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INSIGHT

DECEMBER/JANUARY 2021/22

ISSUE 75



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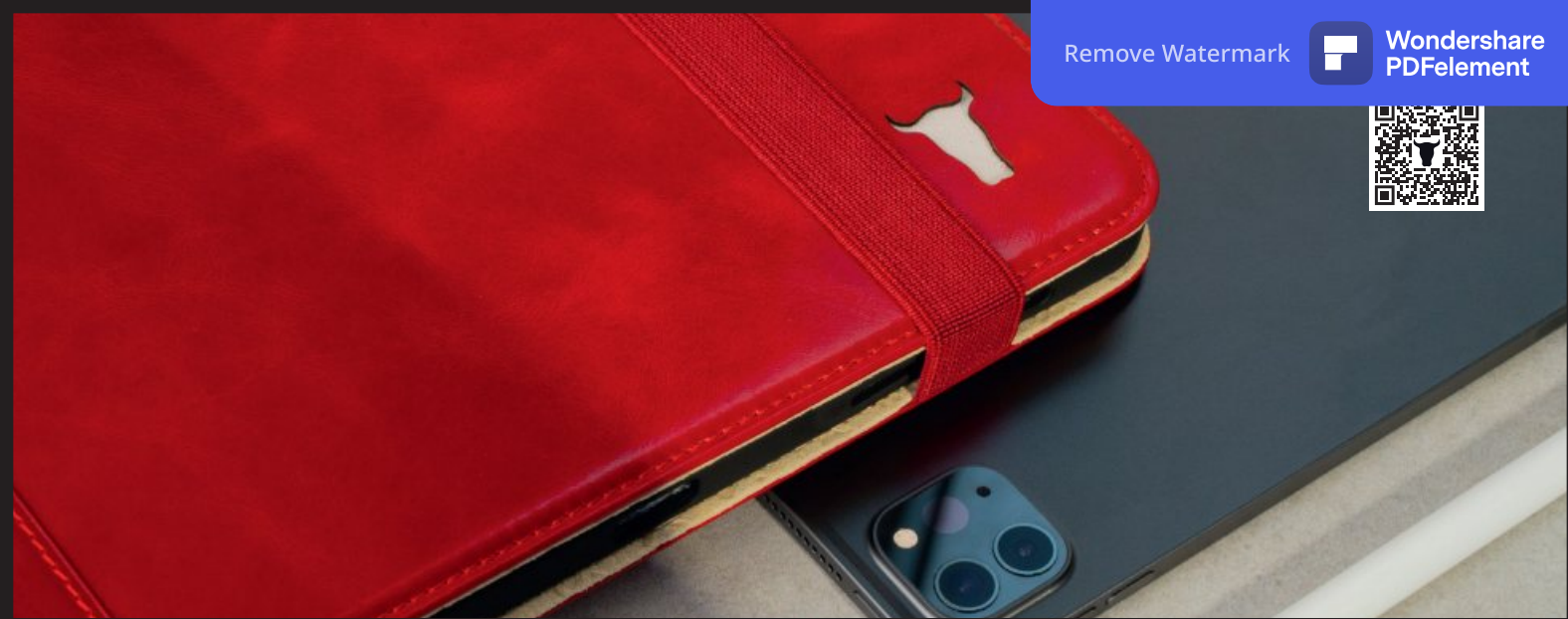
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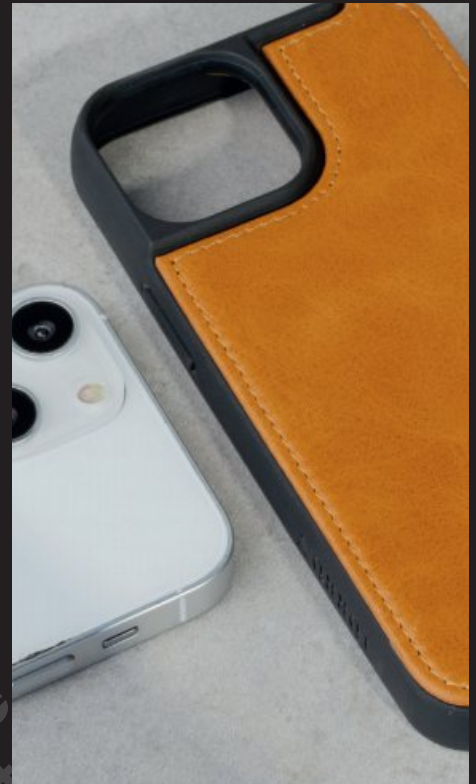
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FOREWORD

Welcome to the landmark 75th edition of Northern Insight.

When we began this journey six years ago, we endeavoured to bring the best possible product to the marketplace, showcasing the wealth of business talent and expertise in our region.

Underpinned by a mix of expert columnists, business insight, social photographs and aspirational lifestyle content, we believe we have achieved this, in spite of two tumultuous years as a result of the coronavirus crisis.

As ever, many thanks to all readers, clients and contributors for your unwavering support. Northern Insight remains your eye on the region.

Our final cover stars of the year are Sanderson Young who celebrate nearly doubling their sales over the past 12 months.

Elsewhere, we visit the French Quarter and Italian newcomer Punto - two classy restaurants, perfect for the festive period with a little more leisure time on our hands.

My warmest wishes for a very merry Christmas and prosperous New Year.

Stay safe and well. See you in 2022...

M.J. Grahamslaw

Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher
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EUROPEAN FINALS FOR SOS SERVICE MANAGER

This December, Service Manager, Ben Fletcher, will be flying the flag for Britain when he competes in the European Kyocera Service Awards.

Ben, who has worked at Gateshead-based office technology company SOS Group for 10 years, won the national competition held in Reading and will now test his technical skills and knowledge against the best in Europe.

The finals of the long-standing competition, a mixture of skills tests and questions about Kyocera products and service quality, are normally held in Germany. This year, because of Covid, it will take place online on 8th December.

The prestigious awards allow service technicians to benchmark skills and knowledge, helping improve their knowledge and also to engage and network with colleagues across the world.

Ben says: "I've previously competed in the European competition in Meerbusch, near Dusseldorf, in 2015 and it was a very positive experience. Hopefully this time I can go on to win!"



REBRAND FOR REJUVENATED RETAIL CENTRE

A Tyneside retail outlet centre is celebrating its 25th anniversary by embracing change and catering for a new generation of shoppers and leisure seekers.

Royal Quays Outlet Centre in North Shields has rebranded to recognise the many small independent businesses that have moved into the centre. Now known as the Royal Quays Independent and Outlet Centre, centre manager Matt Dawson is confident that the change will encourage more retailers and a new cohort of customers looking for a fresh shopping and leisure experience.

The situation reached a critical point in October 2020 when there were 17 empty units in the centre but with careful market research, planning and thinking outside of the box, Matt has reduced this to just four empty units and footfall has risen considerably.

"We are already seeing a huge difference in the centre and things are moving at a lot faster pace than even I had planned. We have embraced fantastic local independents who have integrated with our established branded outlet stores and added unique leisure and hospitality to complement them to create a visitor destination rather than just a visit to the shops," said Matt.



WONDERSTUFF RAISES OVER £800 FOR MENTAL HEALTH CHARITY

Paul Alderson, founder of Wonderstuff, created a collaborative live art event to bring together artists to support a local mental health charity, raising over £800 for the charity.

G H O S T S took place on Thursday 28th October from 6pm-9pm at Flintlab Coworking Space in Gosforth and featured some of the North East's most exciting artists working alongside the creative team from Wonderstuff.

The live art event saw the artists work inside the coworking spaces' large windows on Gosforth High Street with visitors, families, and supporters being able to watch the artwork being created from outside.

Paul Alderson said "I want to move art into the forefront of peoples minds, to let people see artists at work to truly appreciate their talents. To do this and support a local charity means a lot to me."

ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM UNVEILS ITS NEW CEO AT AUTUMN CONFERENCE

The new CEO of the North East's largest entrepreneur membership group has been unveiled at its autumn conference.

Elaine Stroud was confirmed as the new chief executive of the Entrepreneurs' Forum following a period of change for the organisation.

Addressing an audience of 250 North East entrepreneurs, chairman James Robson MBE revealed the leadership change during the Forum's Together We Can Take on the World conference in November.

On her appointment, Elaine said: "I am thrilled to be appointed at this important time as we emerge from the pandemic and bring back our in-person events, including this conference. The Forum was created almost 20 years ago for entrepreneurs to learn and to be inspired by each other and this ethos remains at our core. Right now, entrepreneurs have the opportunity to lead and inspire those around them to be make positive changes for world we live in and I'm excited to be leading the Forum as we play our part."



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ISO SPECIALISTS HELP ELEVATOR COMPANY HIT NEW HEIGHTS

North East based ISO consultancy company, Compliant FM, are delighted to have worked alongside Rise Elevator to help the business gain the ISO 9001:2015 quality standard.

Compliant, who have been based in Sunderland since 2017, work with companies across the UK who are looking to grow their business by gaining UKAS accredited ISO certification.

During the last 18 months, Compliant have seen the demand for their services increase, with many businesses looking to gain competitor advantage or tender for public sector opportunities, many of which require suppliers to have an ISO certification.

They were delighted to be approached by Rise Elevator as they looked to grow their business by gaining the prestigious ISO quality standard. Having recently moved into new premises in Gateshead's Team Valley, Rise Elevator provide lift, installation and repair services to businesses across the UK including the NHS and the National Trust.



FAST-GROWING STREAMGO WELCOMES NEW HEAD OF MARKETING

streamGo has appointed Andrew Dipper as its new Head of Marketing.

The virtual events platform—who work with the likes of Sony, Pfizer, Retail Week and Speedo—has hired Mr Dipper as they look to further capitalise on demand for their innovative streaming solutions.

Andrew joins streamGo from Evolved Search, where he helped the performance marketing agency win two Search Agency Of The Year awards in 2021.

Prior to that he was Global Head of Digital Marketing at cloud talent organisation Tenth Revolution Group.

"I'm unbelievably excited to be joining streamGo as their new Head of Marketing," Andrew said.

"streamGo are genuine experts in live streaming and have a great suite of video products and solutions that I can't wait to tell the world about. On a personal level, this is an amazing opportunity for me - I'm excited to help streamGo achieve its business goals."



LEADING MENTAL HEALTH ORGANISATION APPOINTS NEW NATIONAL OPERATIONS DIRECTOR

North East-based mental health organisation, Insight IAPT, has announced the appointment of Andy Wright as their new National Operations Director.

Most recently, Mr Wright has been involved in several projects that focus on NHS talking therapies, as part of the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme.

In his new role as National Operations Director, Mr Wright will be working with Insight IAPT's local teams across the country, helping them with their day-to-day running, as well as supporting their community and employment services.

Mr Wright said: "I have been an advocate for IAPT therapy for over a decade and I've witnessed how it can transform people's lives for the better. I'm eager to get started and find how we can link our IAPT provision with our community and employment services to make the service better for everyone."

NEWCASTLE INSURANCE BROKER LYCETTS TOASTS TO 60 YEARS OF BUSINESS

Newcastle-based insurance broker and financial services specialist Lycetts has toasted 60 years of industry success by hosting a gala ball for its 155-strong staff.

Colleagues from across the country came together for a diamond anniversary-themed party at the Crowne Plaza in Newcastle where they enjoyed a three-course meal and entertainment from North East band Hip Operation.

Lycetts was established in Newcastle in October 1961 as Wright Deen Lycett Limited and over the past six decades has grown to become one of the UK's leading independently-operated insurance brokers.

Still headquartered at Milburn House, Newcastle, the company now operates from 16 regional offices, advising clients nationwide on insurance matters from farm and estate and household to commercial and bloodstock insurance.

Charles Foster, Chief Executive of Lycetts, said: "Sixty years in business is a remarkable achievement and is testament to the dedicated work of our staff and long-standing relationships that have been fostered and nurtured for more than half a century."



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“

**...we're considering
opening offices
further south to add
to those in Newcastle
and Guisborough...**

”

SD LEGAL SERVICES IS HERE TO SERVE

It has been an incredibly busy and productive year for Simon Darby and the SD Legal Services team. As well as seeing a large increase in new clients, Simon has also been working on some new ventures and strategic partnerships during 2021.

SD Legal Service have helped hundreds of clients across the UK. They serve documents nationwide and provide a rapid tracing service. Clients range from local authorities, property management companies, law firms and housing associations.

"We work closely with the vast majority of legal firms here in the North East, but we are now attracting a lot of interest from firms elsewhere around the UK, especially in Leeds, Manchester and Birmingham. Such has been the speed of our growth that we're considering opening offices further south to add to those in Newcastle and Guisborough."

Along with Michael George, MD at Millbank Solutions, and the barristers at Trinity Chambers, Simon has set up a new venture called Crime Prosecutors during the pandemic which provides a full private prosecution service from the complaint all the way to court room. It is the only business of its type in the North East.

Crime and cybercrime is a growing challenge for businesses, individuals, insurers, and regulatory bodies. As traditional prosecuting bodies such as the Police, Crown Prosecution Service and Serious Fraud Office are facing increasing demands on the resources they can deploy due to financial cutbacks and austerity measures, private prosecutions are a viable alternative.

The experienced Crime Prosecutors team can assist with a wide range of private prosecution services, including:

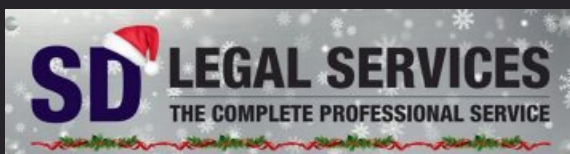
- Cybercrime prosecutions.
- Fraud prosecutions.
- Assaults & sexual offences prosecutions.
- Regulatory prosecutions.

"Fraud and cybercrime offences are certainly on the increase," says Simon who has over 15 years of experience in the investigation, process serving and enforcement industry having personally carried out thousands of cases around the North East. Prior to that he worked as a Police Officer.

SD Legal Services has also gone into strategic partnerships with Millbank Solutions (www.millbanksolutions.co.uk) and Just (www.justdebt.co.uk) allowing them to provide a wider range of services to their clients.

SD Legal Services is North East based....nationally respected.

If you are a firm that needs nationwide process serving or tracing services then contact Simon Darby and his team at SD Legal Services. To contact Simon direct, phone 078322 38441 or email sdlegalservices@btinternet.com. You'll find other details and of course full details of what SD Legal Services can do for you by visiting their website www.sdlegalltd.co.uk as well as the Crime Prosecutors website www.crimeprosecutors.co.uk



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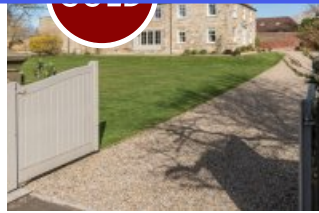


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POWER OF MARKETING

I am delighted once again to be supporting Northern Insight, this fabulous regional magazine, over the Christmas and New Year period.

2021 has been an outstanding year for Estate Agency and particularly at Sanderson Young where we have seen the number of sales nearly double over the last twelve months. Confidence in the housing market has been extremely strong with demand for houses far outstretching the supply which has eventually led to a very significant shortage of properties coming onto the market for sale or available to rent.

The importance in a market like this is to ensure that your Estate Agent is actively promoting your house to ensure you maximise your price and that you have buyers waiting in the wings should anything happen to the first choice purchaser.

In Sanderson Young we have achieved some phenomenal results over the year with many of our sales attracting bids well above the asking price. It is imperative that a good estate agent SELLS YOUR PROPERTY rather than distributing it and allowing people to buy it; the difference between selling the property for the maximum price and an agent simply selling it to the first purchaser is very significant and it is this

SOLD



SOLD



Sssh!

SOLD





SOLD



SOLD



SOLD



SOLD



SOLD



SOLD

amount of money in a rising market which belongs to the client and it is our duty to ensure we achieve the best possible figure.
As we come to the end of 2021, I wish everyone a very safe, healthy and peaceful festive period, and I hope everybody will enjoy a tremendous time with family and friends gathering in a safe environment over Christmas and New Year.
In 2022, Sanderson Young are geared up for some exciting new homes sites and some excellent new instructions that are building up in the month of December, ready for launching in January.
If you are looking for a proactive estate agent who can maximise the sale of your property, please do not hesitate to give us a call on 0191 223 3500 or email me at duncan.young@sandersonyoung.co.uk.

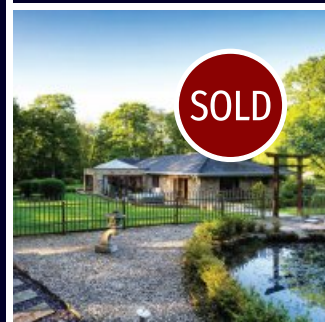
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A RISING STAR

HAVE RACKET - WILL TRAVEL

As you'll know, over the last 18 months or so, travel hasn't been easy. It was bad enough trying to leave your house to visit a neighbour, but imagine the sort of impact a travel ban has had on those people who need to travel around the UK or abroad on a regular basis as part of their job.

And that's exactly the sort of problem which has affected one of the UK's brightest sporting stars.

Lucy Beecroft lives in Seaton Sluice, Whitley Bay but is currently studying at Nottingham University.

Lucy is also one of our leading squash players and is currently ranked at 70th in the world.

She should be much higher than that, but Lucy's main problem is that travel was a nightmare and, courtesy of COVID, the vast majority of tournaments where she'd have picked up world ranking points...and others would have lost them... didn't happen.

"Thankfully the log jam is starting to clear," says Lucy from a hotel room in Norway where she is taking part in another tournament. "The season should have ended in June of this year (2021) but because of the backlog, everything is being rescheduled so that we're actually going to be playing solidly for twelve months."

When COVID restrictions were eased and Lucy... and everyone else....could start playing tournament squash again, she was ranked at number 365 in the world. Since June, she's won her first two PSA (Professional Squash Association) titles and has soared to number 70 in the world. Her ranking has gone up every month since that first event in June and she's hoping it continues to rise over the coming months.

"If all goes to plan, I'm hoping to be in the world top 50 early next year. Hopefully that will mean I catch the eye of the England selectors and gain a place in the national team for the Commonwealth Games."

She certainly deserves it.

Lucy started playing squash at the age of five at Tynemouth Squash Club. Both of her parents played so she was brought up around the club. Lucy first competed for the county when she was 10 and represented England for the first time when she was 12. She then went on to represent England at all junior age groups at European and World Junior Championships and was ranked number one in England at all age groups.

Here in the UK we should do better at bringing youngsters through from sport at school. We're miles behind what they do in North America. It was no surprise when Lucy, who by now was in the sixth form, started to get recruitment messages from US



Lucy Beecroft



universities to study there and play on their squash teams. Squash at US college level is extremely competitive and attracts the top junior players from around the world. Consequently, in 2016 she moved to the USA and started studying at Yale University in Connecticut.

She graduated in May 2020. Lucy played number 1 on the team at Yale and was captain in her senior year when Yale finished 3rd at the nationals...their highest finish in over ten years. She received All American and All Ivy honours for each of the four years she was there which meant she was ranked in the top 10 players in all US universities and all of the Ivy League. An incredible achievement.

"I always had the intention of playing squash professionally after university, so in summer 2020 I moved back to England and started training full time in Nottingham, where I am also completing a part-time Masters in Health Psychology."

And then COVID really took hold.

Fast forward 12 months to June 2021 and she could start competing again.



And she's been hugely successful, coming through as an unseeded player to win two PSA Tour titles. She was even named PSA Challenger Tour Player of the Month for September.

In other words, Lucy Beecroft is a name to watch out for on the sports pages of your favourite newspapers, magazines and websites.

She's a serial winner and, through hard work and dedication, deserves to reach the top.

Would you like to lend a hand in her climb to the top? Travelling to and preparing for tournaments is expensive and Lucy would love to help sponsors gain publicity via her success if they could cover some of her costs. Interested? Get in touch with us here at Northern Insight and we'll put you in contact with Lucy. It could be one of the best business decisions you ever make because you'll be in at the start.

Rising stars don't come any better. You can be part of her journey. Good luck Lucy.

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Gentlemen's



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D. Phillips

L. Wilde

wish you a

MERRY
Christmas



Image by Niltoni 360°



Image by Sean Jobe



Image by Sean Jobe



L_R: Craig Wilde and Filipe Neves Ribeiro. Image by Chris Davis



Image by Sean Jobe

WILDE ABOUT NILTONI LTD

Founded by Craig Wilde in 2017, and now led by both Craig and his partner Filipe Neves Ribeiro who joined the company during 2020 in the midst of the pandemic.

Together along with their development team, they set up the Grainger Delivery platform; providing an online shop for Grainger Market food traders to ship food and goods across the region and now rest of the UK. The site has been a hugely successful endeavour that has kept the 186 year old Market alive and now thriving 'post' covid_19, turning a cool £1.3M for the Traders in the first year, and making headlines across the media.

Craig hails from Yorkshire, but his career has seen him with bases in Glasgow, London, Ibiza and Newcastle - his work portfolio is diverse: as Creative Director at Niltoni, but also on occasion a Hollywood Movie Writer, having worked with finessing on a couple of pictures currently in development; Movie Actor, Voice Over and now Children's Book Writer! "I'm really proud of our new team, and the work we have achieved over the last couple of years, especially with the Grainger Market Delivery, and now the children's book. We are blessed with a super talented and diverse Team, with Portuguese, Lithuanian, Russian and French Team members; the creativity that comes from the mix is exhilarating! "

Now expanded to deliver across the UK, and with a luxury hamper business on the back of the project under the brand 'Phillips & Wilde' - the food delivery business has continued to provide ample opportunities for Niltoni to flex their considerable creative talents; from their highly successful Christmas commercials, last year featuring two 'intrepid elves' played by two budding three year old stars and a knock out performance from Melvin Smith as Santa - who looks straight out of the classic 'Miracle on 34th Street', to this years animated extravaganza, again with the two child stars, joined by a third, incidentally Craig's Niece alongside Niltoni's great friend Tv's 'Queen of clean' Kim Woodburn.

Filipe came to the UK seven years ago, and has carved out a career as graphic designer, 3D animator and second seat at Niltoni - where as Senior Content Producer his skills are stretched almost daily with the diverse work flow and client portfolio "I love the challenge and the range of clients and work, no two days are the same and I'm able to keep expanding my skillset - driving brands, events, and our team ever onward to the next level - the atmosphere we create is electric!"

This year saw Niltoni branch into publishing with their first book 'The Elf Who Saved Christmas'. It's a seasonal kids adventure, penned by Wilde and illustrated beautifully by North East artist Monique Scott, who joins the long line of Niltoni Associates that make up their stellar list of creative collaborators. The story and illustrations form the animation for the Grainger Delivery Christmas commercial. The book also offered the opportunity to help raise money for Charity - the Newcastle Chronicle Sunshine Fund. Sales of the book on the www.GraingerDelivery.com website give £2.50 of every book to the charity.

Niltoni is made up of five divisions: Niltoni Voice - born out of the acquisition of the internationally successful agency QVOX Audio, who's clients include TATA Steel, Coca Cola, The United Nations, UNESCO and The Bank of China. Niltoni Artists which has managed and developed business professionals into TV personalities, notably 'The Property Boys' who went from gritty Channel 4 documentary subjects to stars of BBC One's 'The Customer is Always Right', Niltoni Lux the image library and content business, Niltoni 360° the Creative Agency and now Niltoni Publishing.

The Company's client portfolio encompasses Film & TV, Sports Fitness, Food & Drink, Art and fashion; and as they expand their core four person team in early 2022, the future for the company is super exciting, having their eyes on expansion into the EU with a base in Filipe's native Lisbon, Portugal, where they already have a small but growing client list.

www.niltoni.com



Image by Oliver William Smith



Image by Sean Jobe



FANTASY & HISTORY COLLIDE

THE ART OF JAY JOHNSTONE

Following on from our last meeting we have caught up with local artist and designer, Jay Johnstone, as he continues to explore traditional techniques to portray the mythology of J.R.R. Tolkien's Legendarium. Jay's reputation goes from strength to strength with sales worldwide and an enviable book cover commission list.



jaystolkien.com

L - The Watcher at the Gate
M - The Battle of the Chamber of Mazarbul
R - The Bridge of Khazad-dûm
Gouache, Oil glaze and gold leaf
30cm x 21cm



The Death Of Boromir
Gouache, Oil glaze and gold leaf
28cm x 19cm



Fall of Numenor
Gouache, Oil glaze and gold leaf
26cm x 18cm

Cirdan the Shipwright
Gouache, Oil glaze and gold leaf
36cm x 24cm



THE RIGHT DIRECTION

The Institute of Directors (IoD) has lots to offer directors aspiring to be the best and to make a real difference in their communities.

Here we hear from North East member David Clouston about his role and how completing the IoD's Accelerated Certificate in Company Direction benefited his career.

Tell us about your role today

I've been in the British Army for over 30 years and I'm currently working at the Royal College of Defence Studies.

Why did you join the IoD?

When I knew I was going to be appointed to a work-related Board level position, I decided to formalise my understanding of the legal and governance responsibilities that come with being a director. I needed guidance on how to effectively move away from a present day, operational mind set, to think more strategically and take a longer-term outlook. I also wanted a better understanding of the corporate balance between risk and opportunity.

My focus was first the professionalisation of what I call boardroom hard skills and then softer skills, such as the ability to get the most from people and galvanize them around a specific common task. Balancing these skills is crucial to an optimal functioning board where there needs to be diversity of thought and opinion.

The work I did with the IoD and my interaction with non-military directors broadened my scope and was the first indication of the specific value the IoD brought to this phase of my career.



David Clouston

Why did the Accelerated Certificate appeal to you?

I could have done this over four or five separate courses with four or five separate exams over a period of months (or even years I think), but it suited me much better to have a single attempt and it allowed me to take a much shorter period of time off work. For busy people it is a time effective way of doing the programme.

Ultimately, some aspects of the course had far greater resonance with me. For example, modules like Strategy and Leadership were quite familiar territory after a career in the military. The Finance module was my Achilles' heel so it was great to dig deeper into this. No one was trying to teach me how to become an accountant in two days - the goal was to equip me with enough understanding of Board level finance to ask the right questions and it did just that.

