for a delicious meal, whether it be with your partner, your Galentines or anyone really. After all, we all deserve a treat.

Located on the historic Forth Banks of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Sachins' Punjabi restaurant is sure to add some spice to your evening. The ambient, newly refurbished interior makes the

most romantic setting and their unique, but oh so delicious *al a carte* menu has a choice of dishes that everyone can enjoy. From the classic samosas, curry dishes and family recipes to a range of vegan and dairy free friendly options.

If you fancy something with some heat on your date night, we recommend their Aloo Goshat, sure to get the temperature rising. Or, if you

prefer to play it safe, the Kala Mirch Koftas are perfect as a milder option, cooked in a light spice, with a touch of cream – still equally as divine.

Sachins knows that Valentine's Day is about spending time with the one you love, not about breaking the bank, so their menu offers affordable prices for exquisite meals in the most luxurious of settings.

Availability is filling up fast, so if you want to heat up date night this February, book now by visiting www.sachins.co.uk or call 0191 261 9035.


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DOWN BY THE RIVER

By Michael Grahamslaw.

After a hectic first week back at work, a night away with my wife Lisa was just what I needed, and the Radisson Blu Hotel in Durham provided the perfect place.

Whilst we hadn't visited the hotel in some time, we were eager to return, especially since Durham now has added sentimental value being the chosen university destination of our daughter Holly.

Situated in a scenic location along the River Wear, the Radisson Blu acts as a real hub in the heart of Durham city centre. The venue boasts 207 bedrooms, an innovative restaurant and fantastic leisure club facilities, as well as catering for various business and leisure events. Whilst the hotel is within walking distance from Durham's lively Walkergate complex, the venue manages to maintain a calm and tranquil feel, making it the ideal destination for a romantic getaway.

After a warm and welcoming reception, we checked into our room. With the renowned Radisson Blu label, I knew a comfortable stay was in order, yet I was impressed by the high-quality of the room. A modern and contemporary space consisting of a large double bed, flatscreen TV and complimentary tea and coffee facilities, the room exuded luxury and sophistication. One noteworthy feature was also the stunning large windows, which showcased the hotel's idyllic riverside views.

Ditching the bags, we decided to enjoy some Saturday afternoon hustle and bustle in Durham's vibrant city centre. The beauty of the Radisson Blu is

that it's only a short walk away from an array of bars, restaurants and shops, so we enjoyed some retail therapy and a drink in some of the city's distinctive bars.

After a thoroughly pleasant afternoon, we returned to the hotel for an evening of wining and dining in the renowned in-house restaurant. Aptly named the 'Collage' restaurant, the eatery puts an inventive spin on signature British favourites, from succulent steaks to classic fish & chips and tasty burgers. With infinite choice available, the restaurant provides fusion cuisine at its absolute finest, ensuring that one really enjoys a memorable meal. The décor offers similar delight, providing an intimate ambience and breathtaking views of the historic city.

The afternoon's refreshments had worked up an appetite so we couldn't wait to begin. To start, Lisa devoured the delicious warm asparagus salad accompanied by new potato and fresh brie cream whilst I sampled the crispy chicken wings, a scrumptious dish served with a tangy BBQ glaze. The starters were extremely flavoursome and paired nicely with a lovely bottle of merlot from the venue's expertly crafted wine list.

For mains, I decided to try something new (not!) with the peppered fillet steak. Sourced from Black Angus Beef, the steak was cooked to perfection and came

with delicious fries, grilled tomato and mushroom. Lisa meanwhile savoured the luscious rump of lamb. With gratin potato, Provençal vegetables and sun-dried tomato balsamic jus, the dish was exquisite and certainly hit the spot.

Staring defeat in the face, we unfortunately had to swerve desserts, although we did enjoy a drink in the hotel's adjacent bar before returning to the room for a long and peaceful night's sleep.

The following morning, Lisa headed to the hotel's superb Nuspa whilst I decided to shake off the excess of the night before with a trip to the fitness suite. The hotel offers excellent leisure facilities and comes well-equipped with cutting-edge cardio and weight-training equipment. Unfortunately, the red wine didn't do much for the fitness levels but at least the large indoor swimming pool provided the perfect opportunity for a relaxing dip.

After a hearty and nutritious breakfast, we left the Radisson Blu having enjoyed a relaxing and memorable stay. With an encouraging mix of January diners, it seems that the multi-faceted hotel has much to offer to the region and, all being well, we look forward to returning when Holly graduates next year.

The Radisson Blu Hotel can be found at Frankland Lane, Durham, DH1 5TA. For more information visit the website www.radissonblu.com/en/hotel-durham or call 0191 372 7200.



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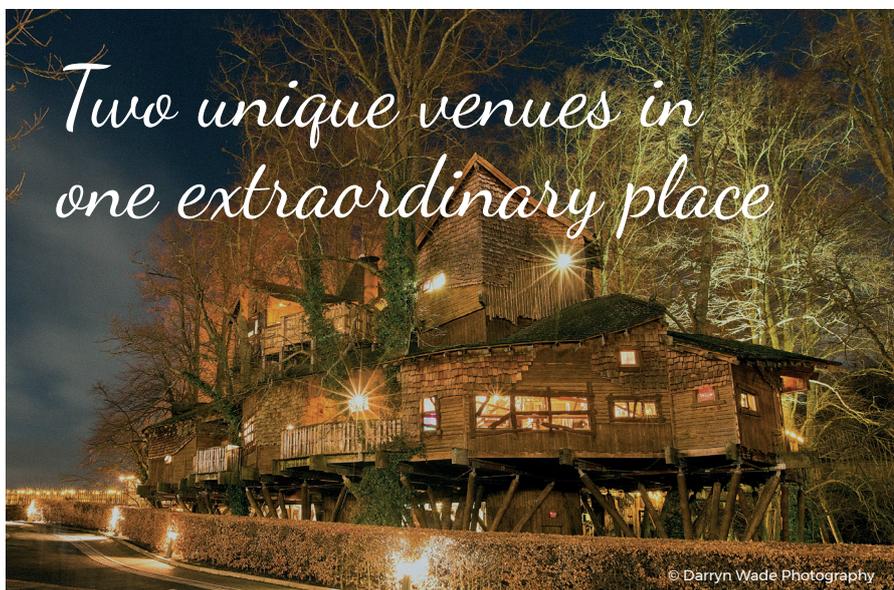
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STAYING POWER...