How has the Accelerated Certificate improved your practice?

One of the major takeaways from the IoD course is that at Board level it ceases to be about wanting to be proven right. That might satisfy

your ego but the real issue is about encouraging a fair and open debate and facilitating the discussion. Collective wisdom is invariably better than any individual wisdom when tasks become complicated or complex.

Before I went on the course, I would have followed the natural military tendency to agree a solution, then plan and deliver it. After completing the Accelerated Certificate I found myself trying to understand why people viewed things the way they did and to take a more considered and longer-term view.

The course exposed me to people at my level who were in totally different professions, of different backgrounds and cognitively diverse. I found it insightful not just to see how they thought differently from me but also why they thought the way they did - and how that insight could provide a different level of effectiveness where problem solving is concerned.

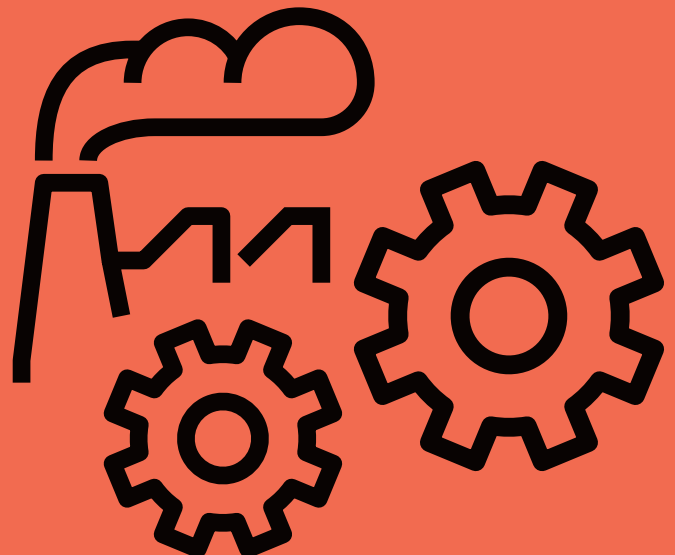
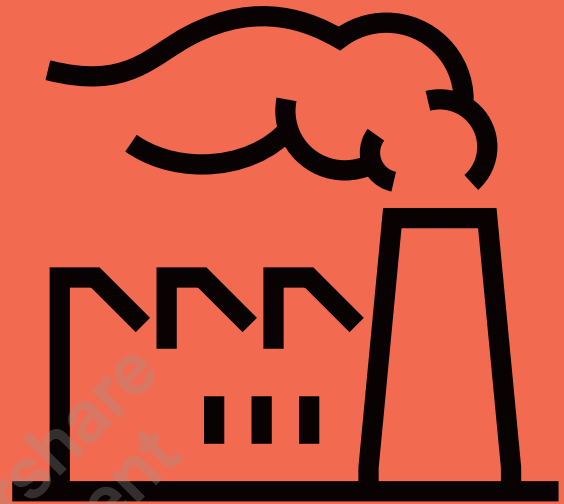
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life fully is what shapes
and fulfils us...**

”

ALLOWING WORK PRESSURES TO IMPACT ON FAMILY

Steve Black, also known as Blackie, is well known in the sporting world for his positive mind, fit body approach. More recently he has been using that knowledge to help businesses, individuals and community groups through his latest venture Protean Solutions.

Here he looks at how work pressure can impact on homelife, personal relationships and how to avoid 'crash and burn'.

"All too often the pressures at work spill into a person's family life. This happens in several ways – it can take up precious time that you should be spending with your family, or it can affect your mood, the closeness of your relationships, your physical health or your mental health.

"Not spending enough time with your family will cause strain and resentment; and the other drawbacks, of course, cause unhappiness all round. Whilst we all need to strive to be the best we can, we also need to maintain a life/work balance, and if it isn't possible short term while you deal with a large project or deadline, then some coping mechanisms to make sure work stays at work are needed.

"Here are five tips from me on getting through those tough periods whilst keeping your home and social life balanced.

"Start your day earlier: If it's a short-term challenge at work, then get up earlier. It is easy to squeeze a couple of quiet hours in at the desk/dining table whilst everyone else in the house is asleep. The beauty of this is that you can do it without showering and dressing, then just start your day at the normal time you would. These quiet hours can be very productive, as you are fresh, focused, uninterrupted. Two hours at this time of day, are often worth four later. This can cut down on working 'late' and keep some family or social life safe.

"Be strict on a finish time or a break time: make a pledge to turn off your laptop or stop meetings at a certain time even if it's later than normal, but still leaving time to do something non-work related prior to bed. There is also the option to break and return to work later, which works very well if you have young children or look after elderly parents. You can spend time with your family, cook tea, do homework, give the kids a bath, walk the dog, all the things you normally would do.... Then forfeit your TV time to dedicate to work. It gives you less rest personally but maintains the family status quo. It also helps attending social functions. I recommend driving and not having a drink, as it means you can do a couple of hours work before you hit the sack when you get in. Balance with compromise.

"Look after your health: firstly, if you are working harder and under stress then make sure you are eating healthily and staying hydrated. Without the right, regular food and lots of hydration your body and brain won't function at their best. Mistakes are easy made or exhaustion sets in sooner. It is also important to get fresh air – aim for one walk a day, even just 10 – 15 minutes. Work with a window open, and every now and then stretch from your desk and go to an outside door to breathe in the air. This keeps your brain alert and active, helps circulation and breaks up routine, much better for the human body. And if exercise is part of your normal day, do not let this slip. It releases endorphins and

is your form of happiness, so you will feel worse without it. Cut it down to 20 minutes sessions rather than cut it out if time is pressing, and rather than travel to a gym, set up an area at home or in the office.

"Make sure you minimise digital exposure in your down time: This should be common sense but one of the first things we do during down time is check into our social media channels to see what everyone else is up to. This is a source of anxiety, comparing your life to others. YouTube, Netflix and everything social takes you away from important people where you could be spending quality time. Unless of course, you watch a family film together!

"Use the mind box: this is my final tip and probably the one I get the most feedback on, in fact one female CEO said it had been a life saver for her. When you get to a point where you can finish work for the day, visualise everything you will do tomorrow, visualise anything that is bothering you, and visualise what you have achieved today. Then (in your head) put them into an imaginary box – it can be any type of box as long as it has a lock. Mine is a study wooden box with the word "tomorrow" engraved into it. Put everything in and shut that box tight, turning the key. Tell it when you will be back to open it and push it to one side. Every time a thought creeps into your mind during your personal time, keep a journal close by to write it in so you don't forget and then get back to your personal time. Trust me, after a few days if you give this a chance, you'll love the technique.

"These five tips are great for keeping balance and reducing stress, protecting any negative impact on your family and your social relationships. Most of them are best employed for a short-term work crisis. If your working hours and stress are long term, then you need a regular mentor and more support in the workplace.

"Always remember we do what we do to support the lives we want to have with people we love. We want to make positive impact, but work can be replaced and business will carry on. Family, friends, living life fully is what shapes and fulfils us. Don't waste important time!

"Stay safe and God Bless everyone. You know where I am if you need further tips!"

Blackie's portfolio is impressive, with big names including Kevin Keegan, Rob Andrew, Jonny Wilkinson, Jonathan Edwards and Glen McCrory endorsing the former Newcastle Falcons and British Lions rugby coach. He now works with companies including Cascade Cash Management, The John McEnroe Academy and Fairstone to name a few.

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



CHRISTMAS HAS ARRIVED AT KINGSTON PARK, MAKE YOUR FESTIVE SEASON ONE TO REMEMBER!

Here at Kingston Park, we're gearing up for Christmas 2021 and we have loads on offer for those looking to celebrate the festive season.

From shared party nights to our festive family breakfast, our guests can celebrate in style this year with events across December and into the New Year.

Festive shared band nights Saturday 4th December

Our festive shared band nights are perfect for people looking to dance the night away. Enjoy an evening of festive dining and fantastic entertainment from our live band – The Cosmics – as well as our resident DJ.

Festive shared party nights Friday 17th December

Our festive shared party nights are ideal for small businesses or those looking to mingle with others. Start your festive season the right way with the perfect combination of dining and dancing with music from our resident DJ.

Our Christmas menu...

Served at our shared evenings and private party nights.
 Slow roasted turkey paupiette with pigs in blankets, roasted root vegetables, roasted potatoes and roasting juices.
 Bitter chocolate tart served with orange blossom cream and candied fruits.
 Coffee and sweet mince pies.

Festive family breakfast Sunday 12th December

Join us for a day of festive fun and games, a disco, face painting and a special meet and greet with Santa and friends. We'll also be serving a delicious buffet breakfast with the choice of bacon, sausage, beans, scrambled eggs, hash brown and grilled tomato.

Private party nights

Enjoy the ultimate Christmas celebration at Kingston Park. Our private party package includes fizz on arrival, delicious festive dining, as well as music and a disco from our resident Christmas DJ.

Each party has its own dedicated events coordinator with bookings available from November 2021 – January 2022. Minimum booking for 50 people.



New Year's Eve 2021

See the New Year in style at Kingston Park. Enjoy our luxury five-course gourmet dinner specially crafted for you to enjoy as you welcome in 2022. Following dinner, you'll be able to countdown to midnight and enjoy our live band – The Shakedown – as well as music from our resident DJ.

You'll enjoy canapes on arrival followed by elderflower gin cured salmon served with a pickled fennel & pink grapefruit salad with a sherry vinaigrette. This will be followed by a main of roast beef fillet, fondant potato, seasonal root vegetables, sautéed wild mushrooms and a red wine sauce. Finally, the meal will be finished off with a trio of mini desserts followed by farmhouse cheeses and accompaniments.

Burns Supper 2022

The fun doesn't stop after New Year, we'll be hosting our annual Burns Supper on Friday 21st January 2022. Join us for a delicious four course meal of cock-a-leekie soup, haggis, neeps and tatties, pan-roasted chicken breast served with a scotch whiskey and forest mushroom sauce accompanied by fondant potato and roasted root vegetables and finally for dessert, a raspberry cranachan trifle.

The evening will also include an address to the haggis as written by Robbie Burns.

For more information about the festive season at Kingston Park, please contact our dedicated events team on 0191 214 5588 or email events@newcastle-falcons.co.uk. Terms and conditions apply.

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CAMPAIGN CRACKERS: FIVE OF THE BEST FROM 2021

It's hard to believe another year has passed but as Christmas approaches it's always a good time to reflect on what's been and gone.

Here Astute.Work founder and PR and management consultant Sarah Waddington CBE picks out her favourite five PR and marketing campaigns from the last twelve months.

1. Weetabix x Heinz

Inter-brand chit chat on social media is always popular, but Weetabix served the ultimate mic drop back in February when it tweeted an alternative breakfast of its famous wheat biscuits topped with Heinz beans. The response was brilliantly swift and brutal, with Ofcom labelling it 'deeply offensive', Tinder stating this was a 'not a match' and the NHS saying the tweet should have 'come with a health warning'. A superb example of how two of the nation's favourites employed humour and controversy to take them viral.

2. Pop to your local

We all know how badly some industries have been hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, with one of the worst being hospitality. Come April then, it was a breath of fresh air to see one of the UK's leading supermarkets Tesco gently encouraging people in England to support their local pub (as long as they felt safe to do so), with the usual strapline of #EveryLittleHelps. What works here was the unexpectedness of the campaign which was easy to identify as Tesco's and showed a real spirit of generosity after a challenging time for the sector. After all, it's not often you see a brand spending advertising money on a competitor.

3. Altogether Different

In July, the government opened a consultation into a potential change of ownership of Channel 4, looking also at its remit. Backed by strong opposition to the privatisation plans, the broadcaster responded in its usual distinctive way with the launch of Altogether Different, a campaign celebrating its role as the 'destination for diverse, alternative British content'. Underlining



Sarah Waddington CBE

its differences to other channels and reminding us of its approach to inclusivity, this was a typically bold and brave move from the programmer which will hopefully pay off.

4. #DontBeThatGuy

Violence against women has been top of the media agenda since the killing of Sarah Everard, with anger and frustration expressed up and down the country about women being told how to stay safe rather than a focus on male perpetrators. It was therefore no surprise that a #DontBeThatGuy video by Police Scotland designed to educate men about their attitudes and behaviours proved an immediate hit. At the time of writing, the video has had 54.5k likes and 32.4k shares on Twitter and has rightly received praise from politicians, the public and activists alike. Find it and share it.

5. Bounty Return Scheme

Last but not least, kudos to the agency behind the latest campaign for Mars Celebrations, which recently announced a Christmas 'Bounty Return Scheme' for Bounty haters, promoted by a heartstring-tugging video called #TheLonelyBounty. Launching on 17 January 2022, the tongue-in-cheek scheme is rolling out in Glasgow, London and Manchester and allows 'Bounty boycotters' to swap them for Malteser Teasers. A brilliantly creative approach based on intelligence about the nation's favourite chocolates which has created real cut through at one of the most competitive times of the year.

www.Astute.Work.



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Contact Sarah Waddington - sarah@astute.work / 07702162704
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TRULY AMAZEBALLS

Saturday 20th November was the date and The Grand Hotel Gosforth was the venue.

Sponsored by Mark Beverley from Sage Wealth Management, this was the first Ball since November 2019 hosted by Danny Mitchell (Founder of Change Fundraising Ltd).

273 guests came to be part of this Ball which had a different theme for each table in the room which had been painstakingly created by Jane Morland (Owner of Margaret Rose Events).

Entertainment included a Live Band (Kathryn Lowdon and the Should Engineers), a giant scalextric game, a giant operation game, a giant buzz wire game, a casino and a Batak Reaction tester game.

Guests also had the opportunity of taking part in a charity raffle and auction which was in aid of the Charlie Gard Foundation, which raised approx £9000.

Planning for 2022 is already underway, so reserve YOUR table now!







L-R: Peter Rutherford, Denise Graham and David Hughes



A CHANCE TO SIT AND THINK

As we come to the close of the year, we at Rutherford Hughes would like to wish all readers a very happy festive season and a healthy and peaceful 2022!

Looking back at 2021, we have continued to suffer under the Chinese curse, "may you live in interesting times." Frankly, I do not see that changing any time soon.

This year has been another profitable one for our client investors, building upon outstanding years of 2019 and 2020. Hopefully, 2022 will be positive too.

The end of a year and the beginning of the next is an ideal time to review your circumstances and to have a spring clean of your finances. Below is a checklist of the sort of things we would suggest you review.

Wills and powers of attorney need to be in place and reviewed from time to time to ensure they match your needs and intentions. Effectively, no-one dies without a will as the State provides for a standard distribution of assets, whether or not that would have suited the deceased.

If applicable, this would be a good opportunity to review your Inheritance Tax position. We regularly work with solicitors and accountants to reduce the IHT bills for their clients and there are many routes that can be followed.

Next, think about your assets and liabilities. Would you be leaving loved ones with liabilities if a turkey bone catches in your throat? Do you need life insurance or is there sufficient in place already?

I know that this is not cheerful but what if you suffer an illness or accident that prevents you from working. Where will your income come from, and will it be sufficient? Remember the State only provides a basic safety net and does not consider the lifestyle you may have previously enjoyed.

Income protection and critical illness cover could make all the difference to you and the family in such circumstances. We have personal experience within this firm of how important this is.

Review your cash balances. Do you have enough cash available to cover an emergency and planned expenditure? If not, try and save a little more each month. If you have more than enough, take some independent financial advice on what you could be doing with the surplus. We certainly give a free initial conversation, as do many other advisers. Do ensure that the adviser is independent and not tied to one company. That is your best way of avoiding heavily charged underperforming products with exit penalties.

It is also a good idea to plan for retirement. Think about what you need to have in retirement for the lifestyle you want. Review what you have in your pension already. Is it going to be enough? Do you need to invest more into it? If so, can you save more now or are you prepared to work for longer?

Next, protect your house. You may have heard of the Luton man who had his house and possessions stolen in a fraud. He was working away and returned to find that someone had bought his property without his knowledge. They were in the middle of renovating it and had disposed of his furniture etc. You can protect yourself by going onto the Land Registry website and registering for notifications if anyone should carry out searches on your property. It is free and takes about five minutes to set up.

All the above are matters that we should ensure are taken care of, and most need to be reviewed from time to time as circumstances change. Do not worry about them, just get them done. Then relax, enjoy the festivities, and move into 2022 with optimism and positivity.

All the very best.

If you would like more information, or would like to discuss your own position, then please do not hesitate to contact me or my colleagues, David Hughes and Denise Graham. Peter Rutherford is a director at Rutherford Hughes Ltd. He can be contacted on 0191 229 9600 or peter.rutherford@rutherfordhughes.com www.rutherfordhughes.com

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**...I am happy to be as
invested in being part
of this team as the
company is in me...**

”

LUKE ROBERTS – CASCADE'S ASPIRING SHARIA EXPERT

27 year old Luke Roberts who joined Cascade Cash Management (Cascade) four years ago and worked for the company whilst he studied at the same time is now poised as an aspiring expert in a niche area that could change the way many people save.

Having completed his Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree at Northumbria University 18 months ago, Luke made the decision to build a career at Cascade and more specifically jumped at the chance to establish the platform's Partner Relationship services saying he had 'caught the bug' and recognised the exciting journey that he would go through with the company which is poised for rapid and specialist growth.

Cascade Cash Management is an independent and transparent service created to make savings simple. The unique online platform generates enhanced cash returns and most attractively, includes every single bank and building society providing clients with the maximum protection they can obtain on deposits under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme through spreading cash across multiple banking licences via professional cash management.

The Cascade team of eleven administer cash savings on behalf of clients and depositors, who can also use the portal to see their accounts listed conveniently in one place, have peace of mind that accounts are opened directly in their name alone. Partners including IFA's, solicitors, attorneys, accountants and many more can also self-brand the product for presentation to their own clients.

And now Luke, who has worked his way up to partner support specialist, is undertaking a specialist course via the Chartered Institute for Securities and Investment (CISI) to ensure that the Cascade team can offer specialist advice on Sharia banking and compliance.

Luke, who got engaged prior to lockdown and has recently booked his wedding for September 2023, said: "There is a huge opportunity for anyone using the Cascade portal and service to benefit from Sharia compliant and ethical savings returns, by depositing their cash into banks that adhere to Islamic principles. Open to all regardless of religion or culture, they offer the same level of depositor protection, but Sharia compliant banks do not pay interest and instead pay a share of the bank's profit on lending activity that's generated from the savings deposits.

"Because of this, although returns are not guaranteed, they continue to perform well and so regularly appear towards the top of our rates listings. We regularly check with Sharia complaint providers to ensure they have met the listed profit rates and we receive regular confirmation, as well as some providers exceeding the profit rate set. As this is a growing area, we decided that rather than just having a strong understanding of how it works, it would be helpful for advisers and clients for us to have an in-house expert to lead our team and advise our clients. I am delighted to be given this opportunity and I'm aiming to complete my training and exams in January, ahead of schedule."

Luke has also, along with colleagues Georgia Boddy and Anthony Tunmore, been enrolled by CEO and Co-founder of Cascade Dr Emma Black, onto the Vistage Emerging Leaders cohort to start in the New Year.

Dr Emma Black, who runs the team which is centralised in the North East but covers the UK nationally, with bases in the Midlands and Cambridgeshire, said: "It is important to us that we foster the right environment for ideas to flow freely. To make sure we keep innovating and generating great ideas, we feel it is important to invest in our people and their desired learning. Luke joined us whilst he was a student, and we are delighted he completed his studies so successfully achieving a 2:1. We were thrilled that Luke stayed with us as he's a wonderful person and a great team player too.

"Luke's recent choice to study with the CISI to build our Sharia expertise will add real value for the advisers that we support and their clients. It is still an area that many people know little about and this can sometimes lead to uncertainty so having an expert on hand to answer any queries is key.

"I'm delighted that Luke has decided to enrol into the Vistage Emerging Leaders programme. I think the programme will help build his knowledge and toolbox to allow him to unlock more of his great potential."

Cascade has won a number of awards across 2021 including the Most Innovative Fintech in the UK. Luke, who holds a NUFC season ticket and plays American Football for the Gateshead Senators, concluded: "Cascade has changed dramatically in the four years since I have joined with a new board and a growing momentum – the offerings, the service and the drive to have purpose are all really exciting, and the company is going to go far as the awards this year testify.

"I am happy to be as invested in being part of this team as the company is in me and hope to progress to a long and fulfilling career as an expert who wants to lead change within the business. With a new house and a wedding booked, as well as a promising future career with Cascade, life is looking great!"

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



CO-FOUNDER OF NEW CHALLENGER BANK CELEBRATES LICENSE

One of the co-founders of the UK's newest challenger bank, Dr Emma Black, talks to Northern Insight about the journey to launch a financial institution which is focussed on one thing: Getting Britain Building again.

Dr Emma Black, alongside her co-founders Stephen Black and Stephen Lancaster, was instrumental in bringing the new exciting concept of a new bank focussed on supporting property developers in the region to the market. In October 2021, GB Bank received its banking license and is now building towards a 2022 launch. Emma, who is also Co-Founder and CEO of Cascade Cash Management, said: "This is really an exciting time for the team behind GB Bank who have worked tirelessly over the past four years to bring a regional bank to market. We are so proud that the bank has grown from the North East with a clear purpose to improve our customers lives when they bank with us. It's a moment in history, for the region and for the financial sector, that we are delighted to celebrate and announce!

"Our journey towards GB Bank started over a decade ago. During that time, we gained insight and experience into the pains and frustrations for so many incredible property development teams with the existing banking landscape. We identified the need for a bank focussed on regional credit, with a greater aim to do good, helping a whole host of people and SME businesses across the country.



Dr Emma Black

"GB Bank aims to lend £3 billion responsibly over five years, building a £1 billion plus balance sheet. This will enable the creation of almost 20,000 new homes and several million square feet of office space too that will support the creation of over 100,000 jobs.

"We'll make this happen through operating with a powerful combination of entrepreneurs and experienced banking professionals who bring with them experience from Barclays Bank, HBOS, Santander, Lloyds Banking group, and Aldermore. We are also thrilled that Paul Rippon resides as our Chairman, a role in which he shares his superb skillset of banking and entrepreneurial experience having co-founded two banks, most notably Monzo.

"The team are committed to capitalising on the opportunity as a specialist lender and all are committed to making a real positive impact in Britain's communities. Of course, none of this could have happened without the support of our investors, large and small, and we are all so grateful and thankful for their support in making GB Bank a reality.

"Their funding has allowed GB Bank to build a technology ecosystem that is intuitive to the bank's needs leveraging today's best in class cloud technology, allowing for the team to customize workflow and drive efficiency – simply the best combination of Fintech with customer-obsessed people. That's what makes GB Bank and of course, my own company Cascade Cash Management, so different.

"When we founded GBB we were fuelled by a desire to make a difference. We wanted for our customers lives to be improved when they banked with us; we pictured a bank working at the heart of the community, together with its savers and borrowers to bring towns, cities and regions across Britain back to life. We must thank all those past and present who have helped and supported the bank in reaching this incredible milestone. We can't wait to see our vision come to life, truly making a difference in the decades and centuries ahead serving as a catalyst for creating new jobs, homes, offices and so much more."

For more information please visit
www.cascade.co.uk and www.gbbank.co.uk



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HANSEN PARTNERSHIP GOING FOR FURTHER GROWTH AFTER ACQUISITION BY US TECH FIRM NAVINT



Steve Crosby (centre), managing director at the Hansen Partnership, with (left) Michael Cantwell and Stephen Slater of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors

A Northumberland digital lead-to-revenue firm is going for further growth after being acquired by a market-leading US technology consultancy.

The Hexham-headquartered Hansen Partnership has been bought by Navint, an advisory and technology services firm that enables enterprise organisations to drive growth and operational efficiency throughout the lead-to-revenue (LTR) lifecycle.

Founded by entrepreneur Steve Crosby just two and a half years ago, the Hansen Partnership has grown to now employ a 50-strong team and has also established a training academy in India to help identify and train emerging talent in Asian markets.

Stephen Slater of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has worked with the Hansen management team on their growth strategy since the inception of the business, while Michael Cantwell and RMT's corporate finance team provided additional advice during the sale process.

The Hansen Partnership helps organisations maximise returns on their investments in solutions on the cloud-based CRM software platform

Salesforce, and already works with a range of globally-renowned organisations, including Jacobs Douwe Egberts, Deutsche Bank and the World Economic Forum.

Steve Crosby, managing director at the Hansen Partnership, says: "Our focus from the outset has been on the delivery of the services that our clients need to succeed, rather than on sales themselves, and we've grown quickly as a result.

"We found there was a significant crossover in our respective capabilities when we carried out some joint projects with Navint and it seemed like a natural step to bring our two organisations together.

"Navint is the ideal partner to augment our capabilities and global reach, and we're thrilled to join this talented and fast-growing team as we extend our combined operations across North America and the EMEA region.

"Our customers have recognised the benefits that this extra scale and access to resources can bring

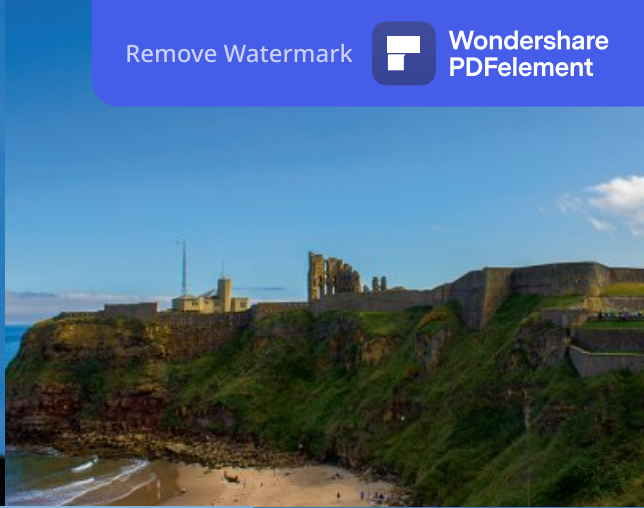
to the work we do for them, and with the drive towards digital transformation only becoming stronger in our target markets, we believe we can continue to achieve significant growth figures under our new ownership.

"RMT has been part of our team from the very beginning and the expert advisory support that they have consistently provided from day one through to the completion of what was quite a complex deal has been central to our success."

Stephen Slater, director of commercial services at RMT Accountants, adds: "Steve and his team have achieved some amazing results in a very short period of time and thoroughly deserve the success they've enjoyed.

"The business is now well set to achieve even more and we're very pleased to have played our part in laying the foundations for its continuing development."

www.r-m-t.co.uk



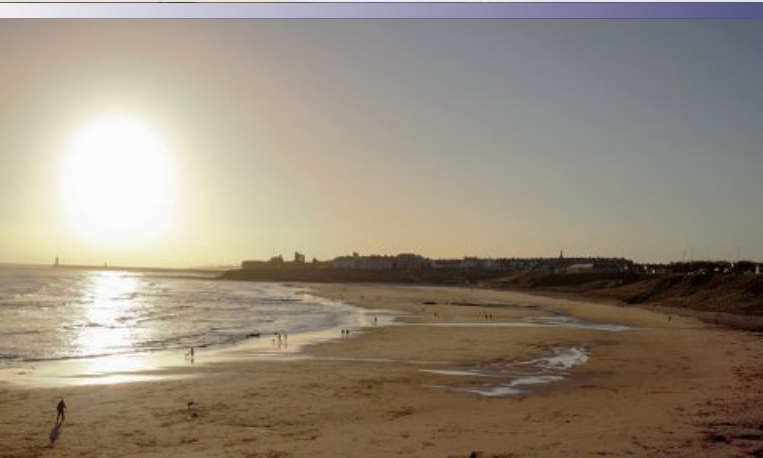
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LUXURY BRAND E-COMMERCE AGENCY SET FOR GROWTH AFTER JOINING IDHL

North East e-commerce agency Fostr has been acquired by leading digital agency group, IDHL.

Creating high-quality buying experiences, Fostr has built an enviable reputation designing and building e-commerce sites on the Shopify Plus platform for some of the biggest and fastest-growing global luxury, fashion and beauty brands. These include Gymshark, Victoria Beckham and Beach House Group ("Moon" with Kendall Jenner, Millie Bobby Brown's "Florence by Mills" and "Pattern Beauty" by Tracee Ellis Ross), many of which are based internationally. Newcastle-upon-Tyne-based Fostr, which was founded by Director Ryan Foster in 2009, is set to benefit from IDHL's acquisitive growth strategy, with the ability to leverage a proprietary platform and operational infrastructure that supports its growth ambitions.

Ryan Foster, founder of Fostr, said: "IDHL is one of the fastest-growing digital marketing groups in the UK, which will provide Fostr with a springboard to further growth and the ability to offer our existing customer base a broader suite of services.

"I am exceptionally proud of the progress we have made as a business over the past decade, which is testament to the talent of our team and the support of our excellent clients. We are looking forward to the next stage of our journey with IDHL."

ALPHAGRAPHS TO EXPAND FOLLOWING NPIF - FW CAPITAL INVESTMENT

Award-winning print specialist AlphaGraphics has received a loan through NPIF - FW Capital Debt Finance, managed by FW Capital and part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund (NPIF).

Stockton-on-Tees-based based AGNE Ltd, trading as AlphaGraphics, is a cross media marketing specialist business with three locations across the North of England. Founded as a traditional printing business in 1993, it currently employs 69 staff and two directors, with a turnover of more than £7.5m.

Clients include NHS England, Durham University, The Premier League and Arriva Group. AlphaGraphics successfully pivoted during the Covid-19 pandemic to launch a new service offering tailored social distancing signs for commercial and corporate clients.

Now the company is expanding further following the acquisition of one of its key clients, Class Fundraising Ltd, a company which raises funds for schools by providing products personalised with the children's own designs. The NPIF investment will provide additional working capital to allow for



growth following the completion of the purchase of Class Fundraising and has safeguarded six jobs and led to the creation of a further two roles.

The deal was facilitated by FW Capital Investment Executive Andy Castle, following an introduction by Graham Cornforth, of Azets.

CRAMLINGTON ENGINEERS AIMING TO BUILD ON STRONG START WITH NEL INVESTMENT BACKING

A new Northumberland engineering business is aiming to build on a strong start with the

backing of a five-figure investment from the North East.

Small Loan Fund Supported by The European Regional Development Fund.

Advanced Composites Engineering was formed at the start of the year by a team of experienced engineers who had previously worked together at another regional firm that was moving out of the sector.

The team managed to retain almost all of their former clients, including businesses in China, the US and Italy, as well as across the UK.

The Cramlington-based firm has worked with regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers to secure the £95,000 Small Loan Fund investment, which will allow it to secure the additional supplies of raw material it needs to service more and bigger clients, most especially across its home region.

Don Robinson, director at Advanced Composites Engineering, says: "Being able to retain the great majority of the customers that we previously worked with says a great deal about the team's reputation and the quality of service that we've always looked to provide..



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NATIONAL MINIMUM WAGE - IS IT TIME TO CHECK YOUR DEDUCTIONS?



After a hiatus of three years, the Government has recently resumed their practice of naming those employers who have fallen foul of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) rules.

The last published list indicated that 191 employers had underpaid 34,000 workers a total of £2.1 million between 2011 and 2018, at an average of just over £60 per worker.

The total penalties levied by HMRC were £3.2 million, indicating that the punishment can be worse than the offence.

Analysis of the issues involved in any NMW underpayments were as follows:

- 47% wrongly deducted pay from workers' wages, including for uniform and expenses;
- 30% failed to pay workers for all the time they had worked, such as when they worked overtime; and
- 19% paid the incorrect apprenticeship rate.

It is clear that a lot of employers have difficulties with some of the more technical points around NMW, as the analysis above suggests that most errors are either inadvertent or simply careless.

What is the background?

The NMW legislation was introduced in 1999 and at its simplest is calculated with reference to the number of hours an employee works multiplied by a minimum hourly wage based on age and employment level, which that employee can expect to be paid, taking into account any deductions which reduce the hourly rate of pay. HMRC has invested heavily in its NMW investigation teams and is very active in reviewing employers to ensure that they have paid the right rate for their employees. They have the power to levy penalties of up to 200% of the unpaid salary and can publicise any employers who have not paid the correct amounts.

What is the issue?

The NMW legislation is not simple for employers to operate, especially in relation to deductions from wages where errors occur most often.

Employers find the following points the most difficult to deal with in respect of deductions from employee wages in connection with a potential underpayment of NMW:

- Deductions connected with job expenses (e.g. uniforms and expenses such as tools);
- Deductions for an employer's own use or benefit (e.g. Christmas club savings schemes, in-house canteens);
- Reductions in the hourly rate following the introduction of salary sacrifice schemes;
- Work related deductions (such as administration costs on attachment of earnings); and
- Deductions for the provision of accommodation in lieu of salary (where the statutory offset amount is not used).

All the above deductions from wages can lead to a potential underpayment of NMW resulting in possible penalties and being publicly named.

What do Employers need to consider?

As NMW is calculated with reference to each pay period (weekly, fortnightly, or monthly), employers are responsible for checking that they pay the correct NMW on a regular basis. If they have calculated the level of working time correctly, employers should review the deductions they make from an employee's pay, either from a reduction via payroll, or from asking them to pay for items to be reimbursed. Employers should then

consider whether the level of hourly paid salary is above the NMW limits for each employee.

Where any employees have been any underpaid for any pay period, employers should be able to "self-correct" by making good the underpayment which should result in no further action from HMRC in the form of penalties or being publicly named.

How can UNW Help?

UNW's specialists can undertake a full NMW review to establish whether an employer has paid the correct amount of NMW to their workers. We take the following into account when we undertake our review:

- the size of your workforce;
- the type of work your workers carry out;
- the number of workers who may not have been paid at least the correct rate of NMW;
- changes to the NMW rates; and
- changes in the contracted hours or pay rates of your workers.

If you need to self-correct, we can:

- work out the amount of the original underpayment in the pay reference period;
- divide that amount by the NMW rate which applied at the time of the underpayment; and
- multiply that figure by the current NMW rate.

If you would like more information about this, or any other employment tax related matters, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Lee Muter, UNW Employment Taxes Partner at leemuter@unw.co.uk

NORTH EAST FUND BACKS COUNTY DURHAM DEVELOPER WITH £4.2M FUNDING

TOC Property Backed Lending Trust PLC (PBLT) is supporting a major new housing scheme in County Durham that will create 145 new homes.

PBLT, which is managed by Newcastle-upon-Tyne-based wealth management and property lending specialists, Tier One Capital, is providing a £4.2m debt facility to Kenley Homes, which is delivering the £35m scheme on the western outskirts of Bishop Auckland.

Located in Etherley Dene, the 23.4-acre site,

which is to the north west of the village, will feature a mix of two-to-five-bedroom homes.

Planning for the development has been secured and construction has begun on the site with the development due to be completed in stages across the next four to five years.

The scheme will be the first development delivered by Kenley Homes, which has an experienced management team with a strong track record in the residential property sector.

Brendan O'Grady, Fund Manager at Tier One Capital, said: "We're pleased for PBLT to be supporting a new entrant to the housebuilding sector and the delivery of much-needed high quality housing in County Durham as part of the strategy to provide PBLT's shareholders with investment opportunities that enhance communities and economies in the North East and Scotland."



BUSINESS DURHAM INVESTMENT SUPPORTS SUCCESSFUL RE-OPENING OF HOTEL INDIGO

Global boutique hotel chain, IHG Hotel Indigo successfully reopened its prestigious £15million hotel and restaurant in Durham City over the summer with help from Business Durham the Business Support Service for Durham County Council.

Hotel Indigo's 4-star boutique hotel is set within the iconic Grade II listed Shire Hall, which originally opened in 1818 after undergoing a major £15 million refurbishment. The conversion of the listed building into a hotel provided a high-quality addition to the visitor offer in Durham City, and it was developed sensitively to preserve the listed features and the importance of this historic building to the city.

The hotel is a key destination in Durham City and is an important business and leisure asset for the city. Affected by long periods of closure during the Covid-19 pandemic, Hotel Indigo secured a £250,000 business loan from the Finance Durham Fund to overcome trading issues and safeguard its future.

Tom Orange, General Manager at Hotel Indigo said: "The funding from Finance Durham allowed us to maintain and protect our Hotel during the hard closure, it allowed us to have a core team on site ensuring that day to day checks were carried out."

SPECIALIST UK INDUSTRIAL PIPE PROVIDER EPCO JOINS NETHERLANDS-BASED MEGAGROUP TO ACCELERATE GROWTH

RG Corporate Finance has successfully advised the shareholders of West Yorkshire-based epco Limited ("epco") on the disposal of the business to Nimbus backed Mega Group Trade Holding B.V. (Mega Group).

Founded in 1994, epco is a leading provider of thermoplastic pipe systems to customers across the UK, servicing a range of commercial sectors.

The transaction means that the specialist industrial products supplier will be able to increase

the pace of its growth. It will also ensure that MegaGroup can further improve its UK market position, utilising epco's product range and distribution capabilities to serve customers in its core sectors, including but not limited to industrial resellers, installers and providers of piping systems in the fish farming aquaculture industry.

MegaGroup is a water solutions specialist operating across seven European countries and employing more than 200 people. The group is supported by European private equity house, Nimbus.

Chris Knowles, Managing Director of epco, said: "Joining the MegaGroup family of companies is excellent news, not only for us as a business, but also for our customers. Now being part of an organisation at the forefront of modern sales technology will accelerate epco's business ambitions and those of our employees."



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2021 – A RECORD YEAR FOR M&A

2021 has undoubtedly been one of the busiest years ever in the corporate finance market, with transaction activity and transaction pricing being at historical highs. And while the sale of Newcastle United received the most media attention, Mike Ashley's deal would unfortunately not quite have made it into the Champions' League spots this year – being pipped by larger deals for True Potential, END Clothing, Fairstone and Tombola.

Activity continued to be fuelled by a large pent-up demand among private equity funds, where large fund raises prior to COVID-19 combined with a reduction in strong investment opportunities during the pandemic has created exceptionally strong competition for quality companies seeking investment. The private equity funds have now also been joined by large corporates where a subdued investment activity during 2020 has created strong balance sheet liquidity for use in acquisitions.

Adding to this perfect storm, private equity funds have also taken the benefit of the strong pricing in the market, with a number of private equity exits adding to the overall deal volume. In the North East, LDC exited their investment in Mandata to Tenzing, and Cavu advised BGF on the sale of their investment in J&B Recycling. The spectre of an adverse change in the capital

gains tax regime – first mooted for the 2020 budget – has also contributed to deal flow, as entrepreneurs look to benefit from the comparably lower tax on business disposals. While this change has yet to come into effect, it likely remains on the political agenda for upcoming budgets, and should form part of any business owner's forward planning.

Cross-border transactions also made a strong return in 2021. Cavu have advised on two sales to overseas buyers this year, and we expect the UK to continue being an attractive domestic market for both UK and overseas corporates and private equity purchasers from USA, ASIAPAC, and Europe.

At Cavu, 2021 has been busy with £14m investment in Bloom Procurement, £10m investment in Bazaar Group, the sale of J&B Recycling to Spanish buyer Urbaser, the sale of Wheelbase to FTSE100 JD Sports plc and

several other deals that have not yet been disclosed. Our expectation is that the strong market conditions will continue into 2022, and anticipate that demand and pricing will remain at a historic high for the next 12 months before seeing a return to normal.

Beyond 2022, market conditions are more difficult to predict but at some point we will reach the top of this M&A cycle and both deal volumes and valuations will at that stage plateau or decline. This makes 2022 the perfect time for entrepreneurs and business owners to consider their options and opportunities, and the Cavu team would be delighted to meet to discuss your plans and aspirations and how M&A or private equity can help you achieve your goals.

www.cavucf.com

DIVORCING COUPLES - WHAT TO DO NEXT?

At Innovate Mortgages and Loans, we receive a large proportion of our enquiries from third party introducer referrals.

One area where we can help solicitor partners is for clients who are seeking a divorce. We would be interested in talking to any solicitors where we can strike up an ongoing business partnership.

It's obvious that getting divorced can be a stressful time, and what to do with the existing marital property and the outstanding mortgage, especially if children are involved, can be tricky. Independent mortgage advice ensures that all potential avenues are explored with the principle options usually as follows;

Option 1 - One party retains the property

One partner buys out the other person's share - to do this, we need to be able to satisfy a lender's affordability calculator to prove that it is affordable by one party, both the existing mortgage and any new borrowing to buy out the other party. This also frees up the other partner to buy a new property (with the same assumptions regarding affordability as above).

Option 2 - Sell the property

This is sometimes the best option as both parties start afresh. If children are involved it may however cause further disruption.

Option 3 - One partner remains in the property and another pays the mortgage

This is usually agreed as part of any divorce settlement. For the partner agreeing to continue paying the costs, they should be aware the impact that this may have on their ability to borrow again to purchase a new property for themselves.



Paul Hardingham, Director of Innovate Mortgages and Loans

Option 4 - Continue with no change

There are some occasions, for example, children shortly leaving home or not long remaining on a fixed rate before redemption penalties expire, where it may make sense to keep the status quo for a period of time. This may only work in an amicable situation!

Whatever the decision, assuming the original mortgage was in joint names, then both parties remain liable for the mortgage payments. Non-payment can result in an impact on someone's credit file – they are not excused from the commitment even if they have moved out and no longer live there.

As always lenders have differing policies on how much they will lend divorcing couples, so don't

despair if your Bank or Building Society says no, there could be a solution elsewhere in the market.

If you would like to see what our clients have to say about us we have in excess of 250 Google 5* reviews on-line and on our website from satisfied clients.

www.innovatempl.co.uk

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 2843723.

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



Jonathan Scott

WHAT DOES THE AUTUMN BUDGET MEAN FOR TAX INCENTIVES AND RELIEFS?

Jonathan Scott, Tax Partner at Haines Watts discusses what the Autumn Budget will mean for tax relief in the months to come.

The Autumn Budget set out the Chancellor's plans for an economy which is "fit for a new age", tackling everything from unemployment and NHS funding, to levelling up the UK.

When it comes to economic recovery, innovating is going to be key, so it's great to see the Government investing in initiatives to drive business forward and promote inward investment.

The Budget also included some key changes to tax incentives and reliefs, which your business needs to be aware of if you are claiming tax relief.

Research and Development

After years of consideration, the research and development tax relief scheme has finally been extended to include cloud computing and data costs as of 1 April 2023. This is a huge step in the right direction when it comes to modernising the scheme and will have a huge impact on businesses who are more digitally-focused or data-driven, such as gaming companies and financial services, by allowing them to make the most of the invaluable relief.

It's worth noting that on the same date the Government will be implementing new rules to the R&D tax relief schemes to exclude costs incurred on overseas R&D activities from the scope of relief. If you are claiming relief for international R&D expenditure, now is the time to start having conversations with your advisors to ensure you're

planning ahead not caught out going forward.

On top of the costs of research and development tax relief, the Chancellor also announced a £20bn commitment to UK-based R&D per year, through multiple funds and loans. If your business is considering applying for funding, you'll need to keep in mind that it could have an impact on your ability to claim tax relief. If you're unsure on where you stand, it's always a safe bet to consult a professional on the matter.

Capital Allowances

It's also great to see that the temporary £1m cap on annual investment allowance has been extended until March 2023. This will be hugely beneficial for companies like manufacturers who are investing in plant and machinery, by offering them 100% relief for qualifying costs.

This will sit hand in hand with the Capital Allowance Super Deduction, which allows businesses to create tax savings of 25p for every £1 spent on new assets to keep within the company.

It's important to take careful consideration when it comes to deciding which Capital Allowances will provide the best relief for you and your business, and the best available option might not always be obvious. To make sure you're maximising the value of your claim, we'd always recommend speaking to an advisor who specialises in tax relief.

Creative Industries Tax Relief

Cultural organisations have faced the brunt of the pandemic. Being forced to shut their doors for the best part of a year and then having to limit capacity because of social distancing restrictions, has had an inevitably major impact on cashflow for many.

With this in mind, it's great to see that the Chancellor has further invested in the Creative Industries Tax Reliefs. Museums and Galleries Exhibitions Tax Relief (MGETR) has been extended for a further two years until 31 March 2024, and the rates of MGETR; Theatre Tax Relief; Orchestra Tax Relief and Theatre Tax Relief have all been temporarily doubled from now until 31 March 2023.

The rates of relief will then start to reduce from 2023, and back to their former rates on 1 April 2024. So if your organisation is considering claiming, now is the time to do so, to ensure you're making the most out of the relief.

Unlocking trapped cash in your business

Whether it's helping you to make the most of the Annual Investment Allowance or Creative Industries Tax Reliefs; assessing your position when it comes to the new avenues of funding and R&D tax relief, or even helping you to submit your tax relief claim, our tax incentives and reliefs specialists are on hand to help.

www.hwca.com



DON'T WORRY. IT'S CHRISTMAS!

It's Christmas time. Again. Yes, Christmases do seem to come around quicker each year. And yes, we're all another year older. But don't worry. It's Christmas! Even though the rest of the world seems to want us to...

I read an article a week or two ago. It was entitled (something like), 'Should We Be Worried About Toilet Waste Falling On Us From Aeroplanes?' Before the article then rattled on for a few hundred words about the probability of such a thing actually happening.

I thought about rewriting the article myself. As follows:

'Should We Be Worried About Toilet Waste Falling On Us From Aeroplanes?' 'No'.

But I guess a one word article isn't really an article at all now, is it? Hmmm.

Worry is real. Worry can be defined as something that we feel anxious or troubled about relating to an actual (real) or potential (not currently real) problem or occurrence.

And as I now look closer at the subject of worrying, here are a couple of things to worry about – I mean think about – on the subject of worry.

1. With regards to any occurrence we ever worry about, whether that occurrence is actual (real) or potential (not currently real), no actual outcome is ever changed – in any way whatsoever – by our worrying about it.
2. Around 90% of the things we worry about never ever happen.

So there we go. Two reasons not to worry. First because the act of worrying has zero effect – on anything. Apart perhaps from stealing your energy and making you unhappy. And second because almost everything you or I worry about never actually comes to fruition.

But even if we do think about these two things being true. Even if we internalise them so that we 'know' them to be true. Most of us will still worry. Even a little bit. But why?

The Worry Umbrella.

Worry can actually have a purpose. Worry can help prepare us emotionally for negative outcomes. I do get that.

I also get that we can now explore whether this apparently negative perspective is healthy or unhealthy. And we can even ponder, as someone suggested to me just a few days ago, whether all worrying is like walking around in the sunshine with an umbrella up, waiting for it to rain.

I get all that. When I think of all that I can almost feel the pendulum of my thoughts swinging back and forth between acknowledging the pseudo-sense of preparing myself for something bad, and the non-sense of expending energy and sacrificing happiness fantasising about something that is hugely unlikely to actually occur.

So what should we do? Should we try to worry less? And if so – how?

How To Worry Less.

Nothing that anybody could ever write in answer to the conundrum, 'How to worry less' would ever be complete or relevant to all. But as I have read lots of suggestions, here are the three things that stayed with me most vividly on the subject.

1. Just Start. Worry can lead to paralysis. It can lead to you procrastinating aspects of, or avoiding altogether, the thing you're worried about. And the reasons I think that 'just start' is good advice is because the worst thing you think will happen probably won't. And even if it does – you'll have learned something.

2. Say it Out Loud. Takes a bit of bravery this. Talking to someone. But you know what, just by saying what you are worried about – storytelling the scenario you fear the most out loud – you are very likely to realise how unlikely or illogical a great deal of your thinking actually is. The other person may say nothing at all. Because they may realise, that you just realised, that you really shouldn't be fretting at all.

3. Move. Exercise. Think about and focus on fitness. Build a fitness routine. Do this by putting regular daily exercise in your diary before anything else. And hold yourself to account by, for example, joining classes. Because that way, the other people in the class will expect to see you. And you are less likely to let them – and yourself – down. Exercise sounds a bit left field as a way to worry less. But it's such a distraction that, honestly, if you exercise routinely, a lot of your worries may just evaporate.

So in summary, when people say (something like), 'Don't worry, it's Christmas' – you can question the logic and the connectedness of such a statement if you like. And keep on worrying.

But let's face it, there's illogic everywhere. Aeroplane toilets are not going to drop anything on your head. And nine out of ten of those other things you might be worrying about aren't going to happen either.

So honestly, try not to overthink the logic of the statement. Not least because the sentiment really is rather lovely.

Don't worry – it's Christmas.

www.harlandsaccountants.co.uk



Darren Wingfield



MAVEN LEADS £2.5 MILLION INVESTMENT IN POWER ROLL

Following a period of growth and relocation to County Durham the business has secured further funding to support its growing list of international customers

Maven Capital Partners has led a £2.5 million funding round in Power Roll, a developer of ultra-low-cost and lightweight flexible film for energy generation and storage. The transaction comprised two investments from Maven managed regional funds including a £500,000 investment from the Finance Durham Fund, established by Durham County Council and overseen by Business Durham and a £250,000 investment from the North East Development Capital Fund, supported by the European Regional Development Fund. A further £1.75 million was invested by existing shareholders.

Newly headquartered in County Durham, Power Roll originally secured investment from the Finance Durham Fund last year to open a new manufacturing facility. The business has since relocated to Jade Business Park in Seaham to support the construction of a solar film pilot plant. Today's transactions will enable the business to embark on a programme of growth to support its growing list of UK and international customers as well as invest in the development of the newly opened manufacturing plant in Durham.

Power Roll has developed a unique, flexible, lightweight solar film capable of producing ultra-low-cost green electricity that is up to 10 times cheaper to make than existing flexible

solar photovoltaic (PV) technologies. The film is suitable for non-load-bearing rooftops, building integration, transport, portable applications, off-grid projects and IoT sensors, and can also be used for energy storage and to manufacture capacitors.

The solar panel and capacitor markets are large and growing due to the increasing global demand for renewable electricity and electronic devices. The global solar energy market is expected to reach over \$220bn in 2026 with the thin flexible solar panel market expected to be worth \$10bn by 2023.

The business has an experienced management team which includes, Neil Spann, Managing Director, prior to joining Power Roll was Head of Group Finance at Eaga plc and prior to that trained and worked at Arthur Anderson and Ernst & Young. Dr John Topping, Co-founder and Chief Scientist, is a research scientist, with over 18 years of scientific consulting experience, specialising in coatings, printed electronics and the development of process manufacturing. John has worked on research projects for the MoD, UK Space Agency and Pilkington Glass and was previously a research fellow at Oxford University.

Michael Dickens, Investment Manager at Maven, said: "Power Roll is an innovative and growing

business and we're delighted to provide further funding following the company's strong growth. Neil and the team have worked hard to open the new facility at Jade Business Park and it's been a great move for the business as they continue to expand their customer reach and invest in the technology of their product. We look forward to working with Power Roll as they embark on their next phase of growth."

Neil Spann, Managing Director, Power Roll, said: "We are in a very exciting phase of Power Roll's development and are on track to meet key milestones as we scale up our technology. Our pilot plant is nearing completion and will enable us to produce flexible solar film using a roll-to-roll manufacturing process with a view to further scaling in the UK and internationally. We very much appreciate our investors' support and are looking forward to settling into our new home on Jade Business Park."

Cllr James Rowlandson, Portfolio holder for resources, investment and assets at Durham County Council, said: "We are delighted to be able to continue to provide funding to Power Roll as they invest and grow in County Durham. Finance Durham was set up to help exactly this type of innovative and dynamic company and as we emerge from the pandemic it is important to continue to support businesses to develop and thrive, especially those that are at the forefront of new green technologies while helping to create and safeguard jobs. We look forward to continuing to work with the company to establish its new manufacturing plant at Jade Business Park through our business support team at Business Durham."

If your business is in need of finance to help unlock its growth potential, Maven may be able to help. Contact our local team on 0191 731 8595 or visit mavencp.com to find out more.

MAVEN

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Finance Durham Fund

Debt and equity funding available between **£150,000 and £2 million** for businesses in, or looking to relocate to, County Durham.

How can Finance Durham help my business to grow?

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We can back companies of all sizes and across most sectors which contribute to business growth and job creation within the County.