Longevity in business is something to be admired. In this series of features, we are celebrating some of the most accomplished professionals from across the North East business community. Aimed at major players with 20+ years' experience in their respective sectors, we provide a fascinating insight into what makes them tick and what we can learn from them.

This month we chat to...

DR SARAH STEAD

Owner & qualified vet at Sore Paws Veterinary Clinic in Winlaton and Newton Aycliffe.

Sarah is a qualified vet with 20 years' experience in the industry. Having recently opened their 2nd veterinary clinic in Winlaton, they are now looking for more premises in the North East region.

Did you always envisage a career in the industry?

Absolutely. When I was a child and my beloved dog had died, followed soon after by my poor rabbit, I was powerless to stop it. I decided then and there that I would learn how to fix animals so that I would then have the knowledge and skills to be able to help. I didn't want other people to feel the sadness that I had, so the decision to become a vet was made.

What is your favourite aspect of the job?

I like to see the relationships between humans and their animals and there is no better feeling than seeing a seriously ill animal walk out and greet their owner when it's time for them to go home. People often say to me "I couldn't do your job" because the thought of putting pets to sleep is upsetting, however I disagree. It is a great privilege being in a position to ease the pain and suffering when there is no other way, and to be there for the people these pets leave behind in their grief when the time comes, to reassure and comfort them.

What has been your career defining moment?

I've always known that this is what I've wanted to do, but the first day on the job was the one that changed my life forever. There is no other career for me as it is too much of who I am. I suppose you could say that every time a life is saved that counts as career defining but every single animal I treat is as important as the next in their own right.

How do you measure success?

With the experience I have gained, the medical advances and an eagerness to always learn the latest techniques, I would say that I measure my success on that. Finding new solutions to problems that present themselves regularly and feeling better equipped with the latest medicines and techniques backed up by scientific research means I feel I am consistently providing the best care possible to my patients.

What have been the biggest changes in the industry since you started?

I'd say public perceptions have changed. In the nostalgic days of James Herriot, he was very well respected and put in the same league as a doctor, dentist or surgeon. Unfortunately, in some cases vets can be judged as not being on a similar professional standing despite having to go through the same rigorous testing and exams as our human medical counterparts. Also, with the new wave of TV programmes involving the veterinary industry, there is a higher expectation. People can watch a programme about a sick animal that has been treated and, as they don't discuss costs on the show, they think that the treatment is available to all pets. In an ideal world it would be, if there was a pet NHS for example, but there isn't and sometimes people's expectations are higher than their bank balance or insurance policy limit. That said, treatment advances for animal healthcare has increased ten-fold and this can only be a good thing.

How has your skillset developed accordingly?

I was fortunate enough to work for someone who threw me in the deep end and made me deal with every situation that was presented to me. Although this style of teaching isn't for everyone, I thrived on it and it taught me to handle situations calmly without panicking. I constantly want to learn and I have just completed my post-graduate certificate in surgery, which now enables me to help more pets which previously would need to be referred to other surgeons. I have had the privilege of working as a vet in India and Australia and even worked with wild game in South Africa, so my skill set has grown considerably in the last 20 years.

Are you a risk taker by nature or more conservative?

I'm not a risk-taker with my work, I will never play Russian roulette with people's pets, but in my personal life, yes very much so. I can often act first and think later when a great opportunity presents itself, however it seems to have worked so far, so that probably won't change too much anytime soon.

To what would you attribute your success?

Probably my down-to-earth approach. I pride myself on always being hands-on and available for all our clients. I don't hide behind my title and always show humanity, which is passed onto the staff. Our motto is there are no ego's welcome here at Sore Paws!

What's your biggest weakness and how have you managed this?

I'd say being selfless is a bit of a weakness as I don't hesitate in cancelling arrangements if I am needed at work. The animals under my care come first I'm afraid. Since Aaron and I now have a two-year-old son, I am getting better at striking a balance.

How do you remain motivated?

I am constantly motivated as I love the job I do, so it's not difficult at all. I wake up in the morning and I cannot wait to get to work. Someone once said that if you do a job you love, you never work a day in your life and that's how I feel. Animals and science are literally my life.

Would you prefer to be liked or respected?

I'd prefer both, but I prefer to earn my respect, I certainly don't expect it.

It's important to be liked and respected in my job as our clients are leaving a member of their family in your care, it's their baby and with that comes responsibility.

I'll retire when?

They carry me out in a box! This is a lifestyle choice, not a job, so I won't be retiring anytime soon!



I WAS ENTITLED TO NOTHING

INTRODUCING

Michelle Jones Wedding Consultants
&
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I often refer to weddings as being my passion. My true passions are bound in people, the unique love they share and the moments that create their story which is why I adore weddings.

But there are many who find weddings less favourable, for many reasons. There are couple's who chose not to get married and there are people who don't believe in marriage, for very specific reasons.

Currently there are 3.4 million couples cohabiting in Britain. Cohabiting as Common Law Partners, who have the same legal rights as a married couple, right?

Unfortunately, this is a myth.

This slight misunderstanding has quite significant impact.

For a relationship to be recognised by law, couples need a 'Cohabitation Contract' which provides them with legal rights; a term of agreement drawn up with crucially precise detail and agreed together with a solicitor.

Citizen's Advice states: "Although recognised by court, it may be difficult to force your partner to agree to the terms in the contract."

FORCE!

Used in this sense, as a verb, the Oxford Dictionary definition states: "To make (someone) do something against their will."



Michelle Jones,
Founder of Michelle
Jones Wedding
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& Michelle Jones
Wedding Planners.

As a romantic, I struggle to comprehend how love can be forced. As a wedding planner I'm thinking, a wedding sounds a lot more fun loving.

But for those that don't agree with marriage this 'forced' agreement seems a rather large step beyond that and even less tolerable.

It is in complete contrast to the meaning of love and partnership.