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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:

info@financedurham.co.uk | **T: 0191 731 8595** | **financedurham.co.uk**



LATEST HMRC CORRESPONDENCE – 'NUDGE' LETTERS



Recently, we have seen a rise in the number of 'nudge' letters that HMRC are issuing to taxpayers in respect of potential undeclared income and gains.

Nudge letters are letters sent automatically by HMRC, usually as part of a campaign and relate to specific areas of tax. Recent campaigns have included disclosures on foreign income (Worldwide Disclosure Facility) and income from property (Let Property Campaign).

The purpose of a nudge letter is to prompt an individual to review their affairs to check whether any additional information or income needs to be declared to HMRC. This does not mean that you have necessarily omitted any income and gains and assuming that you have avoided paying tax, it is merely a prompt for you to review your own affairs to ensure that you are compliant with HMRC. We are aware that HMRC will be issuing nudge letters in relation to the following areas...

Cryptocurrencies

We have been informed that HMRC are in the process of issuing nudge letters to known crypto investors. The nudge letter states that they believe the individual in question holds, or held investments in cryptocurrencies. It goes on to say that capital gains tax may be due if the cryptocurrencies have been disposed of and gains of over £12,300 have been realised.

Under the Automatic Exchange of Information agreement, HMRC has made multiple agreements with other countries to allow the exchange of

information between tax authorities of different countries. This is to help minimise tax avoidance and evasion in the UK. Under this arrangement, HMRC will have collected information of crypto investors in the UK and it is on this basis that these nudge letters will be sent out.

Foreign Tax Credit Relief

HMRC will soon be writing to taxpayers where they believe the individual has received income from a foreign country, such as interest or dividends, and made a claim for relief for foreign tax paid.

Depending on certain criteria, you may be taxed twice in both the UK and the jurisdiction in which your income derives from. Under foreign tax credit relief, you can claim a credit against UK tax for the foreign tax paid but the credits allowable are subject to restrictions, the rates of which depend on the country the income derives from. The nudge letter will state that the rate of relief claimed is incorrect.

Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS)

This nudge letter relates to instances where individuals have told HMRC that they are trading as sole traders or partnerships and claimed SEISS grants. The letter is checking the eligibility for

SEISS grants on the basis that the individual has not completed a 2019/20 tax return or completed any self-employment/partnership pages on their 2019/20 tax return. Action will need to be taken within 30 days of the date of the letter, otherwise the individual will be required to pay back the grants received in the year.

In the above cases, the first step when receiving a nudge is to review your information. Ignoring the letters could leave to further penalties with HMRC.

Should you receive a nudge letter in any of the above areas we recommend you should seek professional advice.

Contact us

At MHA Tait Walker, our Private Client team can assist with undertaking a compliance review, by reviewing your information and data to ensure that your affairs are correct and up to date.

In addition, we can also assist in any response or voluntary disclosures to HMRC to ensure that you remain compliant and resolve any potential issues in a professional and efficient manner.

For further advice, please contact us at advice@taitwalker.co.uk



Steve Plaskitt

2021 MARKS RECORD YEAR FOR MHA TAIT WALKER CORPORATE FINANCE

MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance team are celebrating a record year in 2021 following completion of over £100m worth of deals for businesses in the Northeast and beyond, marking the busiest 12 months for the firm in almost a decade.

Led by Corporate Finance Partner Steve Plaskitt, the team has advised on 22 Corporate Finance transactions, including five disposals, two buyouts, five fundraising and seven acquisitions. These included working with five Private Equity Houses, out-of-region clients, and cross-border M&A involving buyers and funders across North America, Europe and the Middle East. October saw the team's busiest month to date with five deals completed in the opening ten days.

In addition to achieving successful growth, the Corporate Finance team has continued to expand, with the appointment of John O Sullivan at the start of the year as a Corporate Finance Executive. A recruitment drive at manager level in the summer also saw the appointment of Mike Williams to further strengthen the team's transaction support and due diligence capabilities in Teesside with further additions scheduled in the near term to support the teams ongoing pipeline of transactional activity.

This is the second year running the accountancy firm has celebrated record end-of-year growth, after closing 2020 with £100m worth of deals completed for North East businesses – all against

the backdrop of the pandemic.

Steve Plaskitt, Partner at MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance said: "It is through our clients' growth and successes that we have been able to similarly perform strongly, whilst growing our team this year.

"We have seen fees reach their highest in over ten years. We have focused on client relationships, providing Covid19-specific support, meeting growing demand from private equity for Data Analytics and assisting other firms in the MHA network.

"Whilst on the surface we appear to be coming out of the pandemic and reverting to 'normality', the reality is SMEs in the North, ourselves included, have continued to work under extremely challenging circumstances throughout the last 12 months, so to end the year at a record high for a second-year running is a phenomenal testament to our people. It's also massively encouraging to be completing such complex and strategic deals for North East businesses, helping them to grow at a time when the economy needs it most.

"The recent Autumn Budget provided a good platform for M&A activity for 2022 given that the tax conditions are relatively benign for existing

shareholders, as capital gains tax didn't increase, and as government investment in the region, the new Freeport at Teesside as part of levelling up for example, will keep the Northeast economy moving in the right direction."

Lee Humble, Associate Partner added: "The last twelve months has seen an immense volume of activity and we head toward 2022 with a stable of clients looking to execute across the first half of the year.

"Fears in relation to tax increases and the post Covid bounce has certainly stimulated a thirst across our client base for activity and we look forward to supporting a high volume of deals in the coming months. Teesside remains a key area for us, and we are seeing a ramp up in volume of activity in the area, whilst Private Equity also remains a good source of opportunity for us. Cross-border appetite remains high, and should remain so in the medium term, and with mainstream banking support varying we also envisage an increase in debt advisory services as our clients start to look beyond the conventional sources of capital."

www.taitwalker.co.uk

2021: LOOKING BACK ON A YEAR OF NEW PRODUCT LAUNCHES AND NATIONAL EXPANSION

David Foster, managing director of Anglo Scottish Asset Finance, which has its headquarters in Durham, reflects on a year of huge transformation for the business, including a merger with Birmingham-based Capex Asset Finance, ensuring the company is on track for national expansion, supported by the launch of various new products.

According to David, the asset finance experience of the future will be a hybrid, combining a human understanding of the individual needs of each customer with modern analytic tools to create more efficient and cost-effective solutions.

As the UK economy starts to pick up post Covid-19, servicing our customers and caring for their unique needs and circumstances remains our number one priority. Many will be recovering from the pandemic and looking to build back better, requiring expert advice to help them navigate uncertainty and access to innovative solutions.

Asset finance businesses have an essential role to play in driving the success of SMEs, with many utilising asset finance to keep business steady and cash flow healthy.

Gone are the days when businesses could go to their local bank manager to discuss the finance options available to them when they need to invest in new equipment or vehicles. Instead, increasing numbers are asking their suppliers for finance options. With our vast panel of lenders, Anglo Scottish is a preferred partner to many of these suppliers. If one lender doesn't match, we have a plethora of others that most likely will, meaning the supplier can secure the valuable order and the customer receives the best possible deal for their personal situation.



David Foster

As new funders continue to flood in to the market, our positioning and experience has enabled us to create successful and long-lasting relationships. Demand for our services is so great, we have expanded into the Midlands and South, following a merger with Capex Asset Finance, to ensure that we can reach as many customers as possible.

The merger with Capex not only provides us with superior geographical terrain and ways to widen our service offering, it also means we can further improve customer experience, investing in new systems and streamlining our processes to make them even more efficient. It is this which gives us our competitive edge and exemplar service, meaning that as we continue to expand, we are setting a national standard for a customer-centric way of doing business.

It is my belief, that the success of a business comes down to three things; customer service, employee satisfaction and wellbeing and a streamlined and efficient business model.

Anglo Scottish has endeavoured to be an asset broker that provides a complete solution to financial lending. The same customers that come

to us for asset finance also seek finance in other areas, including commercial lending, vehicle sourcing and private car finance. Our desire to help make life as easy and simple for our customers, means we now provide a full service, including our recently launched prestige car finance.

As with the asset finance side of the business, the expertise amongst our specialist prestige finance team, along with our customer-centric approach to business, means we are able to take the time to listen to what our customers are looking for and find the best solution via our vast panel of lenders.

The feedback we have received, alongside referrals and return business, bolsters our belief that our current business model and commitment to servicing customers in all areas of finance, is the right one. As we continue to expand nationally at an exponential rate, it is our aim to offer solutions that make life as easy and stress-free as possible for our customers.

angloscottishfinance.co.uk

THE SHAPE AND STRUCTURE OF A GOOD BOARD AT SME LEVEL

Andrew Marsh, chair of Vistage for the North East and Northumberland, NED for numerous businesses and charities; and successful entrepreneur, has committed to imparting his knowledge throughout 2021 to help business leaders come out of the last year with a solid view for the future.

Here, in his latest article, the last of the year, Andrew looks at what the shape and structure of a good board should look like for a SME.

"As an SME enjoying success or ready for change or a pivot, you are at a point as a leader where you should be aware you need a board now, or if you already have one, that it needs evaluating and refreshing. You may also have been directed to appoint a board due to an investment process, so it is important that the board is right for your company's future.

"A board at this stage needs to be effective in terms of its inputs, insights, diversity of perspectives and bring strong experience that allows for strong discussions and strategic decision making. It must be good for the company in the present but more so for the future; and needs to be composed of positively challenging, supportive, guiding and insightful individuals. It must not be operational in its activity, so looking at say monthly cash flows should not be part of their agenda, only cash projections.

"A board of directors is in essence a panel of people brought together to legally represent the best interests of shareholders and stakeholders. Every public company is required to have a board of at least two people, and in a limited company (where there must be at least one company director) all company directors make up the board with external parties brought in with relevant skills so the organisation can reap the future benefits.

"It is also advisable to consider whether all the members need to be fiduciary and have legal responsibility. There is often a case for appointing board advisors, who you pay for their skills and introductions but have no legal responsibility. A great example of this is if you want someone's involvement as they have a great black book of contacts, and can give structured advice and introductions, but doesn't need to have any fiduciary control. You could just pay this advisor on the doers they open rather than creating a long term financial commitment.

"So ,what should your board look like? What shape and structure will suit your company and why? It is key that this next move you make is a good one as it will shape the future of your company, so it is likely you will need support in realising what you need and who can bring what you need. Most importantly to get this right you need to look at the needs of the business in you next three-year business cycle, not what is needed today.



"Firstly, there is no right or wrong to the size of a board. If you only need 3 key people and their skills, then that is right for you. If you have several different needs, then your board needs to be larger, but it is advisable to keep numbers tight as possible to avoid too much difficulty in reaching decisions.

"Plan out on paper what your ideal support network would look like – from legal brains, to finance whizz, to marketing gurus. Is there a specialist niche trait your future business plan would benefit from? Is there a geographical, franchising or export potential? Do you need specific diversity to make sure your governance is robust? Do you need a governance expert? Do you need to attract new or further funding, investment, or new partnerships?

"You need to take this into consideration and map out personalities that are in line with your culture, or that will help you achieve a cultural change if needed. Do you need a more or a less corporate approach, do you need to be more proactive, do you need to be more customer or employee focused? People from all backgrounds come with these extra skills and often the change can be brought by their personality and in the influence they bring. But do beware of creating a board with too many similar skills, personalities and experience - variety and diversity is the key to great boards, so always look beyond these initial skills!

"This board is going to be responsible for protecting your shareholders' interests, for overseeing the general wellbeing and future resilience of the organisation. The role of each fiduciary non-executive director (NED) includes dividend allocation, creating of policies, management of senior executives, setting company goals and ensuring executives have the tools to succeed. They are not there to work in the day-to-day operations but should be more focused on strategy and growth. The FRC released an illuminating paper a few years ago that is worth a visit, on the Guidance of Board Effectiveness, that covers this off.

"A board should always have a chair, and if made up of four or more NEDs, a vice chair. You can have multiple vice chairs if you have a larger board, particularly if you have a need for sub committees to cover finance, strategy, sales, governance etc although it is important that each one is

appropriately independent so they can provide a variety of views.

"Beyond that, your own company governance, which should be formed prior to the inception of your board or newly imagined board, needs to include what is expected from the board, its structure, the appointment of NEDs, and what internal employees from the leadership team also sit on the board. A minimum of one operational leader, usually the CEO or MD, is expected to sit on the board but it is often sensible to include FD's or perhaps the senior executive responsible for people, stakeholders and policies.

"Your governance should ensure that your company articles are adhered to, and set out how decisions are made in the company, how to keep the executive team accountable and clearly separate out any conflicts that could get in the way of decision making.

"From an administrative structure point the governance should also lay out how often the board meets, guidelines on minutes and reporting, policies for board members to adhere to, company structure, sub committees' authority, resolutions to disputes, agenda setting, AGMs, locations, timings, expectations, service terms and notice periods. The Institute of Directors has some great guidance on their website for this.

"When appointing people to your board you must ensure they are legally able to do the role and have not been previously disqualified, and that they can dedicate the time to attend the board meetings / carry out any additional responsibilities. Look for people who are honest and trustworthy and who can help in a mentoring capacity where necessary.

"Finally, wherever possible, look for professional assistance when building a board, shaping its governance and looking for board members. Unless you are a charity, NEDs are a substantial financial commitment, and you want to make sure your organisation gets the best out of its investment!"

If you want help and support from Andrew in reimagining or forming your board, then do please email him on Andrew@marshbusinesstransformations.co.uk



WHEN BUSINESS SUPPORT MEANS MORE THAN JUST FUNDING

An award-winning business support organisation is starting a conversation about what companies in the region need to help them grow.

Nudl, an innovative funding company set up just ten months ago by CEO Shak Asghar, has positioned itself at the heart of the Northern business community, helping to attract more than £20m to businesses in the region, creating 1,000 jobs and counting.

This positioning was cemented after the fledgling firm won two Tees Business Awards last month, being named as both best new business and best new services business.

Despite this soaring success, Shak says Nudl's journey has been a steep learning curve since launching in March.

"I created Nudl with the idea of putting the fun into funding," he says. "And while that's still the case, we've also been learning a lot about the types of support businesses in the region need, beyond cold hard cash."

"The original plan was all about working with firms to help them access the funding they needed – and were entitled to – to help them grow, but along the way our role has naturally expanded and diversified – which is great."

"While helping local businesspeople with grants and funding is still a key part of what we do, we're also able to support them with consultancy, investment decks, in-depth financial planning and cashflow forecasting."

That's because, as Shak is keen to point out, being good in your field doesn't necessarily translate into being good at business with a capital B.

"We work with a lot of clients who are amazing at what they do but have limited knowledge or experience of things like funding, networking or scaling up," he says.

"That's where we can help, above and beyond helping them identify funding opportunities; we can actually work with them to use that funding in the best way too."

"I've been working in this landscape for 20 years so it's really rewarding to be able to put all those years of experience to good use, because benefitting local businesses benefits everyone in the community."

Sharing the benefits

The real beauty of the work Nudl does is how far-reaching it can be.

One such example is when it comes to the supply chain; with Nudl's clients looking to use their funding to buy goods or services, more often than not the money stays in the local economy.

Shak adds: "There's so much good work going on in the North East and our activity helps businesses on their growth journey or helps them explore what their growth plans are."

"But beyond that, our impact is not just on the businesses we work with through direct funding, it's also indirectly through the supply chain."



Annmarie Antunes

"Even though our client might come to us and say, 'I need funding to buy X', it has a knock-on impact in the supply chain when they make the purchase because, wherever possible, we refer them to local businesses for the products and services they are looking for."

And the support goes two ways, for while Shak's extensive knowledge of the Northern business landscape means he always knows the right person for the job, firms throughout the supply chain are returning the favour.

"What we find," he says, "is that, all along the chain, people are referring potential clients to Nudl, because they know we can help them 'get funded' in order to do business with them."

"We like to say that we've created between 800 and 1,000 jobs since launching in March, but, to be honest, I think that's a fairly low estimate because of the business growth within the supply chain as well."

"Purely in terms of the funding we've been able to access for our clients, we believe we've created that many jobs, but who knows how many more jobs are behind that, because in the supply chain, there has been an impact there as well."

"I think that's so great and it demonstrates why grant funding schemes are great for the local economy and the wider economy, improving prosperity across the region."

Success stories

Despite being less than a year old, Nudl already has some key successes under its belt, showcasing the innovative approach of so many Tees Valley businesses.

One such example is Foley's Equestrian, a Redcar-based firm that uses carpet from cut-

offs at car factories and recycles it into horse surfaces such as arenas, menages and gallops.

Earlier this year, the firm, which was set up in early 2020, won funding worth nearly £50,000 to refurbish a former schoolhouse in Warrenby, Redcar, transforming it into a purpose-built processing site.

At the time, company director Keith Rutherford said: "Larger premises means we can significantly increase our production, which in turn means we can continue to grow the business and take on more staff."

"Now we have more capacity to process more material, we aim to be the best supplier of quality automotive fibres across Europe."

Shak adds: "This is what Nudl is all about, and what I'm most proud of. Yes, it's about the funding, but it's also about what that funding will do and the potential it helps businesses to fulfil."

"And while we work in totally different industries, the Foley's team are just like Nudl; passionate about the region and with some big plans ahead of them."

Looking to the future

So what's next for Nudl?

Recent developments have a green theme, including consulting with an Irish company that is developing a training package over the course of a year teaching people to be electric bike engineers.

At the R&D stage, Shak and the team are also consulting on a project involving a concrete product developed using a new process which will produce 80 per cent less CO2 emissions per kilo, and a paint company developing a product for the outside of buildings that reduces the internal temperature by 10 degrees.

Shak adds: "The past ten months have been a whirlwind and we're not taking our foot off the gas yet."

"We have regular discussions with contacts in the United States, Middle East, Europe – we have conversations going on all over. We are working with strategic consultancy, funding and some of those we are working to bring to the region."

"The North East is my home and I'm committed to helping it be the best it can be. We have some brilliant businesses here and real innovation, so the absolute highlight of my job is supporting these businesses to become major players."

And with results like this and Shak at the helm, Nudl itself is set to lead the field.

For more information about Nudl and its range of services, visit nudl.co.uk



“

**...We've created between
800 and 1,000 jobs since
launching in March...**

”

YEAR IN REVIEW WITH ROBSON LAIDLER WEALTH



Robson Laidler Wealth are a team of Chartered Financial Planners, in Jesmond who will give you the confidence that you can achieve the lifestyle you want without fear of running out of money.

Director Amanda Cowie reflects on the past year...

What did you set out to achieve this year?

After a very successful 2020 we wanted to increase the size of our team to allow us to maintain a great level of service to our existing and new clients. Both Jen Gilroy and Lydia Sutton joined us in May, and they have been a great addition to our team.

We also set ourselves some specific business growth objectives, which we are on track to exceed.

Has everything gone according to plan?

Absolutely! We have increased our marketing activity and have just launched a campaign called "Finding Financial Fairness in Divorce" for those facing relationship breakdown in later life. Because of this we have seen increased traffic through the website as well as more client introductions.

How has the ongoing Covid crisis affected your business and how have you mitigated this?

We are fortunate in that we have been able to work flexibly throughout the whole of the pandemic with no detriment to our service. This is testament to the agility of our team, who adapted well to remote working and to our lovely clients who were so positive about us delivering our service virtually. We are now largely back together as a team in the office but the pandemic has shown us that it is possible to be more flexible and work the odd day from home.

What are you most proud of this year?

Despite the pandemic we have continued with steady growth, which has seen our client relationships strengthen, an increase in the number of families that we serve and new faces to our team.

Seeing our people develop in their careers through professional qualifications has definitely been a highlight. Emma Purvis who has worked with us for 13 years has recently qualified as a financial planner. And our trainee paraplanner Megan Dimmick has passed all of her regulated financial planning exams first time and is now training to be a paraplanner as part of her progression to ultimately becoming our next financial planner.

What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

The best advice we give ourselves is within our simple philosophy of doing the right thing for clients and the consequence of this is a successful

business, measured by more engaged clients and financial growth.

What have you learnt about yourselves this year?

That we are a very strong team. That we can adapt well to change. That we can have even more confidence in the value we add to our clients' lives.

What's been the most enjoyable business social event you have attended?

There haven't been many! We had our team "Christmas" lunch in April outside! Neil (director in the business) has managed to squeeze in several client golf matches including a recent trip to Muirfield. And Robson Laidler hosted a Ladies in Business lunch at Dobson and Parnell recently – great fun and well received and something we will be running again in the spring.

Describe 2021 in three words

The. Best. Yet.

What does the remainder of the year hold and any new plans for 2022?

Apart from helping those facing divorce find an equitable financial way forward, we are now able to advise clients on how to plan using their main residence. We will also continue to develop our client relationships and enable our team to progress in their chosen careers.

www.robson-laidler.co.uk/wealth

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Email: acowie@robson-laidler.co.uk

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Carl Swansbury

RG CORPORATE FINANCE ANTICIPATES A BUSY START TO 2022

By Carl Swansbury, Partner and Head of Corporate Finance.

RG Corporate Finance (RGCF) has maintained its position as one of the most active M&A advisory firms in the North East following what has been an extraordinary 12 months.

The ramifications of the pandemic ensured the financial calendar was turned on its head, with the normally quiet holiday month of August transformed into the busiest in RGCF's ten-year history.

During the month of August 2021 alone we advised on seven significant transactions, including management buy outs, disposals, and strategic acquisitions – a trend that has continued since.

The gradual lifting of Covid restrictions, combined with a significant amount of liquidity in the market, was the catalyst for a torrent of M&A activity.

Many in business have displayed patience and agility since the first lockdown, having to accept business plans and growth strategies had to be put on ice. This past year saw the resurrection of those plans and strategies.

This coincided with an availability of funding, a timely incentive for management teams to take control of their own destinies.

At the same time shareholders were motivated to sell to lock in capital gains tax rates, ahead of anticipated changes in the autumn budget – changes which failed to materialise, but that are still expected to emerge in time.

Businesses are also keen to make up for the periods of lost or stagnant growth by making bolt on acquisitions or accelerating organic growth, financed by private equity investment, debt funding or utilising balance sheet cash reserves.

While Covid restrictions devastated certain sectors, including hospitality, travel, leisure and tourism, and high street retail, other sectors performed well,



including healthcare, technology, human capital, training and ed-tech, manufacturing, engineering, and support/professional services.

Many of the major transactions that RGCF has advised on involved businesses that operate in these more resilient sectors.

For example, in the manufacturing sector, we were delighted to advise on the management buyout of Komatsu Mining UK's conveyor manufacturing operation in Sunderland, to form SE-TEK Ltd.

As may be expected following the pandemic restrictions being lifted, RGCF saw a flurry of M&A activity within technology enabled and related sectors, reflecting the popularity of digital-based businesses operating across the training, education, e-commerce, and recruitment sectors.

Examples include the acquisition by North-East ed-tech specialist eQuality Solutions Group (eQS) of London-based Equality Works Group, and the founders of Clear Edge Search & Selection's management buyout of the Leeds-based Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), igaming and technology sectors specialist staffing business.

Meanwhile, North Yorkshire managed IT services provider razorblue expanded further into Scotland with the acquisition of sarn technologies, Newcastle-based e-commerce agency Fostr was acquired by leading digital agency group, IDHL Group, and Hull-based occupational health services specialist, Latus Health, acquired the Reward Me Now (RMN) employee health and wellbeing

platform, including the RMN smartphone app, from County Durham's Redu Group.

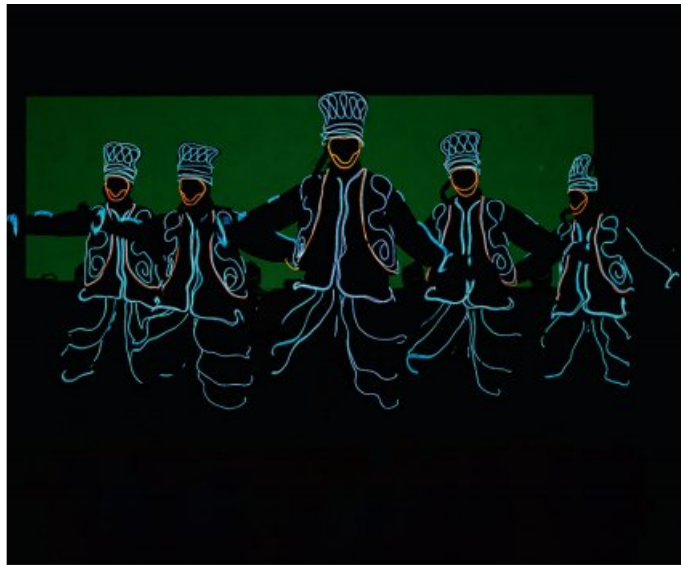
The other deal of note that RGCF advised on involved Garbutt + Elliott Wealth Management, which acquired Yorkshire based wealth management firm HKA (FS) Ltd.

We anticipate a busy start to the New Year in terms of M&A activity, and our primary aim at RGCF is to support our clients by advising on transformational transactions and enabling them to secure the growth capital they require to scale.

We intend to focus on helping management teams acquire businesses through MBOs and MBIs, whilst helping acquisitive clients make bolt-on acquisitions that increase value. Similarly, we will continue to work with shareholder groups looking to maximise the value of their businesses in anticipation of a sale.

As a regionally based, nationally focused business, we are growing our team of 21 and intend to recruit additional CF lead advisors, transaction services and transactional tax professionals over the coming months as we continue in our quest to become the North East's leading CF advisory boutique.

ryecroftglenton.com



WONDERLAN BALL

EMG Solicitors' annual WonderLAN Ball returned in fine style this year, with a Bollywood themed dinner for 400 people.

The event raised £20,000 for brain injury charity, Headway, with guests enjoying an Indian banquet and entertainment which included the arrival of a full size elephant puppet and neon Bhangra dancers.

The highly popular evening sees guests travelling from as far as Leeds and Manchester for a ball which is widely regarded as one of the most enjoyable on the legal calendar.

Auction prizes on the night included a "money can't buy" day for four at tv chef's James Martin's home to watch the filming of his Saturday show.