So, what about the couple's that are very much committed, in love and have cohabited for many years, have children, own property together and share everything? Sadly, many couples have faced the death of a partner or a separation and found they are entitled to nothing.

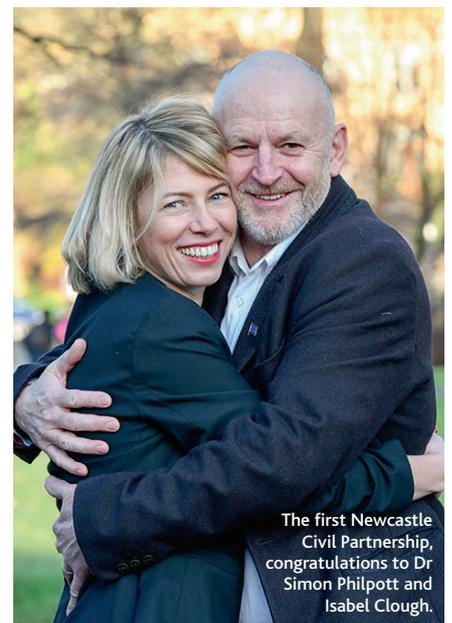
NOTHING!

Thankfully, I say with a huge cheer, as 2019 drew to a close new legislation came into effect; a change to the Civil Partnership of 2004.

All couples, same-sex and opposite-sex can now have a Civil Partnership, providing transparency and fairness. Equal rights for their commitment to one another and respect for the love that they share.

An everything solution.

And if you chose to mark the occasion, a celebration with family and friends may be to one's liking.



The first Newcastle
Civil Partnership,
congratulations to Dr
Simon Philpott and
Isabel Clough.

Image courtesy of Simon Veit-Wilson Photography.

Head over to legislation.gov.uk or citizensadvice.org.uk to learn more about the change in law and your legal rights as a couple.
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Award-winning menswear retailer Master Debonair and local Independent opticians Op & Tom recently collaborated to showcase both their seasonal collections.

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The event was so successful that both brands will be collaborating again this year.

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HEAVENLY HORTON GRANGE

By Michael Grahamslaw

Eager to ease the post-Christmas January blues, I recently visited Horton Grange Country House Hotel for an evening of delicious food & drink with my wife Lisa and son Jack.

Situated in the heart of Northumberland near Newcastle Airport, the Grade-II listed privately owned hotel boasts nine luxurious bedrooms, an award-winning restaurant and cosy bar and lounge areas. The venue is also available for private hire with catering for various events including weddings and corporate functions. With numerous dining options on offer including Sunday Lunch and Afternoon Tea, on this occasion we decided to sample the venue's à la carte menu, which has recently been revamped to reflect the season.

After a warm reception, we were swiftly ushered to the snug dining area. With comfortable seating, traditional décor and open fireplaces, the restaurant promoted feelings of relaxation and conviviality, which was complemented by an easy-listening modern pop soundtrack. The cosy ambience accompanies the new menu perfectly with a plethora of unique, locally sourced dishes on offer. Note strong flavours ideally suited to the season including beetroot, smoked cheese and black pudding. As if we hadn't already indulged enough during the festive season, we anticipated the feast that was in store.

Feeling famished, we were delighted by the arrival of our starters. I tasted the beetroot & gin cured salmon with crunchy thyme crackers and fennel pollen cream whilst Lisa sampled the wild mushroom & blue cheese arancini served with an exquisite truffle mayonnaise salad. Meanwhile, Jack devoured the confit chicken & black pudding terrine embellished by tasty toasted brioche and a honey & mustard dressing. The starters proved extremely flavoursome and nutritious, especially when chaperoned by a lovely bottle of Pinot Noir.

The bold flavours extended to the main courses with much mouth-watering cuisine on offer. Whilst I savoured the delectable roast breast of chicken accompanied by fondant potatoes and baby carrots, Lisa was delighted by the pan seared pork fillet served with braised red cabbage and delicious creamed potatoes. Jack meanwhile enjoyed the roast loin of venison. With dauphinoise potatoes, buttered kale and parsnip puree, the scrumptious dish offered a fusion of delicious flavours, making it clear that Horton Grange offers only the freshest and finest ingredients.

Despite feeling satisfied, we were still eager to sample the restaurant's dessert offering. I devoured the heavenly rhubarb posset served with piquant orange & ginger ice cream whilst Jack tasted the luscious hot chocolate fondant. With more of a savoury palette, Lisa enjoyed the selection of local cheeses alongside celery, grapes and a zingy tomato chutney. Despite falling spectacularly off the new year diet wagon, the desserts were absolutely exquisite and coupled nicely with our final teas and coffees.

Along with exceptional food, the service at Horton Grange was impeccable as always with friendly, attentive staff. With a special 'Wine and Dine' offer of two courses for only £39 per couple including a glass of wine each available every night until 31st March, Horton Grange really does go above and beyond for its customers.

We then left Horton Grange after a thoroughly enjoyable and relaxing evening. With indulgent cuisine, cosy surrounds and excellent hospitality, Horton Grange provides the perfect place to dine, relax and unwind. We can't wait to return.

Horton Grange Country House Hotel can be found at Berwick Hill Road, Ponteland, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE13 6BU. For more information visit their website www.hortongrange.co.uk or call (01661) 860686.



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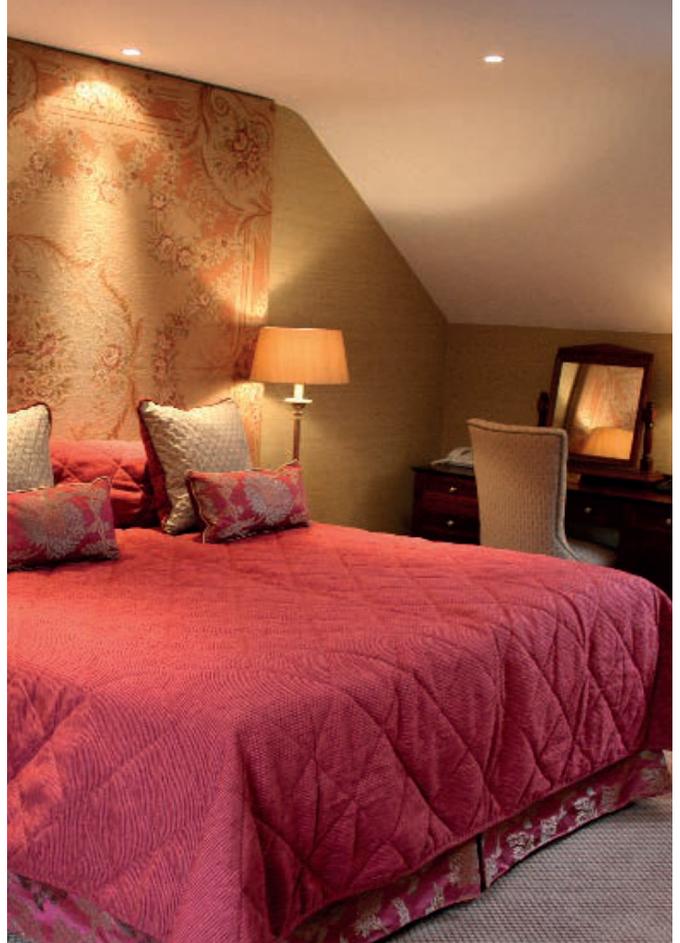
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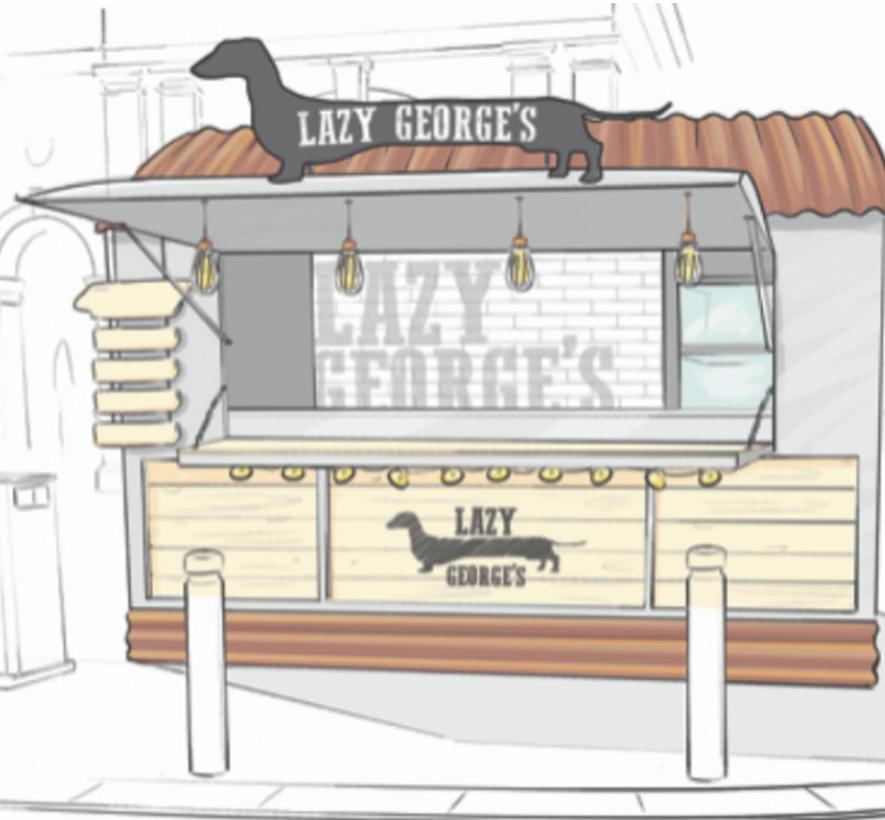
We are a family owned and managed company who together have over 25 years in the catering and manufacturing industry. Our hands on experience in the outdoor catering sector gives us great insight into the every changing needs of the mobile caterer.

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MAKE YOUR VALENTINES DATE NIGHT A SPECIAL ONE WITH PEACE AND LOAF

What better way to spend your romantic Valentine's date night with your loved one than at award-winning, fine dining restaurant Peace and Loaf?

Named as one of the most romantic restaurants in the UK in 2019, by OpenTable, Peace and Loaf is unlike any other restaurant in Newcastle, it's the restaurant to visit for a Valentine's to remember.

With a changing seasonal menu, filled with unique dishes made from locally supplied ingredients and a Dave Coulson twist on British cuisine, it's sure to impress your Valentine and earn you a few brownie points.

Whether you're celebrating the romantic month with your partner, or your friends, Peace and Loaf's newly-renovated restaurant is the best setting. Think exposed brick walls, lots of fresh greenery and a light open space, ideal for both casual and formal dining.

Or if you're on the hunt for a gift for your loved one, let's face it, there's nothing better than the gift of good food. Treat them to a Peace and Loaf gift voucher that can be used at any point throughout the year, so if February's a busy month for you, you can save your special date night for another time.

When it comes to romance, Peace and Loaf have you covered. Valentine's Day? Sorted.



To book a table please visit www.peaceandloaf.co.uk or call on 0191 281 5222.

WINTER DOESN'T HAVE TO BE BORING

The CTRL Pad, Newcastle's premiere video gaming lounge is the perfect place to spend the cold days this winter.



It feels like it has been winter forever, and we know how boring it can be up here in the chilly north, when every time you leave your bed, you just want to get straight back in to it. But if you're getting bored of hiding from the cold by spending all your spare time at home, we have somewhere else we know is sure to warm your up and get your blood pumping.

The CTRL Pad's video gaming lounge situated inside The Gate, in the heart of Newcastle, is a favourite among people of all ages to sit back, relax and play some of their favourite games. Choose from a range of consoles, from new releases to old school favourites, then take your pick from a choice of thousands of games. There's an endless choice, so we're pretty sure you'll never be bored again!

Having recently undergone a huge renovation, customers of all ages can enjoy the videogaming lounge for hours on end and can refuel with delicious snacks and treats from their brand-new menu. We'd highly recommend the loaded nachos and monster shakes! They're pretty impressive.