ALICE TAKES OFFICE AS CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF TAXATION'S NEW NORTH EAST CHAIR

A Newcastle solicitor has taken over as chair of the North East arm of the UK's leading trade body for tax professionals.

Alice Clewes is now responsible for leading the regional work of the Chartered Institute of Taxation (CIOT), a national organisation which aims to promote education for taxation professionals and achieve a more efficient and less complex tax system for all.

Alice, who is a partner in the private client department at Hay & Kilner Law Firm, will serve a two-year term in office.

Originally from the south west, Alice moved to the North East to join Hay & Kilner 13 years ago and, unusually, is dual qualified as both a solicitor and a Chartered Tax Adviser.

She said: "The CIOT sets the standard for tax education and professional expertise, and it's an honour to be taking on the role of leading the North East's highly impressive community of taxation practitioners.

"The organisation has adapted well to the new ways of working that we've all had to come to terms with since the start of last year, with our online events enabling us to widen access to the information we share on the latest developments in our sector.



ADAM TINDALE JOINS RG CORPORATE FINANCE AS CORPORATE FINANCE EXECUTIVE

RG Corporate Finance has welcomed Adam Tindale to its fast-growing team as a newly-qualified chartered certified accountant – just five years after joining the firm.

Adam began his career with Newcastle-headquartered Ryecroft Glenton as an audit and accounts assistant, progressing to audit and accounts senior, before being appointed as a corporate finance executive in October 2021.

The 26-year-old spent time on secondment with several of Ryecroft Glenton's six service lines, including corporate finance, before achieving the globally recognised accountancy qualification with the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA).

Partner and head of corporate finance, Carl Swansbury, said: "I'm pleased to welcome Adam to the team, and I congratulate him on his dedication and hard work in achieving his ACCA qualification.

"Many corporate finance firms have a policy of only recruiting graduates, but here at Ryecroft Glenton we place the emphasis firmly on selecting those candidates, whatever their background, who possess the right values, skills and attitude.

"I look forward to working with Adam and to welcome further new recruits over the next few months, as we continue to grow RG Corporate Finance and indeed the wider firm."

NORTHUMBERLAND-BASED EXPLORE WEALTH MANAGEMENT JOINS TILNEY SMITH & WILLIAMSON'S NEWCASTLE OFFICE

Tilney Smith & Williamson, the leading wealth management and professional services group, has strengthened its presence in the North East by adding Explore Wealth Management's experienced team to its growing Newcastle office.

As part of the move, five staff from Explore Wealth Management –bringing experience covering financial planning, paraplanning and administration – along with the firm's owner, Stephen Sumner will join Tilney Smith & Williamson's office at Quayside House, which is headed-up by Managing Partner David Smith.

The Explore Wealth Management team, which is currently based at Cramlington in Northumberland, provides retirement planning, pensions advice and investment management services and specialises in working with current and former business owners, professionals and senior managers who are either approaching, or are already in, retirement.

Tilney Smith & Williamson has provided financial planning services to its clients, which include families, business owners and charities, in Newcastle for 10 years and with the team joining from Explore Wealth Management now has 22 people based in the city.

David Smith, Managing Partner of Tilney Smith & Williamson's Newcastle office commented: "Stephen and the five experienced staff who are joining Tilney Smith & Williamson have developed a great reputation providing financial planning services to clients in the North East and I am very pleased we are now going to be working together.

HARGREAVES ELSWORTH

Patent Attorneys

Contact Dominic Elsworth CPA, EPA (Head of Practice) for practical advice in relation to:
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Shirley Hall

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF...

SHIRLEY HALL

Edinburgh and Newcastle Senior Office Partner, Employment,
Eversheds Sutherland (International) LLP

What did you set out to achieve this year?

I wanted to support our clients and our people as much as possible in these difficult circumstances.

Has everything went according to plan?

The plan was relatively simple, implementation was difficult.

One of the main challenges for our clients was the Furlough rules being adapted. Both ourselves and our clients had to manage local and national lockdowns being introduced and re-introduced; different government's guidance on returning to the office applying to the different nations, which were regularly being updated which required constant policy and procedural changes.

Add to this the anxiety that staff will inevitably have in the middle of the pandemic and things become challenging to ensure that the needs of staff and the business are effectively managed.

How has the ongoing Covid crisis affected your business and how have you mitigated this?

As a global law firm the pandemic reduced our ability to meet with our clients around the world, and bring our teams together across the business. We mitigated against this by using technology to connect, primarily by Zoom and Teams to provide as much "virtual" face to face contact as much as possible.

What are you most proud of this year?

Implementation of our blended working model, combined with our move to our new office in Rotterdam House on the Quayside in Newcastle. Our new office, and our flexible working model, provides modern facilities in a fantastic location and enables our staff to have the best of both worlds. Our people have the flexibility to work remotely and have time in the office with colleagues.

How has your team changed?

It has grown and developed and we now have a number of new hires using the Newcastle office, as well as other offices within our Network, flexibly which is great for team growth and development. When we attend the office now we use that time more efficiently and benefit from the time together.

What have you learnt about yourself this year?

That I really enjoy connecting with clients and colleagues, whether virtually or in person. I am very much a people person and enjoy these interactions. I have actually found that using Zoom and Teams a lot more now, rather than the previous telephone calls which we used to conduct on a regular basis, means I have more quality time with clients and colleagues enabling us to build stronger and deeper connections.

What's been the most enjoyable business social event you have attended?

The first team lunch after we were allowed to eat inside as a larger group! It was so lovely to be out and having a social get together and really catch up with my colleagues over good food. Whilst we were catching up regularly via Zoom or Teams, you lose some of the social "chit chat" and it becomes very structured rather than natural discussion.

Describe 2021 in three words...

Back to office!

What does the remainder of the year hold?

A lot of client work as we head towards Christmas and clients become busier with their business trying to catch up after the impact of the pandemic and Brexit.

www.eversheds-sutherland.com

“
...I really enjoy
connecting with clients
and colleagues, whether
virtually or in person...
”



NEW YEAR, NEW LAW ON DIVORCES

At Sweeney Miller Law, we take some time away from the office during the festive period to relax and unwind, but we understand that many couples struggle during this time. The social and financial pressures at this time of year put a strain on some relationships and solidifies that the marriage has unfortunately broken down.

We are ready to take new enquiries and arrange face to face consultations in the New Year and by 6 April 2022 couples will be able to legally separate from their partner on the basis of a "non-fault" ground. Currently, couples are required to use one of the five grounds, and rely on periods of separation of two years by consent, five years without consent, desertion, or the more commonly used grounds of unreasonable behaviour or adultery. Although the ground of adultery is outdated due to this not applying to same sex couples. The new legislation means that couples can legally separate without the possibility of the other spouse contesting the divorce or the ongoing battle of who has been unreasonable and the cause of the breakdown.

We are however concerned about the implication this has on the costs of divorce and separation. Currently, the court can award that the person responsible for the divorce has to pay the applicant's costs. If there is no "blame game" in divorce and separation, there is no opportunity for the aggrieved spouse to have their costs paid. We would strongly suggest that you seek legal advice prior to starting the divorce or separation process before agreeing to the divorce as you need to consider the costs and potential financial settlement.

In relation to the financial settlement, the court will look at what assets both parties have at the time of the marital breakdown such as property, cash, investments, pensions, and any potential finances available in the future.

Studies have shown that, often, women have less accumulated pension wealth than their husbands, potentially due to taking time out of work to raise the children, or as a result of the gender pay gap. After the marital home has been considered, pensions are the next most valuation asset on divorce and they are often overlooked. It is important that separating couples consider their future financial planning and the starting point is to consider what financial assets and income you have between you, then what you will each need in the future and how those needs will be met.

Each case is fact dependent, however the starting point is an equal division of assets. The court may however depart from an equal division and would have regard to the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973 taking into account the following: -

- the welfare while a minor of any child of the family who has not attained the age of eighteen;
- income;
- earning capacity;



Rebecca Cresswell

- property; and
- other financial resources which each of the parties to the marriage has or is likely to have in the foreseeable future, including in the case of earning capacity any increase in that capacity;
- the financial needs, obligations and responsibilities which each of the parties to the marriage has or is likely to have in the foreseeable future;
- the standard of living enjoyed by the family before the breakdown of the marriage;
- the age of each party to the marriage and the duration of the marriage;
- any physical or mental disability of either of the parties to the marriage;
- the contributions which each of the parties has made or is likely in the foreseeable future to make to the welfare of the family, including any contribution by looking after the home or caring for the family; and
- the conduct of each of the parties, if that conduct is such that it would in the opinion of the court be inequitable to disregard it.

It is clear that divorce, separation, and financial settlement is not always straight forward so please do not hesitate in contacting our family law solicitors on 0345 900 5401 or contact Rebecca Cresswell by email at rebecca@sweeneymiller.co.uk to arrange a consultation.

Please contact us today to arrange an appointment by emailing Rebecca@sweeneymiller.co.uk or calling us on 0345 900 5401.

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Here at Sweeney Miller Law we are a team of experienced and highly qualified legal professionals. Our expert knowledge is second to none, with specialist teams working in their own field of expertise to advise and guide clients on a wide range of legal matters.

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LAW FIRM LAUNCHES HR COMPLIANCE AUDIT SERVICE FOR BUSINESSES

From calculating holiday pay correctly to drafting robust employment contracts with the correct statutory information and paying the national minimum wage correctly - employment compliance can be complex and time consuming.

Now the North East's leading law firm for businesses, Muckle LLP, has launched a new audit tool to give businesses peace of mind and ensure they are meeting their key employment law obligations.

Muckle LLP's Mi HR Audit provides an affordable pick and mix range of services to help employers with their employment law requirements. Mi HR Audit covers all the essential HR areas - everything from right to work checks and reviewing employment contracts to providing advice on how to capture and report the gender pay gap and assessing employment data privacy notices and monitoring practices are fit for purpose.

Fully flexible, Mi HR Audit is tailored for both general business and the education sector and is priced according to the number of employees and how many different services are taken.

Partner, Lisa Kelly, who specialises in employment law at Muckle LLP, said: "The government has

a keen eye on employment compliance and this focus is likely to increase with its recent announcement of a new single enforcement body to protect workers' rights.

"For employers, making sure they are fully *au fait* and comply with all the latest employment legislation can be a mine field, which can take up valuable time and resources. However, it's a vital requirement and one that all employers need to abide by.

"It's not only government enforcement or claims that employers need to be aware of; any company looking for investment or a potential buyer must ensure its employment compliance is spot on as it will come under scrutiny as part of any due diligence process.

"Our new Mi HR Audit helps give peace of mind when dealing with employment compliance. Companies can choose one or more key areas to be audited and feel safe and secure in the



Lisa Kelly

knowledge they are benefitting from our vast expertise in employment law and practices so, if an issue is identified, we can work together to put it right."

To find out more contact Lisa Kelly on 0191 211 7897 or lisa.kelly@muckle-llp.com

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The key to the successful delivery
of a development project

LAW FIRM LAUNCHES NEW DEVELOPMENT PODCAST SERIES

The experts at Muckle LLP have launched a new development project podcast series aimed at business clients embarking on development projects.

'The Secret to Successful Development Projects' is available on Muckle's podcast 'The Legal Spectrum'. Each episode in the series will focus on a particular topic, where Muckle experts and, in some episodes, guest speakers, discuss the key components to successfully delivering development projects.

Lucilla Waugh, Partner and Head of the Construction, Engineering and Projects team at Muckle LLP says: "We are delighted to launch our development podcast. Delivering a development project successfully involves carefully planning and coordinating a great many workstreams and moving parts.

"At Muckle, we have leading experts to assist clients with all these workstreams. In each episode you will hear from different experts on the legal aspects of topics such as structuring the project, establishing the project team, procurement and subsidies, framework agreements, issues with title to the site, site condition, design and construction contracts, dispute resolution, all the way through to the operation, maintenance, and occupation of the developed facilities.

"For some episodes, we are fortunate enough to be joined by guest speakers, who have particular experience to share with our audience. Our first

guest speaker, in episode two, is Carol Cairns, Strategic Planning Manager at Northumbrian Water Group, who talks to us about the importance of clearly identifying clients' strategic objectives for their projects before going out to the market."

"Our podcasts are easy to access so that you can listen whenever and wherever suits you. The goal is to help listeners take the learnings that resonate with them and use them to avoid some common pitfalls. We hope this knowledge and insight will provide real, tangible help and support to anyone planning their next development project."

One of the key issues for a developer seeking to bring a development project forward is how to fund it. In the latest episode Gail Bennett, Partner in Real Estate at Muckle LLP is joined by Louise Duffy, Partner and Head of Banking, and Will McKay, Partner in Real Estate to discuss financing and the steps to consider.

The first three episodes are currently available to listen, with Muckle planning to produce more episodes over the coming months, based around a wide range of topics that aim to share knowledge and serve as a tool to aid the development process.



Lucilla Waugh

To find out more, visit: www.muckle-llp.com/developmentsuccess. The Secret to Successful Development Projects will be available on all podcast streaming platforms, including Buzzsprout and Spotify.

You can share your thoughts on social media using the hashtag #muckledesuccess.

To find out more about the help and advice we can give on your development project contact Lucilla Waugh on 0191 211 7984 or e-mail Lucilla.waugh@muckle-llp.com

BANTER IN THE WORKPLACE - WHEN DOES HUMOUR BECOME HARASSMENT?

Jordan Bruce a Solicitor at specialist employment law firm Collingwood Legal takes a look at the recent racism storm to hit county cricket.

Yorkshire County Cricket Club ("YCCC") have made headlines recently after an investigation found a former player was subject to racial harassment and bullying. Despite such a serious finding, YCCC concluded that no disciplinary action would be taken against those involved, finding that the incidents in question, which involved the use of racist language, amounted to "friendly banter" and that the player was not offended by the comments made. This issue did not go away for YCCC and as a reaction to matters sponsors withdrew support for the club and resignations from the Board and management at YCCC followed.

So, in what circumstances is banter innocent and when does it amount to harassment? Under section 26 of the Equality Act 2010, a person harasses another if they engage in unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic (e.g. race, disability, sex) which has the purpose or effect of either violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person.

A one-off incident can amount to harassment and as can be seen from the above definition, the conduct does not have to be intentional or even directed toward the person for it to amount to harassment. It merely needs to have the effect of doing so. For example, telling a racist joke might offend colleagues regardless of their race and this could amount to harassment.

When considering if conduct has the proscribed

effect, a tribunal will take into account the person's perception, the other circumstances of the case and whether it is reasonable for the conduct to have that effect. A fairly recent Employment Appeal Tribunal ("EAT") held that calling a claimant a "fat ginger pikey" was not race harassment despite the claimant's links with the travelling community. The EAT in that case held that the comments were not unwanted as the claimant actively participated in the banter and it did not have the purpose or effect of violating his dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for him. This decision demonstrates how harassment cases are fact sensitive and the context must be considered.

Employers can be liable for harassment by employees if it was in the "course of employment", regardless of whether or not it was known unless an employer can argue that it took "reasonable steps" to prevent employees from doing discriminatory acts. Employers should therefore be giving appropriate anti-harassment training to make clear what is and what isn't

acceptable behaviour in the workplace and refreshing this training regularly, have up to date anti bullying and harassment policies and be sure to properly investigate and deal with complaints of harassment in accordance with appropriate grievance and disciplinary procedures.

A finding of harassment can not only prove costly for employers as compensation in discrimination cases is unlimited but also the negative publicity and reputational damage can be significant as seen with the YCCC case. Therefore, all employers should be taking steps to ensure that employees know where to draw the line and how humour can become harassment.

If your business is dealing with a harassment complaint or would benefit from investigation training, Collingwood Legal are running a webinar on how to conduct employment investigations in the workplace from 10 am – 12 noon on Thursday 13th January 2022.

**For more information or to book a place visit
www.collingwoodlegal.com**



Jordan Bruce



A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF...

DALE LEVER

Owner, Lever Law Solicitors

What did you set out to achieve this year ?

I wanted to grow the business organically focusing primarily on bringing in talented staff members to ensure our service levels remained high. We are still recruiting and are eager to develop the business further.

Has everything gone according to plan?

Certainly not! The impact and ramifications of the Coronavirus were unexpected. The conveyancing side of the business took a huge hit when lockdown was announced with lenders withdrawing offers and local authorities closing their doors etc. Fast forward a couple of months and the unprecedented conveyancing boom took everyone by surprise. The surge was difficult to keep up with and trying to manage clients expectations proved tricky.

How has the ongoing Covid crisis affected your business and how have you mitigated this?

As I'm sure is the case with many businesses, Covid has presented many obstacles for us and the running of our usual day-to-day tasks. These have mainly been delays which are out of our control. Of course, this is often frustrating for our clients but we do all we can to ensure matters are dealt with to the best of our abilities and reassure our clients that we will do all we can for them during this uncertain time.

What are you most proud of this year?

Our growth and resilience. This year we have taken on three brilliant new members of staff to cope with the growing demand for our services. For Lever Law, to be able to do this at a time when so many other industries have had to cut back makes me very proud and the long hours worth it. We have members of our team who have joined us from various professional backgrounds that were put under great pressure by the changes Covid presented, and they now couldn't imagine a career outside the law.

What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

Don't forget to take a holiday! I had not realised how important it is to take a break and recharge your batteries. As solicitors we often forget to switch off as we must be constantly on the ball analysing every little detail – we really do forget how taxing this is on our mental health and wellbeing.

How has your team changed?

As previously mentioned, the team is growing which allows us to keep up with demand whilst maintaining the standards expected by our clients for the various services we offer. One of our newer members of staff is solicitor Nicola Sharp who deals with private client work including wills and probate. Her sole focus on this area ensures great service levels and ensures clients are guided through what can often be a challenging time. Our conveyancing team worked incredibly hard through the stamp duty holiday period which saw our record level of conveyancing cases, whilst again ensuring our service levels were in line with expectations and our company values. I am focusing more on commercial work which is really taking off and is an area I really do enjoy. The team as a whole work so well together meaning we can all work to our optimum potential by supporting each other through the good, the busy and the stressful times.

What have you learnt about yourself this year?

I have learnt that I am able to manage stress, or I should say that I have had to learn how to manage stress given the demands placed on us throughout the Stamp Duty Land Tax deadlines.

What's been the most enjoyable business social event you have attended?

I am the chairman of the Dunelm Foundation, a company who raises funds for charitable and worthy causes. In the first year we were able to attract Kevin Keegan to the Dunelm Foundation Dinner as the guest speaker which was a huge draw – Keegan was a hero when I was growing up so to hear him speak at the event was fantastic. We managed to raise £25,000 on the evening and this was distributed to several different worthy causes.

Describe 2021 in three words...

Busy, exciting, memorable!

What does the remainder of the year hold?

We are looking to bring in an experienced solicitor to head our conveyancing department in the new year and hope to find the ideal candidate who will maintain our high standards and share in the firm's ethos.

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“
...take a break
and recharge
your batteries!..
”





EMMERSONS SOLICITORS ARE WINNERS - THAT'S OFFICIAL

And the North East community
is winning too.

There are times in life when it's nice to be given a pat on the back for a job well done. A letter of thanks from a client always goes down well. A bottle of bubbly is even better!!

However, when you are lauded by your fellow peers, it is particularly heart-warming because the people who are bound to be the most critical are those who do a similar job. They know where to look for faults. They appreciate the amount time and effort which can be required.

In that case, everyone at North East based law firm Emmersons Solicitors must be feeling chuffed at the moment because they're collecting prestigious awards like confetti.

Latest awards to be sitting on their mantelpiece are Private Client Team of the Year awarded at the British Wills and Probate Awards.....Small Law Firm of the Year, awarded at the Law Society Excellence Awards...and for founding partner Jacqueline Emmerson, a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Wearside Women in Business awards.

Praise indeed.

"When I founded the company over twenty years ago, I wanted to build a team who have the same

values as me," says Jacqueline. "The awards are a reflection, not only of the work we do and the results we obtain, but also of how the team works together. I know they feel a sense of pride when we collect an award."

As with all awards, it's important to look at why the award was given.

The Private Client Team of the Year award...(the important word is 'team')...was won largely for the work Emmersons do within the community. For example they work closely with the LGBTQ+ community to provide advice and guidance for clients. Several of the Emmersons team volunteer with the Alzheimer's Society's Dementia Friends programme which aims to transform the way people think about dementia.

"We help mainly in the Gosforth area of Newcastle," adds Jacqueline. "We try to bring the community together and raise awareness about dementia. We visit other businesses like restaurants, cafes, estate agents, travel agents etc, to explain how they can help people with dementia and what to look for."

It's certainly worth pointing out that this award is the Blue Riband award for Wills and Probate with smaller companies like Emmersons Solicitors up against multinational firms and banks. Being nominated was an achievement....winning is fantastic. Put it this way; these awards are so often won by London based companies, so Jacqueline and her team have really put North East solicitors on the map. Well done.

Jacqueline is one the most experienced solicitors in the region. Such is her standing within the profession that she was one of the first and youngest members of the Law Society's specialist Family Law Panel. She was also a member of Resolution and a trained Collaborative Family Lawyer.

However, as you can see from what she has achieved to raise awareness of dementia, she is heavily involved in charity work. The Lifetime

Achievement Award at the Wearside Women in Business awards was down to her efforts with the Armed Forces charity, SSAFA (Soldiers, Sailors & Airmen's Family Association). She's been helping the organisation for over twenty years aiming to raise awareness about the needs of serving and ex-serving personnel, especially in the area of PTSD.

"Social responsibility is something that everyone at Emmersons Solicitors is aware of. When I founded the company my first office was in Sunderland. Sunderland is a key recruitment area for the Armed Forces. For example the Remembrance Sunday service in Sunderland is the biggest outside of London. Consequently we have a lot of Sunderland and North East personnel in the Forces and some of them can find themselves in legal difficulty. They can easily lose their livelihood. We try to help and regularly negotiate with senior officers to try and resolve the problem. Remember, if a soldier is in trouble, this can have a knock-on effect for their family."

In other words, Emmersons Solicitors are winners....and they're also helping our communities here in the North East.

The last 18 months have been difficult times for a lot of people. It is therefore wonderful to report on a win-win story.

Or in the case of Emmersons Solicitors....a win, win, win story.

And that's official.

If you need some legal advice, the best idea is to get in touch with Jacqueline and her team at Emmersons Solicitors. They have offices in Newcastle and Sunderland. For Newcastle, call 0191 284 6989, or for Sunderland call 0191 567 6667. Get in touch, sort out an appointment, and then get ready for some winning advice.

SOLICITOR OF THE MONTH

In the latest of our popular series of features we talk to...

SUE MCARTHUR

Family Solicitor and Mediator,
EMG Solicitors

Which area of the law do you work in?

Family law.

What has been your career path so far?

I did my training contract in London and spent 10 years there; I emigrated to Australia and qualified over there as both a solicitor and a barrister; I then moved back to the UK to the North East (where I spent my teenage years) and have remained here since. Since returning I have become a resolution accredited family law specialist, a trained collaborative lawyer and an accredited family mediator.

What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

Coming back from Australia and being unable to immediately find a job as I had 'been out of the industry for over five years' despite having worked as a family lawyer in Australia. It was very trying to say the least, also completing my mediation accreditation portfolio which was a mammoth task.

Who do you most respect in your industry?

Those family professionals who stand up for what they believe in and in so doing make positive changes to our professional lives.

Which fictional lawyer would you most like to meet?

Harvey Specter from *Suits*.

What is your greatest strength?

Being able to build rapport with clients and allowing them to tell their story.

Sue McArthur

What is your biggest weakness?

Not believing in myself and my strengths, or so people tell me!!

What are your remaining career aspirations?

To continue to build the family mediation practice and to continue to be an approachable and creative family lawyer.

How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

Moving away from court being the default position and for people to be advised and assisted to enable them to deal with matters out of court. The court system is not fit for

purpose. The court can only apply the law.

There will always be a need for court for certain cases, but it does not really deal with the issues that are present for most families and makes it very difficult for families to truly resolve their differences and move forward positively.

How do you like to unwind?

Red wine, food and good company after a long walk.

If you would like any advice on Family Law or Family Mediation issues please contact Sue on 0191 500 6989 (Offices in Durham & Gosforth).

sue.mcarthur@emgsolicitors.com

LEGAL DISPUTE? WHY NOT MEDIATE?

Elmwoods Law are mediation experts. Let's start by stating the obvious. If two parties have a legal dispute which ends up in court there will be a winner and a loser and it will cost the losing party a lot of money.

But does it always have to end that way?

Why not meet in the middle?

"Mediation encourages the parties to look for a solution that works for both of them," said Angela Curran from Newcastle based Elmwoods Law & Mediation. "It's very easy to assume that in every dispute there has to be a winner and a loser, but in many cases it isn't like that."

Mediation lets a neutral third party, the mediator, help the parties to find a solution which can satisfy both sides to the dispute.

An example which Angela gives really does sum up a lot of the essence of the process – this is a training exercise often used on mediator training courses:

A farmer has sold two tonnes of fruit, one tonne to each of two end users. Unfortunately, the growing season is poor and the crop only yields one tonne. Neither end user is happy. What should he do? Actually, once the legal teams investigate the problem, it turns out that both parties want a different part of the fruit. They don't need the whole fruit. The solution is that the outer skin is removed and given to one party while the other party gets the soft inner flesh.

Thinking outside of the box, looking at what the parties actually want out of the dispute and agreeing to something that a court could never order allows both parties to walk away with a 'win' and hopefully a continued relationship.

"On some occasions it isn't about money or compensation. I recall a mediation I was involved with where one party wasn't happy about some cosmetic surgery they had undergone. This resulted in litigation against the surgeon. However, once I started to mediate the case it became clear that the real issue was the information given to the patient before the surgery. It was agreed that the surgeon, with the assistance of his former patient, would rewrite all of the pre-surgical

literature. This was done during the course of the mediation. The parties refused to be in the same room together at the start of the day but by the end of it they had redrafted the documentation and shaken hands. The surgeon also refunded the cost of the surgery which had not actually been requested by his patient. That is what mediation can do. A judge doesn't have the power to get that sort of result."

It wasn't too long ago that mediation was seen as the new kid on the block. Today, it is a legal tool which is taken very seriously. It's been mainstream for over 20 years now.

"Lawyers need to be educated", adds Angela. "What is the client really trying to achieve? Can the legal team achieve a satisfactory result in a different way...look for a different solution so that both parties can walk away with something they can live with rather than where one wins, and one loses." It's in clients' best interests to find a resolution that's fair, speedy and cost effective – mediation can deliver this.

Mediation has been traditionally carried out face to face with the parties meeting up at a neutral venue and the mediator shuttling between them trying to find common ground. Lockdown changed all of this and mediation has moved to the virtual world. Angela confirmed that initially she thought this would never work but after conducting many

remote mediations on various platforms she is now a convert. She points out the obvious benefits of further costs savings as the parties do not have to travel but also the fact that for the parties themselves it is far less stressful as they can take part in the process from their own homes. Remote mediations have a very high success rate and Angela predicts that they are here to stay although face-to-face mediations will always be an option for those who feel they need it.

Angela has over 25 years of experience as a mediator and has been involved in some very complex cases. She is particularly experienced in mediating medical negligence disputes and is also a member of the Court of Appeal mediation panel involving the mediation of cases before they go to the appeal judges after an initial trial – disputes really can be mediated at any point provided the parties are prepared to talk.

In other words, when it comes to mediation, Angela Curran and Elmwoods Law & Mediation are THE people to turn to.

For more information or if you would just like an informal chat you should contact Angela and her team at Elmwoods Law & Mediation. You can find her contact details on their website www.elmwoodslaw.co.uk



Angela Curran

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SOLICITORS



EL NOCHE DEL SOL

On Friday 5th November, St James' Square Law Firm hosted a Mexicana themed charity ball in partnership with its Charity of the Year, The Chronicle Sunshine Fund, at the Grand Hotel in Gosforth Park.

It was a huge success that raised over £40,000 to help provide disabled children across the North East with specialist, life enhancing equipment that would otherwise be unavailable to them. From all the team at St James' Square and The Chronicle Sunshine Fund, a massive thank you to the wonderful guests who supported the event.







FREEDOM - A CALL FOR MORE, RATHER THAN WAR!

I had the incredible honour of joining the Remembrance Parade in Ponteland last month. The whole community came together to remember those that gave their lives during the various wars.

Courageous and selfless service and sacrifice from members of all communities and religion joining forces to fight for our freedom. Interestingly one sixth of the British Forces was made up by Indians in the early to mid-1900's.

The following is an excerpt from a speech I gave as part of my role as Honorary Colonel of the 101st RA Regiment Royal Artillery - an amazing honour bestowed upon me to represent our armed forces and a truly humbling experience given all they have done for us.

Freedom can mean so many different things to us all. Simple things like being free to live and love in a way that suits us. Being free from persecution, being free to pursue our dreams, our ambitions and aspirations.

Freedom is far from simply feeling liberated. Freedom is a sense of belonging, being able to be what you want to be, and realising your ambitions and aspirations. Freedom is fitting in.

However, we all haven't always been equally free.

Every single inspirational speech ever given, relates to Freedom. From Martin Luther King's "I have a Dream", Emmeline Pankhurst's "Freedom or Death" to Winston Churchill's "We Shall Fight on The Beaches". Each one

illustrating the fight of those before us to make our world a better place.

There is no doubt that many have suffered injustice. Whether black and ethnic minorities not being given the same opportunities as others, or women being held back or simply not being allowed to vote.

Whilst I truly love our region and there is no other place I would want to be, it hasn't always been rosy. Growing up I saw first-hand so many injustices and inequality across all communities. From deprivation, discrimination and disengagement. Families struggled to put food on the table, worrying about bills to pay, feeling caged in their own communities.

Being born on the banks of the Tyne in our North East, the greatest region in the world, I never really stopped to consider the importance of freedom. After all we live in a modern, developed free world, and I thought I was living in a free society.

When I was 18 living in a devout Muslim household, I thought freedom was sneaking out of the window to go out with my friends and then sneaking back in. I assumed my late mother mustn't have known, yet couldn't quite understand how unlucky I was having to get

up at 6am to drive her to the car boot sale in Blaydon every Sunday.

I thought freedom was shooting off to London after finishing my studies....yet I could not have felt lonelier.

It wasn't until later on in life that I realised what freedom truly means. Freedom is equality and equity. **Freedom is a sense of, and being part of, a community.** A true community recognises and respects differences, making space and a place for us all. **Freedom is me being appointed as the first non-military Honorary Colonel of my regiment and feel as though I belong.**


There is no better place than our armed forces to experience a sense of belonging, a true sense of community, and there is no other place that I would want to be to share this sense of camaraderie and kinship.

Our Armed Forces not only protects our freedom, but also offers freedom by creating a community where every one of us can fit in. Times have changed and certainly for the better. So rather than going to war, we can all do more to become part of this astonishing community – let's all come together and support our armed forces. Not just on this day but every day.

Lest we forget the contribution of all of those that lost their lives and all of those that continue to serve, especially those that are not with their loved ones this Christmas.

From my family to yours, Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year!

Ammar Mirza CBE is Chair & Founder of Asian Business Connexions, Chair of the NELEP Business Growth Board, Chair of the IoD North East (North) and holds various positions across the public and private sectors.



**AmmarM would like to wish all customers,
partners and supporters a very Merry Christmas
and a prosperous New Year**



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ASIAN BUSINESS CONNEXIONS

ABC Membership

Grow your network. Grow your business.



Connect

Meet and meaningfully connect with members of the Asian and wider communities. Attend sell-out events that provide insights and inspiration from a range of industry and community leaders. Be part of something special that values individuality and ensures inclusion.

Support

Access a range of business and personal support programmes including Peer Networks, Accelerator and Scale. Recruitment support and advice through our Inclusion by Default campaign, to help organisations recruit ethnic minorities. Exclusive specialist roundtable events to address industry challenges.

Promote

Meet Ministers, High Commissioners and other leaders to promote you and your organisation. Feature in our media and marketing that can get a unique message out to an audience of over 1 million. Showcase your offer to the whole community.

ABC is a not-for-profit social enterprise that aims to connect, support and promote the Asian and wider community

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OUR VISION

"SME CofE aims to be the leading Small to Medium Enterprise (SME) Support Hub. A truly collaborative and ethical approach that will provide a one stop High quality centre of excellence for All support needs, helping SMEs to start, survive and thrive."

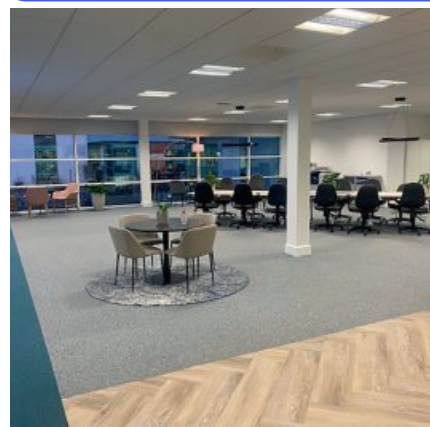
OUR MISSION

"To bring together credible enterprise support and service delivery partners with the single goal of providing the right support, at the right time, for the right price for all SMEs to grow."

*Wishing you a very
SMERry Christmas!*

Reach out to see how we can help you in 2022

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SSCL - INSIDE NEON OUR EXCITING NEW NEWCASTLE OFFICE

SSCL is the largest provider of business-critical support services for Government, Police and Defence clients.

We employ around 2,500 people and play a vital role in transforming services through digital solutions and innovations that make things easier for our clients and their employees.

We have six Centres of Excellence across the UK – Newcastle, Glasgow, York, Blackpool, Newport and Gosport. SSCL Newcastle is where we deliver services for our clients including Human Resources, Payroll, Expenses and Benefits, Customer Contact Services and IT.

We moved into our wonderful new Newcastle office at Neon in Quorum Business Park in December 2020 and are now welcoming more colleagues back in as we move to a hybrid way of working.

Our new office still operates under COVID restrictions ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all colleagues, and we are using digital technology to support the return to office through the use of a smart booking app.

Our SSCL Newcastle Centre of Excellence was designed with input and ideas from our colleagues, and we now have an environment where our people feel inspired to be their best, feel relaxed and comfortable.

SSCL is about transformation, innovation and the future. In 2021 we wanted to showcase this in a modern design, providing a bright, innovative and creative office environment.

Inspiration came from Newcastle Central Train Station, Newcastle's Co-op Tower of the 1930's, the Tyne and Millennium Bridges and Newcastle/Gateshead Quayside.

These iconic local images have been incorporated into the artwork on walls and doors, symbolising the connection between people. The result is a neo-classical interior design inspired by Grey Street - creating an avant-garde vibe with a distinct art deco influence.

We have a number of features to benefit our colleagues:

- Wellbeing room.
- Relaxing social spaces.
- Collaborative working spaces.
- Great facilities on site and on campus.

This has been a positive move and will hopefully provide our colleagues with an office environment and facilities they can all be proud of for many years to come.

Stu Clennell, Head of Payroll Operations,

SSCL Government based in Newcastle can't speak highly enough of our new space; "Well I can honestly say that SSCL has offered that "something special" with the opening of our new office on Quorum Business Park. This new way of working has allowed the office to be specifically designed in a much more modern way. I think everyone was wary of returning to the office, but it has been amazing to see the delight on colleagues faces returning to the office, not only because they are seeing their colleagues face to face for the first time in over 18 months, but an awful lot of their delight is undoubtedly because they now have such an amazing working environment."

To find out more about SSCL and what we do, go to: sscl.com

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(Stat source: Hubspot, 2020)



NE1'S BIGG MARKET REDEVELOPMENT – A BIG SUCCESS STORY, A POTTED HISTORY AND EXCEPTIONAL RESULTS ACHIEVED

By Alex Slack, Head of Special Projects at Newcastle NE1.

As the end of NE1's Bigg Market project moves into view, it's an opportune time to look back and remember that NE1 has always had ambitious plans and a clear vision for the Bigg Market area. We recognised that investment in the public realm would help catalyse private sector investment and change the area's fortunes.

The transformative results of this vision are now evident for all to see. And, as we always believed, the effort and focus on the area has catalysed further investment of in excess of £13m from the private sector, creating over 350 new jobs along the way and attracting a whole host of new businesses to the Bigg Market, another two newcomers in the last six months alone. The project is even used as an exemplar for other UK cities by the Government's High Street Task Force.

We were confident that preserving, enhancing, and celebrating the Bigg Market's status as a heritage asset would ensure that it contributed to the future economic prosperity of the city. The Bigg Market contains 14 listed buildings and is the historic heart of Newcastle, close to the Castle Keep, Newcastle Cathedral and Newcastle Central Station. Its regeneration has also dovetailed with other National Lottery Heritage Fund projects in Newcastle at The Common Room and at the Cathedral which together have reinforced Newcastle's heritage offer. Led by NE1, the project has had funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Newcastle City Council.

We first started thinking about the project some eight years ago in response to calls from resident businesses to help improve an area caught in a spiral of decline and, whilst there was doubtless scepticism in some quarters, there was a huge groundswell of positive support for the proposals.

The Bigg Market has been high on NE1's agenda since the Business Improvement District Company was elected for its second term in 2013. In 2016, we secured the NLHF grant and garnered support from Newcastle City Council and from local businesses to help bring our plans to fruition. The work behind the scenes, at development stage took almost five years, with the delivery phase, over the last three years, seeing the most dramatic transformation of the area and now as we near the end of the project, it is amazing to look back on all that has been delivered. We are extremely proud of our achievements, not least our ability to successfully sell the vision to others, because it is with their help and investment that we have collectively contributed to the area's regeneration, and we are now seeing the fruits of our labour.

The first phase of the Bigg Market regeneration was the redevelopment of the public realm and the creation of the tiered-terraces, high quality street furniture, additional trees and improved lighting. The new space enabled hospitality venues to create new pavement cafes and restaurants, with 6 now operational compared to the one solitary licence that existed at the start of the project. A major goal of this project was to demonstrate that the area could be a viable daytime destination as well as a night-time one and outdoor dining has reinforced that. This part of the project was delivered as a partnership between NE1 and Newcastle City Council and was completed on time, to budget and when complete won the Lord Mayors

Design Award for Landscape in 2019. The work transformed the look and feel of the area and created flexible spaces and the right conditions for quality street events and markets as well as workable outdoor areas for businesses. NE1 hosted a series of regular street food events and two events to celebrate the area's history as a vibrant marketplace but the space really came into its own during the Covid crisis with many businesses using their outdoor pavement cafes and dining areas to trade through the various levels of restrictions.

Once the public realm work was underway and businesses could see the start of the transformation, work began on the shop front and façade restorations. Arguably the most significant and ambitious transformation was that of the subterranean Victorian WC's which, following a complete restoration, now operates as a wine bar in one of the most unique locations in the city. Since 2018 there have been another seven restoration projects with a further four currently undergoing work on site. Other major regeneration work is still proposed within the area with pipelined projects including the Malhotra Group's proposed hotel development and the redevelopment of Thomson House, the former home of the Chronicle and Journal newspapers.

Because the history and heritage of the area is at the heart of its redevelopment, it was essential to find ways to celebrate it – that's why we commissioned Northern Stars to create a documentary film, 'A People's History of the Bigg Market'. The film is still available to view at ne1biggmarket.co.uk and provides a wonderful insight into people's memories of the area.

Another hugely important part of the project has been an activity and learning programme to raise awareness about the area, its history and heritage and the Bigg Market's future. To date the programme has involved both of the city's Universities, Newcastle College and numerous local schools.

The NLHF Bigg Market project will end following the completion of the four buildings currently underway, but it is vital that the positive momentum does not simply fizzle out and there is still plenty of work to be done to ensure the area does not again fall into a spiral of decline. There are opportunities aplenty and there remains a wealth of under-utilised space, especially within the upper floors of buildings. NE1's intervention was always intended as a catalyst for a programme of improvement and whilst we will endeavour to sustain this beyond the life of the project, it is vital that other stakeholders now play their part.

The future challenge for the Bigg Market and the city will be the management and maintenance of the space as NE1 shifts its focus to other areas of the city.

www.newcastle1ltd.com



IN CONVERSATION WITH...

IAIN ANDERSON

Government appointed LGBT+ Business Champion to talks to Peter Darrant, from Pride Radio Media Centre, Pelaw about his latest appointment.

Iain Anderson is the new LGBT+ business champion and I am delighted he is joining me to chat about his new role. It sounds like a grand title, I didn't see it at careers at school, what does it mean Iain?

Absolutely, no careers service was going to give you this job at all. Look, it's very good to be with you. First time the Government has had this role, so I'm kind of making it up as I go along. If I am really honest with you. But no, there are two or three really, really key priorities. Firstly, to showcase some brilliant work going on by LGBT businesses and allies. There's not a lot of research and evidence the Government has collected so far on what really works, so first job is to get out, meet businesses, and find out what works.

Secondly, we are going to put together a large company - small company buddying scheme. Large companies, they've got diversity people, HR people. Small companies - it's just a bit harder to do sometimes. So, we are going to do some signposting, get bigger companies to help smaller companies, actually probably get some smaller companies to show big companies what to do in that regard, too. I mean, I used to run an SME that I've taken into a larger business, so I kind of understand that.

And then the third thing, and I am really, really excited about this...Is there's going to be a global conference next year?

This is the first time the UK has ever held an LGBT+ conference, and it's hopefully going to secure some pretty important domestic and global changes.



In your role, who do you report to? Do you get to sit at the top table? Is Boris there? Can you say "Chancellor, can we have some more money?" Or are you reporting back and saying this is how we should shape policy going forward?

So, think of this as like a commissioner. My job is to take what I am hearing from businesses in their space, back to government. And ultimately, this reports to the foreign secretary and the minister for women and equalities. But also, you know, my role has been kind of approved by the prime minister, too. So, this goes to Boris as well, and I know his team is taking a really active interest in the conversations that we are having.

It's a new role and you identify within the LGBT+ community. I'm interested to know what this role would have meant to you in business ten or twenty years ago? Is this role a big game-changer?

When I first came into the world of work, the idea of being "out" just wasn't possible. When I launched my business, like many of us, I was out to my friends, but not necessarily out to my customers. I wish I'd made that decision to be out at work and in my business much, much earlier in my life. Since I've been out, my business is five times larger than it was before. So, I've seen the benefits of that, both as a businessman and as an activist in this space. Um.. I've worn what I've seen, and what I am kind of scooping out from being out and about in sight, and the economy if you can be out and about in the economy. Get some real examples to take to government.

They've done an awful lot, to be fair, around gender, they've done an awful lot, to be fair, around race. But this whole space is not very well-researched by government, and I want to try and change that. If you'd told me this job could have existed when I, you know, was kind of first coming into... into the world of work, I would have been amazed. It wouldn't have been possible thirty years ago. It shows how much has changed, but there's still a lot more to do.

What advice would you have given yourself thirty years ago? Because we've got a lot of young businesses people that will be reading this.

I just think being comfortable with yourself. I just think you're freer with your thoughts. I just think you're more creative with your ideas. I just think you're more grounded... I could go on, and on, and on. You know, you're not hiding, you're not compartmentalizing things anymore. You're not saying one thing out of one corner of your mouth to a certain audience and saying something out of another corner of your mouth to another audience. I just think it allows you to be freer. And actually, saying beyond LGBTQ, I mean, if you are freer, and you are more open, I think more comes towards you. I think that's the opportunity. I mean, in pure raw economic terms, as I was saying, my business is five times larger than it was before I did this.

So, lots to do in your new role. I guess we'll have to watch what happens over the coming months?

Yes, watch very carefully!

To become involved in the aforementioned projects, please contact: lgbtbusinesschampion@geo.gov.uk

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IT'S TIME TO STEP OUT OF THE FAST LANE

Bryony Gibson, Director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, talks about the importance of taking some time away from work before exhaustion takes the Christmas joy out of your career.

At this time of year, my work and life tend to become especially hectic, and I don't think I'm alone.

For many people, the nearer we edge toward the sanctuary of a well-earned festive break, the more this most wonderful time of the year transforms into one of the most stressful.

Whether it's linked to the pressure of sales targets, the financial year-end, or the need to lock down new budgets and plans, the calendar's end never fails to instigate a deep desire in people to clear any outstanding jobs and tick them off their list before they can even begin to contemplate relaxing.

This year, when you add into the melting pot two years of constant change, irregular holidays, the blurred work-life boundaries created by homeworking, and the pressure of organising a magical Christmas at home, it is all too easy to see why December and January are the months that carry the highest risk of people burning out or losing the enthusiasm to work for their current employer.

What can you do to help yourself?

A certain level of stress may be unavoidable but, even if you are working long hours, burnout is preventable.

Firstly, there are some common warning signs you should look out for, including an increasing

number of errors at work, higher than usual levels of anxiety and worry, being constantly tired, or becoming disengaged and moody.

If this sounds like you, then it's time to sprinkle a little bit of joy back into your life. Start by stepping off the daily treadmill, even if only for a short time, to look after your health and well-being:

Exercise

Not only is exercise good for physical health, but it is also good for mental health and gives a positive emotional boost.

Eat Well

Eating healthily and, if possible, including foods in your diet that act as natural antidepressants, like those rich in Omega-3, can also help to lift your mood.

Get some sleep

Resting your body and resetting your mind is essential for your welfare, and that means getting into a healthy and regular sleep routine.

Ask for help

During stressful times, it's so important to reach out for help when you need it and share your problems instead of burying them and letting them build.

I know it's not easy - and I need to take a lot

of this advice myself - but these four widely accepted pieces of wisdom should help to navigate you safely to the Christmas break.

If you still feel unhappy, however, the holidays also offer the momentary pause you need to reflect, and I would start with four key questions; where you are, what is important to you, where do you want to be, and are you happy with the balance between home, family, work, and time for yourself?

They are big questions, so you must be brave and honest with yourself. If you struggle, try chatting openly with family and friends, and thinking about what makes you truly happy. The answers to what you do next won't be far away from there.

Personally, I like to use the downtime Christmas brings to be with my family and plan for the new year by creating lists and setting new goals and routines. This helps me to be clear about what it is I want to achieve in the coming months and how I plan to make it happen.

This year, I have a feeling it could lead to introducing and sticking to some new work-life boundaries, but whatever it means for you, don't be afraid of change. It is always better to try something new than settle for something that doesn't make you happy. Not many people regret making a choice, but plenty regret doing nothing at all.

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



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JOB OPPORTUNITIES...

CORPORATE FINANCE DIRECTOR

Newcastle, upto £75,000pa plus benefits

Strong growth in the market presents this award-winning large firm with the opportunity to appoint a Corporate Finance Director to operate across the Newcastle market as they expand their existing service line. With the flexibility to base yourself from a number of locations you will be instrumental in the development of the region.

Working alongside the Corporate Finance Partner you will operate as lead advisor on client engagements, generating work from external sources and developing the firms local presence. With a strong network across the business community you will already be well connected, valuing the benefit of collaborative working. My client is looking for an individual who is passionate about working with local businesses to assist them in their business activity at the same time as building a bigger and better service line to clients.

The team has achieved some great recent successes and with more resource expect to continue going from strength to strength. Their portfolio of services range from the provision of advice on all aspects of Mergers and Acquisitions, disposals, buy-outs/buy-ins, equity, capital and fundraising.

Applicants will be qualified (ACA/ACCA) with a strong career in corporate finance, able to demonstrate their success and experience on buy-side and sell-side M&A projects. As a natural relationship builder you will be excited about the opportunities available to develop business and win future work, through your network and an inquisitive approach to business.

PRACTICE ACCOUNTS

Durham, £20-35,000pa plus benefits, DOE

Looking to attract an Accountant to join a Durham based accountancy firm as a result of increased referral work. The team is long-serving, with a steady flow of graduates and school leavers joining each September to undertake professional accounting exams.

With the current resource and commitment to nurture staff and provide training, they are seeking an individual preferably from a practice environment with relevant experience. The firm are able to accommodate anyone from 12 months experience/ AAT level through too ACA/ACCA qualified. Dependant upon your background and preference work is available in the following areas:

- *Year end statutory accounts production and audit*
- *Completion of VAT returns*
- *Production of monthly management accounts*
- *Bookkeeping*

This is a rare opportunity in the current climate to find a firm that can afford the resource to support your learning and development. It also presents as an opportunity to join a firm that value the investment in you and teaching new skills.

Prior use of accounting software is required, such as Sage, Quickbooks, Iris, Xero or similar. Both full and part-time hours can be considered along with flexible arrangements you may need around family life. Study towards AAT/ACA/ACCA is provided.

PRIVATE CLIENT SENIOR TAX MANAGER

County Durham, c£65-70,000pa plus benefits

A rapidly growing accountancy practice is looking for an experienced Senior Manager or Manager with expertise in private client tax planning to join their existing tax team. The role will focus on the portfolio management of private wealth clients including HNWI's, Owner Managed Businesses, Trusts and Estates. With an emphasis on the provision of advisory services including Inheritance and Capital Gains Tax there will also be a small element of compliance overview.

You will be afforded the time to develop strong working relationships with your clients and to identify opportunities to offer additional tax services to clients. You will find yourself supported not only by the team but the Tax Partners who hold a significant amount of technical knowledge and expertise. The opportunity comes with a great amount of autonomy to run your portfolio as you see appropriate.

We are looking for a qualified individual (ACA/ACCA and/or CTA) preferably with upwards of five years post qualification experience in private client advisory. Trusts and Estates exposure, or holders of STEP is desirable. Any knowledge on a broader range of corporate tax matters would assist when speaking with Owner Managed Businesses but the firm's Partners are on hand to support. More importantly is attracting an individual driven to deliver excellent client service and proven people management skills.

FINANCE MANAGER

South Tyneside, £35-40,000pa plus benefits

An Independent School with a strong family background are seeking to appoint a Finance Manager to lead the day to day operation and supervision of the School's accounting function. Providing a safe and caring environment, one which is often reflected in a family itself, the School take pride in the way the children are taught and helped to develop into strong individual characters, who will be able to succeed in the world today.

In what is a hands-on role you will responsible for the complete accounting function from data entry through to reconciliation, control and preparation of monthly, quarterly and annual accounts. Your work will include; nominal ledger, fee ledger, purchase ledger, cash, billing and production of termly and year end accounts to trial balance.

Demonstrating strong communication skills you will be required to develop positive working relationships with all academic and support staff as well as external contacts. Your work will include maintaining the bursary and discounts ledger and dealing with parental queries. The preparation of budgets and subsequent management of these, providing expenditure reports to budget holders and analysing expenditure data are important aspects of the financial management. There will be some administrative aspects, maintaining archived audit files, ordering supplies and the presentation of information for Investor meetings.

Applicants will hold a minimum of eight years accounting experience, capable of running core accounting functions independently with a desire to work in a school. The ability to work in a commercial office environment is essential and some knowledge of Xero would be beneficial but not a requirement. Applicants either qualified (ACA/ACCA/CIMA) or by experience will be considered.

To express an interest in any of the above vacancies, or for a confidential discussion about your career in professional practice, please contact Bryony Gibson, Bryony Gibson Consulting, on 0191 375 9983 or bryony@bryonygibson.com



Jenny Allinson from The Bernicia Foundation which has allocated a further £110k to local community charities.

BERNICIA FOUNDATION DONATES A FURTHER £110K TO LOCAL NORTH EAST COMMUNITY GROUPS

A further £110,000 of monetary donations have been given to more of the North East's smaller charities, volunteer groups and grass roots initiatives as part of The Bernicia Foundation's most recent round of funding.

Delivered as part of an ongoing drive to make a real difference to the region's communities and their people, local organisations across Tyne and Wear, Northumberland and Teesside have once again benefitted.

These include a sexual abuse counselling service, several mental health and learning disability charities, a community training enterprise, an ex-offenders support service, a digital employability project, a food poverty distribution service and a young carers respite centre, amongst others.

This is in addition to several young individuals who have also been awarded personal grants towards training costs to help achieve their sporting ambitions.

It is hoped that the awards will make a positive difference to each of the chosen organisations and will boost vital services supporting people

with different needs. For many projects, this also comes as welcome news and a much needed lifeline given they have struggled to cope with rising costs, increased demand, heightened pressures and reduced financial support.