It doesn't stop there, The CTRL Pad is all about community spirit, so they host regular tournaments for popular games such as FIFA, Fortnite and Tekken. You can also hire out the venue for birthday parties, stag/hen dos and corporate gatherings, with prices starting at just £10ph.

To keep up to date with the latest tournaments and offers, follow them on Facebook, @The_CTRL_Pad or call 0191 250 52 64 to make a booking.

LUSCIOUS LIPS FOR VALENTINES

As Valentine's Day approaches, salons and beauty experts offering lip enhancement are gearing up to be inundated with requests for luscious lips...

However, a new aesthetics company in Whitley Bay is set to make sure that the lips of the north east are treated well and that clients can have confidence in their safety and health whilst achieving the desired results – just in time for the most romantic day of the year!

Dr James Hoyle of Quay Aesthetics, who is medical lead at newly opened Quay Aesthetics in Whitley Bay, has joined forces with Northern Insight to make sure that the right checks are done prior to appointments and help people feel reassured in exploring a treatment they may not have considered. He said: "With many years experience as a dentist, focusing on cosmetic dentistry, I am keen that the aesthetics industry has a positive reputation and that all work is done by qualified experts who understand facial structure fully.

"Enhancement of the size or shape of lips can be very flattering if done correctly, giving a more youthful appearance, boosting confidence and in some cases improving the look of teeth and gums. We all know if it goes wrong though, the appearance can be unappealing, creating the well named 'trout-pout'. Even worse you could run the risk of scarring, infections, ulcerations or even necrosis, which is when the natural lip tissue dies

"This is why making sure the right checks are undertaken is hugely important. So if you are considering the treatment, then please do follow my



Husband and wife team, Dr James and Bethany Hoyle.

best practice guidelines:

1 - Check that the filler is made from a good grade of hyaluronic acid (HA). HA occurs naturally in the bodies, helping maintain a healthy skin and therefore is kinder and safer than a synthetic version of filler. At Quay Aesthetics we use a high grade, top quality dermal filler that gives a natural lift and fullness by replacing lost collagen. This makes the treatment ideal for ladies entering menopause who have lost some of their youthful shape and texture of the lips, as well as being ideal to reshape, enlarge for better facial balance or reshape lips to cover exposed gums for people of all ages.

2 - Choose a safe clinic and professional. Always take a full note of their name and ask for their qualification, recommendations and client reviews. Also ask which products they use and why, and discuss levels – start lower as you can add more but can't take away. Be aware that immediately after your procedure for the first few days there may well be some swelling and/or bruising. You won't know the full extent of how you look until that has settled.

3 - Have a pre-appointment consultation. Good practitioners will spend time with you, discussing desired outcomes, examining your features and explaining the procedure. They will also need to know all about your medical history and discuss risks. Don't feel you have to make the decision there and then and don't be rushed.

4 - On the day of the procedure, make sure that you see the packaging, and that the HA is sealed and unopened until your appointment. Make sure a before and after photo is taken.

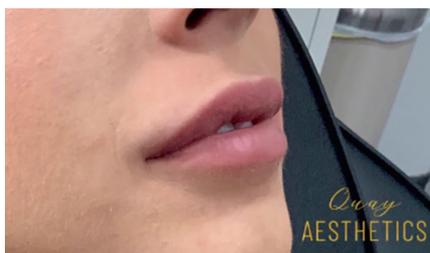
5 - Ensure that the practitioner offers after care appointments. Never agree to lip fillers at home, at parties or exhibitions or in a clinic that isn't clean.

"If you follow these steps, then you can enjoy the beauty of enhanced lips without worrying. It can take between four and 14 days for your lips to settle so if it is for a special occasion then please do plan in advance. And you can expect lip fillers to last between three and six months, but please do be aware that each person is slightly different! Timing is key to the success of aesthetic treatments, so always consult your clinician well in advance."

Quay Aesthetics has been opened on Park View in Whitley Bay by husband and wife team Dr James and Bethany Hoyle. The pair have invested into the new salon, which offers a unique range of non surgical facial treatments and semi permanent makeup specialisms.

Bethany, who has a degree in business, holds the highest level 4 VTCT accreditation in semi-permanent make-up. As well as her specialism in semi-permanent makeup, Bethany also excels in Dermaplaning, Plasma Blast Skin Tightening and LVL lash lifts.

Dr James Hoyle is a qualified dental surgeon, who is now focusing his career on cosmetic dentistry and facial aesthetics. Dr James concentrates his talents on a range of cosmetic dental offerings including teeth whitening, as well as Botox, Dermal Fillers, Prohilo, PRP 'Vampire Facial', IV Drips and Boosters.



More information on the services, experience and treatments, along with how to book a free consultation, please call 0191 691 1328 or visit www.quayaesthetics.com

NORTH EAST DENTAL GROUP CROWNED BEST TEAM AFTER A YEAR OF SUCCESS

Staff at a leading North East aesthetic dental group are all smiles after a tremendous year of growth and recognition on the national dental stage.

The Honour Health Group, which has clinics in Jesmond, Ponteland and Stanley, won the title of Best Team at the national Private Dentistry Awards. This achievement marks the latest in a series of accolades the team has brought home to the North East during the past year, including:

- **Winner of Dental Team of the Year** - Dental Awards 2019
- **Finalist for Dentist of the Year** - Dental Awards 2019
- **Finalist for Dental Practice of the Year** - Dental Awards 2019
- **Finalist for Best Website** - Dentistry Awards 2019

The Private Dentistry Awards, held at the Royal Lancaster Hotel in London, is renowned as being one of the most prestigious occasions in the dental industry, recognising excellence in private dentistry in the UK and Ireland.

For Honour Health's entry, the team provided examples of clinical excellence, marketing literature, team training and development information, evidence of team leadership and happiness, examples of how they go beyond the regular duty of care, how they connect with the local community, and patient testimonials.

In addition to the team's success, individuals at Honour Health have also been recognised by the dental industry in recent months.