Jenny Allinson, Director of The Bernicia Foundation, explained, "We are absolutely delighted to once again help these local North East projects and organisations, all delivering crucial assistance in their communities. There are some incredible people doing amazing things on behalf of others, and whilst we would love to allocate funds to every single organisation that applied, we can only choose so many at a time. It's extremely difficult but I would very much urge those that may not have been successful this time round, or anyone new who requires much needed funds, to reapply or get in touch."

The funding programme is once again open to applications now until midnight on Monday 13 December 2021.

The Bernicia Foundation is a £1m charitable trust set up two years ago by Bernicia housing association to help direct funds where they are most needed - supporting local people living in hard-working North East communities.

Two funding streams are available – the inclusion fund for voluntary/community groups, registered charities and social enterprises which awards up to £10,000, and the inspiration fund, awarding up to £1,000 for young people, aged 24 years and under, who are actively working towards personal goals.

For more details on the application process, go to www.berniciafoundation.com

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East Durham

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In 1971, Barrie Lee opened the first branch in Horden, with the aim to provide the communities of East Durham a personal and caring funeral service. 50 years on, the company is now run by son-in-law, Philip Maddison, along with his children, Tom and Ellen, who all proudly acknowledge the milestone anniversary and thank the generations of families who trust in East Durham Funeral Service to provide their loved ones with the best possible service.

A message from Philip:

“ Having worked in the business since the age of 18, I took over completely in 2001. I was delighted to be joined by my children Tom and Ellen, making us third-generation funeral directors. Alongside our great team here, we now have further four branches, with our head office at The Manse, Peterlee.

Let our family assist your family, in your hour of need.

Although the funeral industry has certainly changed over the last 50 years, you can continue to put your trust in us to use our expertise to deliver the professional service that your family deserves, whether that's for a traditional funeral or one entirely bespoke.

★★★★★

To mark our **50th Anniversary** we have a **special offer of £360 discount** on any new pre-paid funeral plans.

With a funeral plan, not only will you be **protecting your loved ones** against unexpected costs, but you will also remove any uncertainty with regards to your final wishes. All with the peace of mind of knowing everything is secured at **today's prices**.

From a simple, unattended funeral to the finest farewell, all services can be personalised to your individual requirements

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- Award-winning floristry
- Complimentary Facebook notice
- Complete catering services
- Headstone consultants



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A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF...

MARK HENDERSON

Managing Director, Compliant

What were your career ambitions growing up?

I have always been a very focussed and hard-working individual which I learnt from my parents, because of that, I always wanted to run my own company.

I wanted to offer a service to businesses that really makes a difference to them and which ultimately, gains you respect for that.

Through many ups and downs over the years (as I'm sure everybody has), with the continuous support of my family, friends and work colleagues, I have at last reached that point.

Tell us about your current role?

As the Managing Director of Compliant FM (UK) Ltd, which provide internationally recognised standards such as ISO to all types of businesses, my role is quite varied. As a BSI trained lead auditor, I manage the ISO projects which includes consultation support through to face to face or online meetings.

I'm often out and about visiting clients and love the diversity the role brings and being able to help businesses grow is a great part of the job.

What is your proudest business achievement?

There have been many over the years, but more recently, we have been successful in gaining large contracts with nationally recognised companies such as IKEA and International Trade, both of which we helped in achieving UKAS accredited ISO standards.

How has your industry changed in the last decade?

The UKAS ISO ethos is all about continuous improvement therefore the industry is constantly changing and adapting. We operate to Demings Cycle of Plan, Do, Check, Act and as such we strive to be better in not only delivery of the standards but the streamlining and improvement of the standards themselves.

What are you currently working on?

We're currently working with a lot of clients on ISO 27001 which is the standard for Information Security, now, more than ever is the time to be cyber aware and we have certainly experienced an increase in interest for this system. Although we've seen excellent growth over the last 12 months, we never rest on our laurels and are always looking at ways to improve our offering and services. Along with the many clients we're currently working with on gaining their ISO certification, we're also



Mark Henderson

looking at improving and updating our website and increasing our sales and marketing activities.

Tell us about the team you work with?

What can I say except they are the heartbeat of the company's success. Their commitment, attitude and focus is second to none and I could not be prouder of that. Maybe that is my proudest business achievement – the team.

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

Many years ago I worked at a fantastic company and learned so much from them. It is fair to say it really set me on my way with a firm footing. The managing director always said that "life is one rich tapestry of changes". He meant that there will always be challenges and successes, but the whole effect makes it worthwhile when you lay it out and learn from its historical story.

What has been your biggest challenge?

There have been a few from my life's story but I'm lucky to have the attitude of mind to bounce back and keep on going and strongly believe that I will find the right path with the right business.

With Compliant, I have now found it and feel it's now time to develop, improve and enjoy the business with our great clients.

Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

I don't actually recognise the hero status of people. After all, we are all just the same with differing paths. However, there are many people I admire for

many different reasons, many household names could potentially be given for various reasons.

Internally for Compliant, I do admire the attention to every conceivable detail that my colleagues, Nicola and Danielle bring to the business and their magnificent work ethic.

As for externally, I always like to see people who have succeeded through adversity or commitment, so people who devote their time to recovering from a challenge or charitable causes that make the difference.

How do you unwind outside of work?

At last, an easier question! Quite simply, work does not stress me, as we respond and work closely with our customers and deliver what they need.

Every Saturday being on the field with our two dogs and then settling down in the evening with some ambient lighting, chill out music and a few vodkas is very relaxing.

Favourite Book and Boxset?

Believe it or not I am in the last few months of finishing a Chartered Manager degree at Sheffield Hallam University, so any relevant book depending on the subject matter!

I do like a James Patterson novel when on holiday though.

Box set currently is "Not Going Out" – just makes me laugh with the continuous innuendo.

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NHS Business



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Michelle Rainbow

NORTH EAST BUSINESSES CALLED ON TO HELP SHAPE HEALTH AND SCIENCE CURRICULUM

With more than 100,000 NHS vacancies nationally, a nationwide drive to recruit nurses, and a regional aim of doubling the number of jobs in the North East health and life sciences sector, the potential for young people to go into a career in this sector looks bright.

In the North East, employers are joining forces with education providers to make sure that young people gain the practical skills needed in the future workforce. Michelle Rainbow, Skills Director at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), explains more.

The health and life sciences sector in our region has real potential for growth and we know that many businesses operating in this area have plans to expand. At the same time we know that young people are amongst the hardest hit by the effects of the pandemic, with the months following the start of the pandemic seeing a fall in employment levels for people aged 16 to 24.

So how can we make sure that young people in our region can take full advantage of the job opportunities which are out there, now and in the future? And how can we make sure they have the specialist skills that employers in the health and life sciences sector need?

In the last year, six organisations in the North East

LEP region – four further education colleges, one school and one sixth form centre – have become amongst the first places in the UK approved to deliver the new T Level in Health and Science.

T Levels are two-year qualifications for 16 to 18 year olds which combine industry placements with classroom learning. In contrast with shorter work experience placements, the on-the-job learning that takes place during a T Level lasts for a minimum of 45 days and is real world, meaningful work provided by employers.

And here in the North East, we've gone the extra mile to make sure that T Levels are designed to deliver the skills that employers are looking for in their future employees.

The North East LEP has played a huge role in shaping Health and Science T Levels in our area. The North East LEP area is the only region which has pulled together a network of employers, universities, schools, sixth form colleges, FE colleges and awarding organisations to support T

Level delivery. It's resulted in a coherent approach which we're sharing with other areas nationally.

As an example, the University of Sunderland and South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust are working with local colleges to help design the curriculum for young people who want to go into adult nursing. Students will gain meaningful, practical experience during their course, those who complete it successfully will be guaranteed an interview for the Adult Nursing degree at the University of Sunderland, and successful students will be supported to apply for posts within the Trust on completion of their degree.

So you can see it's creating a pipeline of young people who want to work in this sector, have a relevant qualification and practical experience, and who have followed a curriculum designed to match the skills employers are looking for.

A Health and Science T Level can open the door not only to a career in nursing but, depending on what learners decide to specialise in during their second year, they could also progress onto careers in pharmacy services, midwifery and lab technician specialisms.

There are opportunities for more businesses to get involved in providing placements and helping to shape the skills that young people in our region are gaining. At a time when the employment rate amongst younger people has been hit by the pandemic, I want to make sure that we're doing all that we can to give young people the best chance of success, so if you'd like to be involved, we'd like to hear from you.

To find out more about T Levels in the North East, email kim.smith@nelep.co.uk

MAKING A MATCH: FINDING A BUSINESS MENTOR THROUGH THE NORTH EAST GROWTH HUB



Karen Berry

Are you ready to take your business to the next level? Then Growth Through Mentoring could be the programme for you. Karen Berry, Growth Hub Connector (Mentoring Programme), explains more.

From building confidence, to developing skills or even just a friendly chat with someone outside of your business, the benefits of mentoring can be huge.

At the North East Growth Hub, we want more of our business leaders to experience the positive impact a mentor can make, which is why we're inviting people to find out more about our Growth through Mentoring programme.

We match business owners with a mentor who has experience of successfully scaling a business themselves, so you can benefit from what they've learnt along the way.

We want to help leaders who want to work on growing their business, ultimately creating more and better jobs for the region.

Making a match

The matching process is an important component of establishing a successful relationship between the mentor and mentee. Our team takes the time to really understand your business and our mentors' areas of expertise in order to make the most appropriate match.

Businesses are matched with mentors we feel they will have the right chemistry with and who will have the skills and knowledge to create the maximum impact.

Mentoring sessions can take place online or in person and offer business leaders a three to six month programme to work with a mentor as a sounding board and someone to share ideas with.

The mentors themselves are experienced business people who have been there, seen it and done it. They give up their time to share the lessons they learned along the way and help others. Whatever area of your business you want to work on – from sales and marketing to organisational culture and digital adoption – a mentor could help.

Boosting the growth mindset

Our work is about developing the mentee as a person and as a business leader, building confidence and resilience.

One thing we know about business owners is they can be very busy but they can't effectively work on the business if they don't work on themselves first.

Mentors can provide that vital support needed to turn the dial and get the business moving to the next level.

We've found our programme is working really well and are proud of how Growth Through Mentoring is helping North East businesses to develop. Client feedback recently showed 100% of Growth Through Mentoring participants said they would recommend the programme to others.

Who is Growth Through Mentoring for?

Business in any sector can take part and the programme is targeted at founders and owner managers of SMEs based in our North East LEP area who want to improve their leadership capabilities. Businesses who will benefit the most from mentoring will have been trading for at least two years, will be employing more than five staff and be experiencing high growth in turnover.

So if you have the ambition and potential to grow your business, get in touch and we'll help you find your mentoring match.

Find out more at
www.northeastgrowthhub.co.uk



A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF...

JACK SAWARD

Managing Director, Saward Marketing & Events

What did you set out to achieve this year?

Our primary focus was to continue to delivery event experiences for our clients, whether that be in person or online. At the same time as this we spent time helping shape their plans for the next 12-18 months, so that they can maximise their exposure in their own marketplace with a structured ROI and ROO (return on investment, return on objectives).

Has everything gone according to plan?

It's been challenging for our clients, team and contractors. Movements in government guidelines have been the most challenging, but they have also been understandable given the circumstances we have been living in. There has been a lot of education and training delivered to ensure that the experience that is created is suitable to the audience either attending or engaging with the content provided.

How has the ongoing Covid crisis affected your business and how have you mitigated this?

Materials costs have increased because of supply/availability, clients have tried to wait as long as they can prior to committing to projects, we've had to deal with cancellations and postponements. However, having a clear line of communication with our clients and ensuring a frank and honest approach with them has allowed everyone to move forward. This trust is earned, not given and we are fortunate to work with a number of long term clients who know our values and standards.

What are you most proud of this year?

I think in simple terms, we are still here trading. We have seen a number of our peers close their doors and yet we have continued to support our clients and also gained new clients through good referral channels. We love what we do, so when someone advocates our services to their own peers that boosts the moral of all the team. An example of this came via a referral from our Podcast, yes you heard me right, via The Events insight Podcast! The feedback was humbling to myself and the team;

'Writing a recommendation is not something I normally do. But then again, I don't normally meet people like Jack Saward and his team. Saward Marketing & Events have been crucial to our launch of the UK business. Jack has always incorporated our perspective and objectives of the event in all his dealings. His experience, perspective, extensive knowledge and passion for understanding our crucial point has allowed him to deliver a fantastic show. We can't wait to work together on many other events we are planning over the next few years.' Pedro Levene, Director, Gatelock Van UK.

What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

There's always something that can be done, even when things are difficult! I've done some great networking over the past 12/18 months that I might not always have had the opportunity to do, and business has been generated from it. So I'd always advocate for using your time wisely. You also never know where a new connection might lead. Don't sell at people, engage with them, find out where their pain points/pressure points are and help to resolve them, either directly or via one of your own connections. That support doesn't go unnoticed and you can never foresee where that gesture of support will lead to in the future.

How has your team changed?

It hasn't really, however what I do think has and will change further is the amount of collaborative pieces of work that will come from the next 12 months. We are getting a lot more enquiries from peers asking us to work on a project together. I see real strength in this approach and proactively advocate for it too. It also gives our team the chance to work with new people and learn. Something I always advocate for is continuous learning, you're never too old to learn new skills.

What have you learnt about yourself this year?

This year has allowed me to reflect and self-evaluate. I've taken the time to read properly the feedback we get as a business and that I get myself. It's generally been really positive and whilst often finding it difficult to accept praise (as I'm only doing my job!), I have begun to embrace it a little more comfortably.

I've also really enjoyed mentoring and supporting others this past 18 months, it's the old sports coach in me coming out again! So I'll be continuing to do this, whether that is direct or via guest university talks that I have enjoyed.

What's been the most enjoyable business social event you have attended?

I was asked to speak at International Confex this year in London. This was a great opportunity to meet up with industry colleagues and newly graduated event professionals. All I can say about the social side of the event is that as event professionals we know how to work hard and play hard. Although in the words of a good friend of mine Helen Moon from Eventwell 'Work hard, rest hard and the play will take care of itself'. We have a responsibility as an industry to monitor the health and wellbeing of our staff and that can, on occasions, be 'parked' when a project deadline approaches. As business owners we have a responsibility to monitor this and ensure all our teams are getting the correct rest and support they need to do their jobs effectively.

Describe 2021 in three words...

Challenging, reflective and resourceful.

What does the remainder of the year hold?

Having just got back from a big event in Scotland as well as projects in Italy and here in England, we have a number of other smaller events before the year is finished. We also have some really big events in the diary for 2022 that we are already designing and planning for. We've even started work on some of our 2023 events, so we're not going to get bored! What I would say though is that the industry is busy, its open for business, but ensure you are planning in advance otherwise you might not get the support you need when you request it as demand on those resources, especially the good ones, are higher than they've been in a long time.

[Linkedin.com/in/jacksaward](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jacksaward)

[Website : saward-me.com](http://saward-me.com)

“

...support doesn't go unnoticed and you can never foresee where that gesture of support will lead to in the future...

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SPINCRAFT BOLSTERS DIRECTOR TEAM VIA EXPERIENCE BANK GROUP

Don Murray recently joined Standex Engineering Technologies Group's Spincraft UK business as Managing Director earlier this year, and he was so impressed with his own journey that when he was ready to expand his senior leadership team, he turned again to Peter Neal at Experience Bank Group.

Spincraft UK offers engineered metal forming solutions to the aviation, oil & gas and medical markets with its core process being spin forming, supported by other critical added value processes.

With an office in Newburn and an office in Benwell, the North East based UK company recognised that it needed to update its approach to looking at the future, looking for investment and growth, both through current account expansion as well as new customer and market penetration. To do this Don, who had previously been at Rolls Royce for 35 years, has strengthened the existing team by bringing in Mark Healey as Director of Business Development.

Working with Peter Neal to find the ideal candidate, Don said: "When I was looking for a change in direction, I met Peter who just seemed to do things differently. I had been talking to other recruiters, but Peter seemed genuinely interested in me and in what I was doing, to make a difference. He went to great lengths to ensure he was under both my skin and that of his client's needs. He has a way of thinking and asking questions that make it a relaxing experience, and I certainly wasn't treated like a number or just one on a list."

Don was so impressed that when he came to expand his team in his new role, he asked Peter for help again.

"The beauty of the way Peter engages with you, means you aren't selling yourself. You are simply saying, this is who I am, could I be what you need?"

"When he first introduced Mark to me on paper,



Don Murray with Mark Healey

I chose to not pursue him as his CV didn't reflect quite what I was looking for. Peter asked me why and listed the reasons he thought there was synergy as he had got to know Mark the same way he had me. I trusted Peter's judgement and interviewed Mark and so far, it has been a very good decision.

"Mark is already making a difference with his high level of energy – he is very active and dedicated to result driven acts. He has ideas and puts them into action, delivering profitable aims, in which we can both see how the clarity for the future is starting to form.

"I can't thank Peter enough for his introduction, the leg work he puts in, his insight and his guidance into understanding what we needed to have the right person in place!"

Experience Bank Group incorporates a commercial venture providing two, symbiotic services – EB Board Level Recruitment and EB High Performing Boards along with The Experience Bank philanthropic, social enterprise company.

With this combination of specialist expertise, Experience Bank Group is uniquely positioned to help organisations ensure they have not only the right skills in the boardroom but also optimum board performance with higher value creation.

Peter said: "I was delighted that Don came to me to help him build his team. Firstly, to see him

doing so well and settled in his new role is very satisfying, and to put in place Mark to support his vision and journey is exciting – I will be watching their futures with much interest. I am also delighted that Don has since offered his services to The Experience Bank, on a pro-bono basis to support our philanthropic efforts."

For founding entrepreneurs and small charities, the social enterprise company, The Experience Bank, has a carefully curated network of inspiring, experienced people who can add value to many start-up businesses and small charities, and can match entrepreneurs to board advisors and non-executives who support businesses to become investment-ready or to successfully achieve the next phase of commercialisation.

5% of all revenue from the commercial activities of Experience Bank Group is gifted to The Experience Bank social enterprise to enable more start-ups, early-stage businesses, charities and social enterprises access to high quality, advisory and non-executive talent.

If you are keen to know more, then visit www.theexperiencebank.co.uk.

To gain access to The Experience Bank or for recruitment of a senior management or board position, email peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk or call Peter on 07843 329393.



Mike Clark (left) and John O'Connor (right) of Project Genesis Trust with Richard Holden MP (centre) next to new signage on the Consett Heritage Trail.

NEW HERITAGE SIGNS SIGNAL CONTINUED COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

Representatives from Project Genesis Trust have officially marked the installation of new signage which was erected along 4.5 miles of Consett's Heritage Trail to encourage more local people to use public open spaces during the lockdown period.

The £435,000 investment, made directly by the Trust to the local community, has, over the last 18 months, encouraged individuals of all ages from young people and families to retired walking groups, to take full advantage of the woodland trails at a time when for many, their mental health and wellbeing were being impacted.

The signs, the first of which was installed opposite the Café in the Park, detail the route of the trail, places of interest and its link to other local footpaths and national cycle routes such as the C2C which runs through Consett. It is hoped that residents, as well as new visitors to the area and event organisers, will continue to use the trails and

woodlands which have proved extremely popular. Local MP for North West Durham, Richard Holden, was present at a recent race event to mark the donation made.

John O'Connor of the Project Genesis Trust, commented, "The new trail maps and marker signposts were installed at a time when they were most needed and we're delighted to be able to acknowledge their installation, albeit a little later than planned. This is another example of the importance we place on investing directly in our community, and the comments we have received about the signs have been very positive indeed.

"The Heritage Trail attracts and is used by a great many people, not just locally but by many from

outside of the area. We hope the new signs will be used by different generations for years to come."

Richard Holden MP, added, "It's great to see local work being done to celebrate Consett heritage, not just looking at the past but also looking forward. This trail and signage will help people get out and about, and rediscover their area after the Covid pandemic."

Other recent community investments made by Project Genesis Trust include the Visit Consett website and the purchase of the former St John's Ambulance Station to establish a Heritage Centre.

project-genesis.org.uk



WHEN YOU REALISE THAT YOU'RE THE NIGHTMARE COLLEAGUE

Rumour has it that there is some tension between two of the presenters of the TV Show *Countdown*. So I was asked to go and speak on BBC Radio Scotland about how you can deal with difficult colleagues. During our pre-recording chat, the producer asked a really interesting question... "What if you're the difficult colleague?"

What a great question. I'm sure all of us have worked with someone we could consider to be a massive pain in the bum. We swap our 'difficult colleague' stories with our friends and loved ones. But what if we are the pain in the bum? The nightmare colleague?

I was able to cobble together an answer around doing some self-reflection and asking for and being open to feedback.

But it got me thinking...

When I mentioned to a former colleague that I was going for an assessment for ADHD, she laughed and said she wasn't surprised. Oops. I was probably a nightmare to sit next to at work. Constant talking and high levels of enthusiasm for everything. Completely distracting for everyone.

Generally we don't reflect enough on our own behaviour. I don't mean that we should beat ourselves up for our part in any conflict, just having an awareness of our impact on other people. Questioning what we could have done differently in a given situation. Whether we could have handled something in a different way and got a different result. Words matter. Could you have responded with more kindness and compassion? Could you have asked more questions to understand the other person's perspective? Could you have given clearer instructions?

Approach a trusted person (someone you would go to for advice and expect they'll be honest with you) and ask for specific feedback - what should I

stop doing/what should I start doing/what should I continue doing? You could ask a few people to build up a wider picture.

When you get the feedback, try not to take it personally. Some of the stuff you get back might sting a bit because it's true. And that's ok. This is learning. Some of it you may completely disagree with and that's ok too. Feedback only tells you about the other person's opinions and preferences. But do consider if it's true before discarding it.

If you do get the feedback that you are that nightmare colleague, then you have the power in your hands to change. Take the hit to your ego, sprinkle on a little bit of self-compassion, then listen to your colleagues and do something about it. Get some help. Find a coach.

Get in touch with me!

About Work Pirates

The way we've always done things is no longer working. We created Work Pirates, to help you re-write the rules of work. We help leaders gain the confidence, courage and tools to do things differently. So they can better solve their problems, feel less stressed and have a happier, more innovative workplace with more empowered employees.

Find out more at workpirates.com or get in touch with Michelle at michelle@workpirates.com

URGENT ACTION IS NEEDED TO SUPPORT CUSTOMERS BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!



Dylan Jones

Disposable income is set to reduce for many throughout 2022 - this is according to independent research carried out on behalf of IE Hub. For households across Britain, budgeting exercises will need to start now to avoid falling behind on payment arrangements in the coming months.

The pandemic has impacted many UK residents and the effects of Brexit are starting to be seen across the country with the rise in average weekly shopping costs. The Budget headlines were announced on 27th October 2021 and public borrowing needs to be repaid. The Bank of England also predicts that inflation will top 4% by the end of 2021.

To help organisations better understand the economic impacts on their customers, IE Hub has produced a whitepaper. In this paper, Dylan Jones, IE Hub CEO, explores an average family's income and outgoings in 2021 versus their position in 2022 following the expected increase in living costs. The findings display an average family of four may find themselves in deficit by April 2022.

The full report can be viewed at iehub.co.uk/news.

Jones said: "If more isn't done to highlight the need for budgeting in the here and now, organisations will find themselves in a situation where their customers can no longer afford to make payments. This will prove particularly difficult where vulnerability exists. There are tools available to support customers ahead of the impending debt tsunami – IE Hub is one of them!"

IE Hub is a free online tool that lets customers share their financial information with the companies they owe money to. They simply create an account, complete the online form and share it with their creditors. No stressful phone calls. No paper forms to fill in.

To find out how IE Hub can support you and your customers visit iehub.co.uk

HOW TO NOT HACK OFF THE CUSTOMER

The customer is said to be central to the values of most organisations. However, much too often we see customers losing it on helplines, switching products out of principle or simply continuing to purchase whilst cursing the provider to others because the change effort is just too great.

This latter condition we call apathy. It's when you don't actually like what is going on, but you put up with it because there's just too much involved, and you are not capable of making the change with other demands at that time. It's where a customer has become 'process disempowered'. Many disempowered customers are stuck with contractual lock-ins, perhaps they are not particularly quick to do the maths or simply don't think it through, grumble and tolerate until their angst gets sufficiently strong enough for them to take action.

So how do we avoid hacking off our customers? Of course, this doesn't apply to you because it's about those terrible companies that don't put the customer at the centre of everything and of course that's not yours, is it?

Beneath the customer service speak we need to be sure that we are being truly customer centric, so let's look at what matters to customers.

- **Waiting:** Multiple delivery systems variable demands, attempts to bear down on staffing levels and poor capacity planning can all lead to customers having an inordinate wait for access to helplines, sales lines and others. This is time they don't get back and forms part of the transaction for many.
- **Online failures:** When online attempts fail, immediate access to a human being is a crucial part of the relational process between provider and customer. Too often however, helplines are obscured, hidden deep within websites and when calling several layers of automation are experienced before actually getting to speak to fellow homo-sapiens.
- **Accessible, accurate product information:** Organisations now offer such wide product ranges, particularly with online sites and the like. Often this is inaccurate or not sufficiently detailed. Even professional services are often now increasingly sophisticated, complex offerings simply cannot be understood from menus.
- **Particular needs:** We have the most diverse community we've ever seen. The post-modern world makes consumers individuals, and the market has given them a sense of power as a consumer that is easily frustrated by poor sales support, after sales and customer service processes. Whilst it's absolutely right, the FAQs and other inputs can make a huge difference to dealing with volume enquiries, they should never be primarily intended as a cost-cutting approach to the human touch and the attempt for someone to be able to be heard as an individual. It's an essential part of the relationship and leads to happy customers, great testimonials and long lifetime client values, yet so many organisations act as though their sales are so great as a result of their processes, this individuality is a secondary consideration only stimulated at the point of complaint.

- **Complaints:** 94% of customers who do switch where they buy are so disenchanted that the grass simply seems greener elsewhere and their frustration so great, they become open to change. They also just go without saying why. Complaints are a valuable opportunity to gain feedback and need to be listened to with care and an eye to customer satisfaction, retention and process improvement from the narratives given. Often, they are a chance to re-establish a meaningful relationship with the customer and truly treat them as an individual.