Dentist Gulshan Dhanoya was shortlisted as a finalist in the Best Young Dentist category at the Private Dentistry Awards, and was the only dentist in the North East to reach the final in the teeth whitening category in the Aesthetic Dentistry Awards. Gulshan has seen a rapid increase in her aesthetic and orthodontic cases and is continually



Gulshan Dhanoya and Onkar Dhanoya of Honour Health with the Best Team trophy from the Private Dentistry Awards

working to further her skills. She is currently studying for a Masters in Restorative Dentistry at the prestigious, academically renowned Eastman Dental Institute in London.

Honour Health's team has grown in 2019 to include dental hygienist Samantha Trestrail, who works in the Jesmond clinic's dedicated Hygiene Pod. The group has invested in a state of the art EMS Airflow hygiene system for all three practices, which is the only system that is suitable for sub-gingival cleaning. Airflow quickly and comfortably removes staining and biofilm during hygiene appointments, for brighter, healthier smiles.

Dentists at Honour Health have a broad range of special interests, including Endodontics, Invisalign, dental implants and aesthetic dentistry. The clinic features a dedicated dental implant suite, and an Itero scanner for digital treatment planning and Invisalign smile outcome simulations. There are plans to invest in further facilities for the Endodontics department in 2020.

As part of Honour Health's growth, lead facial aesthetician Dr Lucy Turnbull has joined the skin team to provide facial aesthetics in Honour Health's

Skin Sanctuary, including anti wrinkle treatments and dermal fillers. Further skin treatments available at Honour Health include plasma facials, chemical peels, edermastamp and laser hair removal.

Principal dentist Onkar Dhanoya has been at the helm of the Honour Health Group for almost 35 years. He opened the first of his three practices in Stanley in 1986, followed by Jesmond in 2001 and Ponteland in 2015.

He said: "Winning Best Team at the Private Dentistry Awards is the perfect end to a fantastic year of growth and development for our team. These accolades are a wonderful reflection of what a talented group of people we have working at Honour Health, and it's a great privilege to fly the flag for the North East on the national dental stage.

"We are delighted to have been helping our patients achieve smiles they love for more than three decades now. We have always continually invested in our team, the latest equipment and facilities, and we are looking forward to embarking on exciting plans for 2020 and beyond as the world of digital dentistry evolves."

For further information about Honour Health, visit www.honourhealth.co.uk

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GETTING YOUR LIFE BACK ON TRACK

Whether it was caused by getting back to the gym, a winning kick in football or just by lifting something heavy, foot and ankle pain affects most people at some point in their lives.

Mr Rajesh Kakwani is a Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon and joined Spire Washington Hospital in December 2019, Mr Kakwani sees patients with foot and ankle pain during every clinic.

Here he explains the commonest causes of foot and ankle pain and shares some top tips on how to manage acute foot and ankle pain.

What are the common causes of foot and ankle pain?

Foot and ankle pain is very common, especially with people that are involved in kicking sports such as football and rugby. It can be triggered by everyday activities, can develop over time, or can come on suddenly for no apparent reason.

What is the solution?

Most conditions settle with non-operative measures, some need an operation.

At Spire Washington Hospital we carry out a procedure known as ankle arthroscopy, which allows us to treat most of the ankle problems.

Ankle arthroscopy is a surgical procedure allowing us to treat ankle problems. A small camera is inserted into the ankle joint, displaying an image on a television screen. We then use these images to guide miniature surgical instruments to correct and repair the damage.

There are different types of ankle surgery and arthroscopy is applied in a variety of different ways to treat foot and ankle conditions. It can be used



Rajesh Kakwani

to diagnose problems by providing us with a clear image of all the joints and structures inside the foot and ankle.

Ankle arthroscopy may be used to perform the following:

Arthritic joint debridement

Osteoarthritis and injury can result in excessive scar tissue and diseased cartilage in the joint. Arthroscopy helps remove the diseased parts of the joint, along with any bone spurs or loose fragments of bone.

Arthroscopy following an injury

Chronic ankle symptoms can arise following a sprain or injury. The ligaments can be torn and the cartilage can be damaged. This damage can be treated by arthroscopy.

Footballer's ankle

A common problem for people involved in kicking sports – a large spur of bone at the front of the ankle can be painful when the foot is extended. The spur can be removed by arthroscopy.

Arthroscopic Ankle fusion

For end-stage arthritis of the ankle, we can perform a key-hole (arthroscopic) ankle fusion by removing the remaining cartilage, hence providing excellent pain relief. Although the option of ankle replacement is also available in certain cases

Symptoms

- Swelling or tenderness in the foot or ankle
- Pain the foot or ankle

What would happen after ankle arthroscopy?

In most cases, we would encourage patients to walk on the foot from the day of the surgery, however crutches may be required initially in the days following surgery. We work closely with our physiotherapy department that would immediately draw up an exercise program. This would be designed to have patients back to work within one week and back to playing sports within six weeks. We would then like to see the patient for a follow up to see how they are getting on.

If you are suffering from a foot or ankle injury, sports related or not, book in to see Mr Kakwani at Spire Washington Hospital. 0191 448 7827.

OUR VALENTINES GIFT TO YOU

Ah, the month of love. Whether you're in a relationship or on the dating scene, you just can't avoid wanting to make yourself feel a million dollars during Valentine's month.



So, at Novellus Aesthetics, we've got the ultimate Valentine's gift for you: Laser Hair Removal.

Feeling silky smooth is one of the best pick-me-ups a girl needs, and laser hair removal is the guaranteed treatment to ensure it lasts more than a night's sleep. In fact, the results of laser hair removal are permanent, so say goodbye to cheap razors, panic-dry-shaving and those pesky razor bumps, they're officially a thing of the past!

Laser hair removal, carried out by a trained laser nurse, is a far more precise and far less damaging form of hair removal than any other, including IPL. Whilst IPL may appear to be cheaper alternative, the results last don't last as long and IPL can actually lead to a number of adverse effects. It also tends to require more sessions than laser and is only suitable to certain skin/hair types.

Laser on the other hand, is much more effective, and achieves substantially better results than IPL, requiring less sessions, treating more hair types and you'll even notice longer hair free periods after just the first treatment. All skin types are safe with Novellus' gold standard laser.

And the best part...Most clients achieve permanent hair removal of 90-95% after just six treatments. Sign us up!

At Novellus Aesthetics, their trained Laser & Aesthetics Nurse Practitioner, Ness, is currently offering 50% off selected packages during February, when you quote 'Northern Insight' at the point of booking.

To make the most of this offer or to find out more information, please contact the Novellus team on 0191 6950450 or visit www.novellusaesthetics.co.uk.

A few reasons

To become a member of Tyneside

A wide range of memberships available





'Cherish our history, embrace change'

<p>Natural Quality</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid white; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>Competitions</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid white; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>PGA Professional</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid white; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>Historic</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid white; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>Breathtaking</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid white; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>Restoration</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid white; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p>Practice</p>	<p><i>Free draining land affords excellent playing conditions all year round. Even in Winter!</i></p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid white; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p><i>Consistent greens and playing surfaces throughout the season.</i></p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid white; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p><i>Strong and well supported weekend competitions for Senior, Ladies and Junior & Academy sections.</i></p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid white; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p><i>Gary Vickers on hand to support and assist when ever needed.</i></p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid white; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p><i>Historic but forward thinking Club with 2 Ex professionals being Open Champions.</i></p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid white; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p><i>Views of the River Tyne and Tyne Valley.</i></p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid white; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p><i>Recent investment and course changes to bring it back to the original classic Colt design.</i></p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid white; margin: 5px 0;"/> <p><i>Superb new practice facility, driving range and Par 3 course all included in a membership.</i></p>
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If you like what you're reading and want to hear more please contact:

General Manager, Peter Smith

peter.smith@tynesidegolfclub.co.uk

0191 413 2742





GET READY TO TUMBLE

Former Olympians unite on Tyneside to inspire the next generation of gymnasts and their families to be active and get tumbling

Over 500 supporters turned out on Sunday 5th January to mark the opening of Tumble Gymnastics & Activity Centre in Benton, Newcastle. Special guests included World Champion Gymnast Beth Tweddle, the greatest GB female gymnast to date and North East Paralympic Champion Stephen Miller, who cut the ribbon and officially opened the family friendly facility.

Owned and managed by Newcastle based retired Olympic Gymnast Craig Heap, Tumble Gymnastics & Activity Centre not only meets the growing demand for gymnastic based activities for all abilities but also encourages families to get fit together offering a range of activities from babies through to grandparents.

Managing Director Craig, who has captained the England team to a gold medal twice in his professional career, said: "Gymnastics is an amazing sport for development of fundamental movement and my original vision was to have a place where young people can have a taste of gymnastics which was centred around fun rather than performance.

"As a new parent I quickly realised that the time to be physically active becomes less to none existent and so my vision was not only around the young people but to provide a space where parents and grandparents can take part in physical activity whilst their children take part in Gymnastics."

The centre includes a fully equipped fitness suite which is designed to ensure that parents/carers and anybody else who may spend their time chauffeuring their children to and from sports classes are given the opportunity to get active without leaving the building. There is also a baby and toddler area offering a range of groups and activities to support the development of the whole family.

To cater for the competitive side of the sport, Tumble Gymnastics & Activity Centre will be home to a brand new TeamGym competitive squad. The centre is staffed by a highly experienced coaching team, led by former Olympic Gymnast Paula Thomas as Head Coach. The TeamGym programme is split up into development pathways and competitive squads and focuses on routines being performed on three pieces of apparatus; tumble,

trampette and floor.

Supported by Sport England and part of the British Gymnastics Foundation's Love to Move programme, the new facility has already created a number of new jobs (10) and aims to be a true community hub. It also features a coffee shop in partnership with the popular Oats & Eggs Pantry, providing locally roasted coffee and fresh healthy food. Based on North Tyne Industrial Estate, customers are also welcome to drop in to use the café or the fitness centre facilities during opening hours.

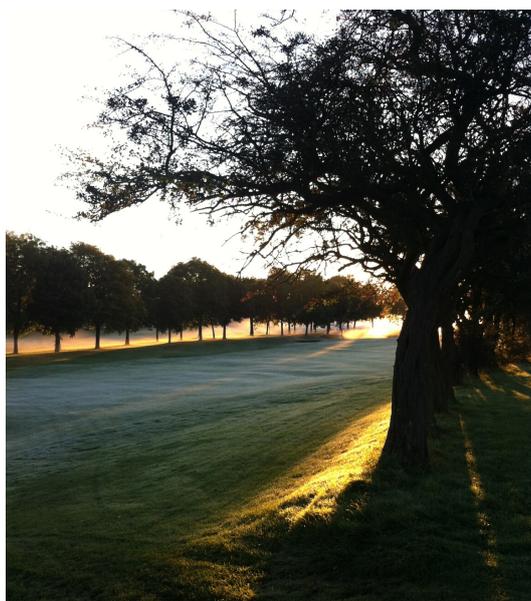
Since retiring from Gymnastics in 2002 Commonwealth Games Craig became a high performance gymnastics coach and mentor working in education and is now using all this experience to create TUMBLE! He has commented on gymnastics for BBC radio 5Live and BBC Sport covering World championships, 2014 and 2018 Commonwealth Games and the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympic Games. Craig was also a Judge on BBC One's Saturday night Gymnastics entertainment show "TUMBLE" in the summer of 2014.

For more information or to sign up online please visit - www.tumbleactivity.com



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or email admin@gosforthgolfclub.co.uk





RUGBY FEVER HITS KINGSTON PARK FOR THE BIG ONE!

Kingston Park Stadium will host 'The Big One' on Saturday March 28, with Newcastle Falcons aiming for a 10,000 sell-out for their Greene King IPA Championship game against Ealing Trailfinders.

The 5.30pm kick-off will be a huge family occasion with local rugby clubs at its core – the Falcons set to announce details of a special fanzone and charity partner in due course.

Gallagher Community Cup @ Kingston Park

The Gallagher Community Cup will take place throughout the day which looks to continue as one of the largest rugby festivals in the region. For the third year running, the fixture following the festival will be The Big One at Kingston Park Stadium, and each team can claim complimentary match day tickets for their squad, plus two accompanying coaches to the fixture.

Entry to the festival is FREE and alongside

complimentary tickets, teams also have the opportunity to purchase additional tickets for the Newcastle Falcons V Ealing Trailfinders at just £5 for juniors and £8 for adults.

Last year's pre-match festival had over 100 teams taking part with entries from clubs with an Under 11s or U12s section. With this year's event taking place ahead of the Newcastle Falcons' game against Ealing Trailfinders, interest is already high from teams outside of the region.

Local Club Matches

Newcastle Falcons are also in discussion with Northumberland, Durham and Cumbria CBs to request that games are able to kick-off earlier to

enable teams to meet after the game and head to Kingston Park for the game. It's expected that the fixture will attract many travelling teams visiting the North East during the weekend and the Falcons are committed to putting these teams in contact with local clubs to arrange fixtures where appropriate.

Clubs wishing to enter a team into this season's event or who would like to arrange a local fixture should contact the Falcons Community Foundation's Gavin Beasley by emailing gavin.beasley@newcastle-falcons.co.uk without delay, to ensure they are part of this year's big day for North East rugby.

Groups of 15 or more will also be able to purchase tickets for £5 junior and £8 for adults. With all tickets now on general sale, book your place online at newcastlefalcons.co.uk by calling 0871 226 60 60.





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*Calls to the ticket hotline cost 13p per minute plus your phone company's access charge.

THERE IS A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN EATING HEALTHILY AND EATING TO LOSE WEIGHT

If you are trying to lose weight and you are not succeeding, what you are doing is simply not working, therefore you need to work out where you are going wrong.

You may think because you are eating relatively healthy food you should be losing weight, this is where you may be going wrong.

The facts are simple, if you are burning off more calories than you are consuming, you will lose weight. I don't want you to count calories, none of my clients do, you just need to look into things a little further.

Most people perceive eg porridge, brown bread, brown rice and sweet potatoes as pretty healthy and you would be 100% right, they contain very little fat, sugar and salt. You would therefore expect to drop weight, here lies the problem – this food is taken in as carbohydrate and although has minimal fat content, if you do not burn it off through your day to day living or exercise, it will eventually be stored as fat.

If you are looking to lose weight I would suggest you keep a food diary. You can then check on the amount of carbohydrate based foods you are having, you may be shocked. Look to cut your portions right down and add more protein foods eg lean meats or fish. Or you could replace them with less calorie based foods, here are just a few examples of everyday changes you could make to help weight loss

- Eat smaller portions, I suggest buying smaller plates.
- Replace porridge/cereals with eggs/omelette for breakfast.
- Replace concentrated sugar-laden orange juice, with water or herbal tea.
- Replace traditional rice with cauliflower rice more green vegetables or salad.



David Fairlamb

- Cut out your lunchtime sandwich, replace it with home made soup or protein based salad eg chicken, turkey – make sure there are no sauces, just add lime or lemon for moisture.

As far as I'm concerned, the biggest and quickest results will happen if you can follow the above, but more importantly, cut out refined sugar or as I call it, white death.

The same goes for your training, walking 3-4 times

a week is fantastic for your health but is not the best for weight loss. If you can combine healthy natural food, with a fitness programme that is varied and consistently pushes you out of your comfort zone, it will accelerate your weight loss, improve your posture, self esteem and general outlook on life.

It's a very short time out of your life to focus and get to where you want to be, but it will be worth it and your life will become so much happier.

DAVID'S SUMMING UP

Forget about losing weight just eat healthier and exercise, then the weight will take care of itself.



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2 Old Eldon Square, Newcastle, NE1 7JG

KARPET MILLS LAUNCH DESIGNER FLOORING PREMIUM SHOWROOM AT FLAGSHIP NEWCASTLE BRANCH



Karpet Mills, the North East leading Carpet and Flooring retailer, are delighted to announce the launch of the NEW Designer Flooring Premium Showroom at their Kingston Park branch in Newcastle.

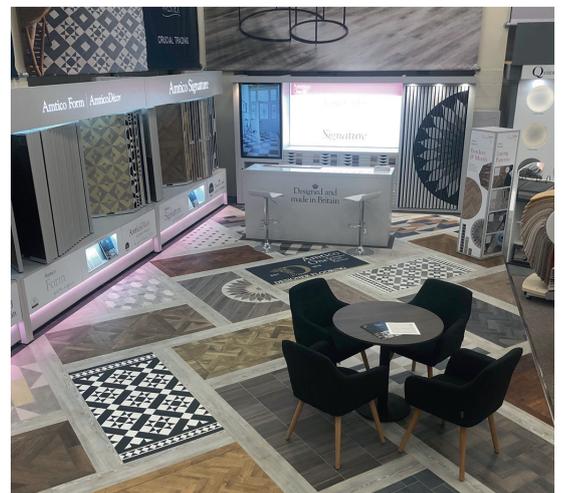


The new 10,000 sqft showroom displays the highest quality floor coverings available in today's market, including famous names such as Amtico, Axminster, Crucial Trading to name just a few. In addition to having the North-East largest selection of premium flooring on display, the new showroom will also feature state-of-the-art design software from both Hugh Mackay & Amtico, allowing customers to create completely bespoke carpets and flooring, and even providing them with visual representations of how their new flooring will look in their home.

"This will be a real game changer for us" says Karpet Mills director Joel Dickinson. "Our Designer Flooring Showroom at our Karpet Mills branch in Hexham has had great success since its launch in early 2018, so it has always been the plan to open up further showrooms and expand the business further. The new Designer Flooring showroom will allow us to provide customers with the largest selection of premium flooring brands in the North East."

The move marks further expansion for the Karpet Mills brand, who have invested heavily in recent years with two new stores in Hexham & Benton, brand-new purpose-built head office facility, and a full renovation of their Durham branch based in Hetton-le-Hole.

Karpet Mills combines the experience gleaned from over a 140 years trading with the modern-day expectations of quality and service to provide the full package for every customer. All branches (Kingston Park, Gateshead, Hetton-Le-Hole, Hexham and now Benton) are open for trade seven days a week.



Visit the new Designer Flooring Showroom Today – Unit 8A Airport Industrial Estate, Kingston Park, Newcastle, NE3 2EF or visit www.karpetmills.co.uk for more information.



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