- **Excessive Automation:** People buy from people, not from algorithms. Never assume mass delivery systems enhance, support and foster the identity of individuals. If you are selling one-offs that are a bargain, fine, but if you want a long-term relationship with your customer, automation needs to be wisely interspersed with human contact.

- **Feedback:** Frequently companies think they are catering for their customers by eliciting feedback. As with all research, the researcher often lacks the reflexivity to understand that they are asking questions that the company needs answered, rather than listening to the detail of the customer experience. So much customer feedback is quantitative not qualitative in its nature and assumes people will not engage with anything more than a few simple questions and tick boxes that sometimes it barely constitutes feedback at all. It tends to ask what the company wants to know about its processes rather than what the customer wants to experience. It can feel like just another electronic intrusion to the customer and re-emphasises the absence of the human touch.

Trust and respect of identity are both paramount in all trading relationships. These are human qualities, built over time and very difficult to generate from automated, technological, systematised practices, however good those practices are dealing with scale. Equally, thinking customers don't like manipulation by industrial psychology, covert data capture in exchange for information or discount, data scraping, product placement and the like.

Finally, have a wonderful end to 2021 and beginning of 2022 where Covid and some other issues are now slowly receding, but new ones are advancing, e.g., the climate. Remember the people you love, remember also the value and humanity of your customers. My very best wishes to readers, clients, my family, friends and colleagues. Let's also give a vote of thanks to the unsung hero of Northern Insight, Mike Grahamslaw, who has served the north-east business community well for years with this publication. Let's ensure, as contributors and readers all, we advance this cause in the year ahead.

www.gedanken.co.uk



Dr. David Cliff



ORANGEBOX TRAINING SOLUTIONS CONTINUES TO GROW WITH SEVEN NEW HIRES

Just months after moving into its new Tranquility House headquarters at Hartlepool Marina, the North-East training provider has created the new roles on the expanding team.

Jill Tones is the new training quality manager, Niki Cotson is in quality compliance and Laura-May Lawson has been brought in as a learner engagement officer.

On top of those there will be appointments in admin, on reception and John Coates is the new facilities coordinator through the government's Kickstart scheme to help people back into work.

Orangebox's chief executive officer Simon Corbett said: "It is good that we are focusing on the full business, providing opportunities for those who are looking for that step into employment.

"It is all about employing the right people, no matter what age, experience and knowledge, if you show the ambition and desire to work for us then we will provide the opportunity.



SES ENGINEERING SERVICES WINS PLACE ON £20M CITY CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

Leading engineering specialist, SES Engineering Services (SES), has announced its appointment to a key £20 million commercial development, which lies adjacent to the historic Strawberry pub next to St James' Park football ground.

One Strawberry Lane, as the development will be known, is set to become the new six-storey headquarters for The Home Group housing association, also acting as a support hub for the city's voluntary sector.

During the first stage of the tender for the project, SES partnered with developer, Ask Real Estate (Ask) and BAM as principal contractor, providing cost advice and buildability support.

Designed by Ryder Architecture, the building is expected to achieve a BREEAM Excellent and EPC rating of A. The SES team will be drawing on its previous experience gained on similar projects, in this case, drawing heavily on its building physics capability, which will be just one of the ways that the stringent standards will be achieved.



ESL GROWTH BOOSTED BY OVER £3M OF NEW CONTRACT WINS

A specialist engineering company, which uses the latest industry technology to develop innovative energy efficient solutions, is aiming to treble turnover after securing over £3m of new contracts in 2021.

Burnopfield-based Electek Solutions Limited (ESL) has put in place ambitious growth plans which could see turnover increase from £1.1m in 2020 to between £3.5m and £4m by the end of March, 2022.

The growth forecasts have been boosted by several high profile business wins in 2021, including a £1.2m contract with Roomz Hotel at St James' Court in Edinburgh, which will see ESL work the national chain to kit out the bedrooms with energy efficient heating and lighting solutions, and a £1.1m contract to support the build of 87 student apartments in Bradford.

The wins are alongside significant contracts the Hobson Industrial Estate company is already delivering for Bishop Auckland Hospital and the Borders Housing Association.

NEW PARTNERSHIP BOLSTERS SUPPORT FOR NORTH EAST ENGINEERING AND MANUFACTURING SECTORS

A new partnership between B2B marketing company Horizon Works and the Engineering and Manufacturing Network (EMN) is set to boost business support in North East England.

Horizon Works, which is based at Northumberland Business Park near Cramlington, Northumberland, has been confirmed as a new affiliate partner of EMN.

EMN supports the continued growth of the North East's engineering and manufacturing industries by building a strong collaborative community of businesses. It offers companies expert support and advice, and runs the highly successful annual EMCON exhibition and conference.

A long-standing EMN member, Horizon Works supports innovators in complex



industries and offers a wide range of integrated marketing services across strategy, PR, design and digital.

As an affiliate partner, Horizon Works will be running monthly 'lunch and learn' advice and networking sessions for EMN members. These will be launched at a special event on Tuesday, December 7 at Gestamp Tallent Ltd in Newton Aycliffe.

The **B2B** Marketing Specialists

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L-R: Andrea Wood and Maria McIntyre

NORTHERN GAS AND POWER, THE UK'S LARGEST ENERGY CONSULTANCY, ENHANCE OUTSTANDING TRAINING PROVISION WITH TWO FURTHER SENIOR HIRES

Andrea Wood and Maria McIntyre have both joined Northern Gas and Power at a period of significant growth, as the business continues its success in supporting 22,000 customers around the globe.

Bolstering the Training and Development programme, Andrea and Maria will focus on providing outstanding training to support new colleagues, as the company reaches almost 800 people worldwide. The new training programme will provide hands-on mentoring, coaching, support, and guidance into the energy industry, ensuring new recruits are confident in delivering industry-specific guidance to customers.

Andrea Wood

Andrea Wood joins Northern Gas and Power as a Trainer with significant experience and expertise in Training, Coaching and Development, from junior executive level to senior leadership. She had previously worked at Barclays Bank for 20 years, between 2001 – 2021, enhancing the development of employees and providing coaching and support to colleagues.

Having started her career in telephony at Barclays Sunderland Contact Centre as a Sales and Service Adviser for 3 years, Andrea then progressed to become a Training Consultant in the company for the rest of her career.

During her time in Learning and Development, Andrea facilitated and delivered a suite of training

courses from Customer Service skills to Leadership Development. Her role helped to steer the Learning and Development programme, as well as the launch of three induction programmes over her career for new departments: Fraud Detection, Premier Banking and Mortgages.

In her time there, Andrea secured offshore secondments in Noida and Mumbai (India) between 2009 – 2013. She was part of a team that launched a new telephony business unit in Noida.

Andrea said: "With my knowledge in the Telephony and Leadership & Development areas, I'm excited to use these transferable skills at Northern Gas and Power and share my expertise to help drive forward the company's vision in 2022. The energy market is an ever-changing industry, so supporting our colleagues to keep abreast of this is imperative to our success and I'm excited to be a part of this."

Maria McIntyre

Maria McIntyre has joined Northern Gas and Power as Training Manager. Her career began 32 years ago with Barclays Bank. During this time, she worked across various roles, though more recently, Maria worked as a Business Manager in supporting

and helping new and established business customers on their journey to securing growth and becoming more successful.

Over the years, Maria supported colleagues to enhance and enrich their performance through her skills in coaching, training and facilitation. Maria is incredibly passionate about Learning and Development and ensuring all colleagues are able to maximise their potential.

She said: "In my first week at the business, I am already working well with my team and feel part of the NGP family. This is such an exciting time to join the company and help to shape the future vision for this business as it continues its journey in this evolving and ever-changing industry.

"My new role will allow me to make a substantial contribution within the learning and development function and I am really looking forward to the challenge."

These appointments follow the successful appointment of Brendan Garvey, Chief People Officer in August 2021 and the appointments of Terri Lewis, Director of Talent Acquisition and Megan Hofmann, Director of Organisational Development.

www.ngpltd.co.uk



WILL A SMALL SAVING WARRANT AN UNECESSARY RISK TO YOUR TEAMS SAFETY?

Many of you reading this edition of Northern Insight will be the owners of businesses or chief decision makers, a decent percentage of you will own or be responsible for a property of some description.

It could be an office or shop, Perhaps you have a garage or builders yard, or some of you may have an industrial or manufacturing unit. It doesn't matter what sort of business it is, how small or large. Someone will be responsible for security of your premises, someone will have a key or a code number?

So, what happens if the intruder alarm goes off in the middle of the night?

Nearly all property alarms will be linked in some way to an alarm receiving centre. If the alarm is activated, the receiving centre will ring you or an appointed person within your business to report that something has happened.

Nine times out of ten it will be a false alarm. There might be fault with the alarm.....but of course, there is a chance that your premises may have been broken into.

However you wont know until you or your nominated person actually arrive at the property as to why the alarm has went off.

What happens if you or someone you've asked to go and check it out disturbs a burglar? What happens if you or another person is attacked? What happens if you or they are injured or worst case scenario, be killed?

If the person you have asked to attend is injured...no matter how seriously...there is a strong possibility that you will be liable. If you are injured, what will happen to your business and how will your family be affected, I'm sure none of you would relish being on the wrong end of a corporate manslaughter charge if the worst case scenario occurred involving a member of your team, and ultimately the safety of your team is your responsibility as a business owner.

Wouldn't it be better if someone attended on your behalf who knew what they were doing and were prepared for any eventuality?

The most effective way to mitigate the risk is to utilise a keyholding and alarm response service with a reputable security company, this takes the responsibility off your hands and offers a safe and cost effective solution which can be tailored to fit a business of any size.

How's that for peace of mind?

"It's frightening how many businesses unknowingly put their staff in harms way and the consequences can be potentially fatal" says T3 Security director, Peter Moore. "Imagine if you have a small shop and the alarm goes off at 3am, is it the owner who goes to check what's caused the alarm to trigger, or do they have a few people who have a key and could go along to turn it off. If it's been a faulty alarm or perhaps someone kicked the door and triggered the alarm and then ran off...fine. But the real danger is that you or one of your staff arrive to find one or several burglars still inside. Now what do you do?

"At T3 Security all of our response guards are fully trained in conflict resolution and wear full PPE and body cameras. Instead of the alarm response centre calling you, they will call T3 Security's 24 hour control room and we will respond to the call out. While our guards investigate they will be in constant contact with the control room. If there has been a break-in, we will then contact you as per the escalation process, but in the event of a faulty alarm or a simple reset we won't disturb you and you will receive an email complete with a detailed site audit to update you on what had happened and how we responded."

But at T3 Security it doesn't stop there. If there has been a burglary, they will contact the police. If a door or window has been broken, they will contact glaziers and locksmiths for you. T3's guards will stay on site to keep the building secure.

"You and your staff should never be put in harm's way," adds Peter. "You never know what to expect when attending. Duty of care is a huge responsibility for any business which is why, when it comes to something like the security of your premises, you should leave it to the professionals."

As part of their service, T3 Security will act as key holders. If an alarm is activated, they don't need to meet you or visit your home to get a key or an entry code. They already have one which will be securely stored in our control centre based in Seaton Burn. Once again, this gives you peace of mind knowing that your premises are in safe hands.

Don't take risks. Let the experts look after your security.

T3 Security- Setting the standards.

To get further information on what options are available get in touch with Peter and his team at T3 Security by emailing info@t3security.co.uk or give them a call on 0191 284 4730

“
...You and your staff
should never be put
in harm's way...
”





WHEN IT COMES TO WATER, YOUR EMPLOYEES DON'T PAY THE BILLS



Josh Gill and Clare Galland

Turning the tap off when brushing teeth, using a water butt and having showers not baths – at home, we're all well aware of the cost of water.

But when it comes to the workplace, it's a different matter. Clare Galland, water efficiency and environmental services manager at Everflow Water, looks at how to engage workforces in their company's water use.

At Everflow, our business model has always been to work with SMEs; it's why Josh Gill, our CEO, launched the company in 2015. He felt the market had traditionally been underserved by the water industry, and he set about changing it.

And it's worked; we're the fastest organically growing water retailer in the UK.

However, one thing has leaped out at us from the past six years – employees aren't bill payers and, as such, aren't as invested in saving water, or money.

Whereas at home they might pop a jumper on before turning the heating up, or think twice before reboiling the kettle to make sure it's piping hot, at work, anything goes.

And that's because, as far as they're concerned, the water and heat they use at work is free – because, to them, it is. They're not hit with a bill at the end of the month, or a meter reading showing how much they've wasted, so why should they care?

Help them to help themselves

We'll start by saying that, while engaging employees is key, employers can also make it easier for their staff to save water, with very little outlay.

Take washing our hands... We're all hyper-aware of hand hygiene these days, but nobody wants to wash their hands in cold water when it's freezing outside, so consider using aerating, flow reducing tap nozzles (or flow reducing valves under the sink) to take the sting out when the temperature outside drops.

In a staff kitchen, a dishwasher, while a hefty outlay at first, will soon reduce bills, as it uses considerably less water than running a sink full of hot water a number of times throughout the day.

Sharing is caring

In the UK, 30 per cent of all the water we use is used by businesses, which is why we are so passionate about raising awareness of water wastage among our SME customers.

We know it's not as easy as it sounds; the lack of smart meters in the UK means that many people are, to some degree, disconnected from how much water they're actually using.

And the situation in businesses is magnified; waiting for the water to run cold for a bottle or filling the sink seven times a day to wash up just doesn't register in the same way as it does at home.

Employees need to be engaged with the idea of water wastage through whatever means necessary, even if that does involve sharing the monthly bills with them or introducing incentives for saving water.

Education is also key; signs in kitchens, toilets and communal areas, or monthly meter readings shared throughout the team can all bring the issue to life and make it tangible.

Because, just like residential water users, employees can only take steps to reduce their water consumption if they're made aware of it in the first place.

That's why our CEO, Josh Gill, recently launched the #100Pledges campaign, for members of our team to commit to at least one water-saving action, really thinking about every drop of water they use.

The initiative has been so successful within the team that we're now calling on businesses across the country to follow suit and encourage their staff to count every drop by joining in.

We've even created a free toolkit to help at www.everflowwater.com/100-pledges - because every drop counts.

CASH INDUSTRY MAPS OUT ROUTE TO SUSTAINABILITY

The global cash industry – both manufacturers and cash management providers – is making huge strides in reducing its carbon footprint and securing a sustainable future for cash.

A new report – ‘Cash: Roadmap to Sustainability’ – highlights the progress in the last decade and innovative developments underway. It challenges some of the myths and misconceptions about the industry, while also shining a light on the digital payments sector.

The report – produced by Hexham-based business intelligence consultancy, Reconnaissance – challenges any idea that digital payments are a low carbon impact alternative to cash. The huge energy consumption needed for crypto currency is already well reported.

The report reveals an industry that has dramatically changed and is heavily investing to reduce its impact on the environment. It looks at the impact of cash in terms of carbon, resources used and pollution.

A fact it highlights is that while paying cash for a 40g bar of milk chocolate uses approximately 4.6g of CO₂e (ie. carbon dioxide equivalent), the CO₂e involved in the production of that bar of chocolate is 200g.

The new report was produced to coincide with international climate change conference COP 26, which met in Glasgow, early in November.

The UK is well positioned globally and has already taken a lead by launching the first ever Cash Industry Environment Charter to deliver a sustainable future for cash and tackle its impact on the climate.

Irrespective of the move towards digital payments around the world, cash remains a key pillar in the payments eco-system; every person on the planet uses cash and most of the world's population depends on it. Cash usage continues to grow in most countries. In this context the report is an important record of the progress made to ensure cash is environmentally sustainable, says author John Winchcombe.

Some 24 organisations contributed 106 case studies on changes that they have made to reduce their environmental impact and the results that have been achieved.

John Winchcombe says: "This document shares



John Winchcombe

best practice with the global cash industry of what is possible, demonstrating that industries are listening, acting and making a real difference. Change is happening.

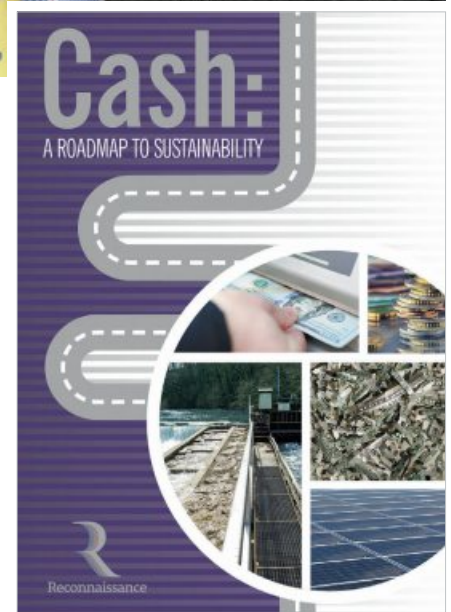
"Unusually, this is an industry that is changing through choice. There is little actual customer demand or government legislation at this stage forcing them to change. There is a genuine momentum across the cash industry to be a good citizen."

An analysis of the different projects undertaken across the cash cycle that the report covers reveals 10 organisations that are sourcing 100% renewable energy; and seven organisations that have invested in solar, hydro, wind and tidal power. All cash in transit companies have invested in telematics to reduce fossil fuel usage and the same companies have started trials with electric or hybrid vehicles.

Some projects and examples range from the simple change to LED lighting, to the more complex, changing from single use plastic seals to cloth bags, to those based on major capital equipment and investment decisions.

Winchcombe added: "There is no greenwashing here. All the contributors to this report are taking action and devoting time and resources and investing to do better. The cash industry is taking a strong lead, not just in the UK but other parts of the world."

Cash is physical and therefore visible, he explained, adding that the alternative digital payments are not, and therefore assumed to be low impact. However, Winchcombe challenges this assertion: "While the carbon footprint of digital payments is hard to quantify, it does require substantial



hardware, software and considerable energy consumption for payment data processing, data management and communications."

Astrid Mitchell, CEO of Reconnaissance, said: "This is an important report in the context of where currency and coins are in society and the environment. Coins and notes offer choice, freedom and financial inclusion for billions of people across the world. But equally the future for payments is rapidly evolving. This report puts a marker down to show the progress made and to be able to measure future strides that the industry is committed to taking."

A copy of the full report can be found here: estore.reconnaissance.net/cn-cash-roadmap-sustainability



ERIC KNOWS BUT ELLA DIDN'T

Mum sets up website and discovers she is autistic at 39 years old after son's diagnosis.

A mum of three young children from County Durham has set up a new website to allow people with additional needs to find activities, places and people that will go the extra mile to accommodate any special considerations.

The "Eric Knows" website is the idea of occupational therapist Ella Bains from Bishop Auckland. Targeted to help those with specific needs such as new mums, wheelchair users or visually impaired people, the site pin points those companies and venues which help or go that extra bit further when people really need it.

Ella's journey to starting the website began three years ago when she worked as an occupational therapy case manager specialising in spinal cord injuries. Her idea to help even more people by creating Eric Knows was made even more personal when at the age of four, her son Fynn was diagnosed with Autism.

"I knew very little about autism and attended parents' classes to help me understand the

condition so that I could help Fynn. As I learnt more, I realised that some of the traits and behaviours I was hearing about related to my own personality and I suddenly had the realisation that I too was on the autism spectrum. Looking back into my childhood, I was able to identify times when I couldn't understand certain things and I started to fill in gaps from my past which suddenly made perfect sense," said Ella.

As well as the website embracing diversity and equality, Ella herself has taken the decision to help other people with a disability and in partnership with Durham University, she has taken on four autistic interns to help with blogs, website updates and social media. The four are Rebecca Kennedy who is now living in Norway, Durham based Zach Killingback and Francis Wellborn who is originally from Austin Texas and Georgina Parvin-Guerreiro from Hartlepool.

"The team have been amazing; they really understand the vision that we are trying to achieve, and they are also really creative as well as being out-of-the box thinkers. They've all seen what Eric Knows does for people and their passion fills me with a lot of confidence."

Eric Knows is available via Google search or www.ericknows.co.uk



THE INN COLLECTION GROUP WIN MAJOR CHARITY AWARD

NE Youth are delighted to celebrate The Inn Collection Group winning the North East Charity Award for 'Outstanding Charity Support by large companies.'

The Inn Collection have supported NE Youth over the last year and were the main sponsor of their Clay Pigeon Shoot that raised more the £70k!

Jon Niblo, CEO at NE Youth said: 'This is an incredibly well-deserved award. The Inn Collection Groups support enables us to reach more young people and sustain our essential youth work to the most disadvantaged across the region. Well done all!'

THREE COURSE FOR A FIVER WILL HELP THE PEOPLE'S KITCHEN THIS CHRISTMAS



One of the North East's best loved charity's is inviting the kind-hearted North East public to bring festive cheer once again to the homeless and vulnerable this Christmas.

The People's Kitchen supports hundreds of "friends" across the city every day. Volunteers have supported people in Newcastle for more than 35 years serving up to 300 meals every session, cooking everything from scratch. The charity is run entirely by volunteers, no government funding is received, and no one is paid for their work.

The People's Kitchen has launched its annual "Feed a Friend for a Fiver" campaign and is appealing to people across the region to give a £5 donation which will go towards someone in need having a hot three course meal during the winter and festive periods. Donations can be made on The People's Kitchen website www.peopleskitchen.co.uk/donate/

Maureen Armstrong looks after Corporate Social Responsibility at The People's Kitchen. "Sadly, there are many people in the city that need our help. For some, The People's Kitchen is the nearest they will get to having a constant in their life where they receive unconditional friendship, a caring environment and good healthy food. Unlike many other charities this year, we will be providing a much-needed service on Christmas Day itself and our "Feed a Friend for a Fiver" campaign will help to fund that and many more meals throughout the cold winter period."



Let video tell your story...

Turps Film is a North-East based video production agency, focused on creating authentic content for businesses who are looking to generate ROI, build awareness and drive engagement.

✉ info@turpsfilm.co.uk 🌐 turpsfilm.co.uk



PROJECTS WITH PRIDE AWARDS

Celebrating the amazing young people, youth workers and volunteers of the North East.

NE Youth celebrated their 10th Projects with Pride Awards on Wednesday 3rd Nov at The Grand Hotel, Gosforth Park Hotel sponsored by The Learning Curve Group. Over 300 young people, youth workers, volunteers and members of the charities' network gathered together for the incredible event which was part of NE Youth's 85th anniversary.

A drumming workshop for all 325 people was just one of the highlights of the night- there was also circus skills, dance troupes, singers and a rapper who performed in Spanish! An emotive poem written by Neo Burns, who won a poetry competition to celebrate National Youth Work Week was read out by his youth worker.

NE Youth have been celebrating the success of young people, youth workers and volunteers for ten years and have handed out over 100 awards. So many of the young people nominated did amazing things during the pandemic- helping people in the community and their peers.

Jon Niblo, CEO of NE Youth commented: 'Lots of young people face difficult challenges in their person lives, so to be able to be part of a youth club, project or community group can really make a huge difference. Projects with Pride celebrates young people's involvement, their achievements and the personal journey's they've been on. We are proud to be not only celebrating our 85th Anniversary but also the 10th anniversary of the Awards. Congratulations to all nominees- you are all winners!'

Brenda McLeish, CEO of The Learning Curve Group, "Learning Curve Group's vision is to transform lives through learning and we do that by keeping learners and young people at the centre of everything we do. We are born and bred in the North East and work with young people up and down the country but the youth of this region in particular has a special place in our hearts which is why it made total sense to support NE Youth's celebration event -Projects with Pride'





IN CONVERSATION WITH...



Chris Coles

CHRIS COLES

Director, Turner & Townsend

Tell us about your role at Turner & Townsend

I am a director, responsible for the delivery of project management services across the North East from our regional offices in Teesside and Newcastle.

What services does the organisation provide?

Turner & Townsend is a world-leading professional services company, with 112 offices across the globe. We offer independent advice, transforming performance to safeguard the commercial interest of clients embarking on investment programmes across real estate, infrastructure and natural resources.

We deliver services covering the full spectrum of consultancy, project delivery and post-project operations.

What's your proudest business moment?

My proudest business moment to date has to be

working on the construction of Middlesbrough College. This was a massive undertaking and a positive beacon for the regeneration of Middlehaven, back in 2008. It is an amazing facility, a project that always stands out and one that I am very proud to have played a part in.

What challenges have you encountered?

Today the biggest challenge is ensuring there is a highly skilled workforce ready to meet the unprecedented volume of work in this sector. We need to address this together as an industry by inspiring a new generation that draws from a more diverse pool of talent.

At Turner & Townsend we place a big emphasis on our graduate recruitment and their journey through the company. Members of the senior management team have remained with us throughout their own progression and as their careers have flourished.

By working with local colleges, universities and schools we are able to demonstrate the career paths available.

How has the industry changed since you arrived at the company?

The industry is always constantly evolving with

modern methods of construction. Digitalisation, sustainability and the race towards net zero, have transformed the way we operate. We need to be greener, more inclusive and more productive in our delivery to meet the investment coming into Teesside and the wider North East as part of the government's levelling up ambitions.

Who is your hero inside of work?

In work it would have to be Vince Clancy, CEO, Turner & Townsend. He is an inspiring person who has progressed through the company, is down to earth and someone who I look up to.

Is there a mantra you always aspire to do business by?

Be honest and open, friendly and approachable.

How do you like to unwind?

I enjoy spending time with my family and friends. I have a passion for cars and I am big fan of Formula 1. I also enjoy the outdoors and we are spoilt for choice with different walking routes to explore across the coast and countryside in the region.

www.turnerandtowntsend.com

Howe Consultancy

Is your company in need of an HR Business Partner, Business Mentor, Non Exec Director or Business Consultant? If so, why not go for the best and someone with over 40 years' experience in the HR industry. Working at a strategic level, Howe Consultancy offers a common sense approach to your company's growth plans, helping with blue sky thinking to create a clearer vision for you and your business.

LET JOANNE HOWE FROM HOWE CONSULTANCY BE YOUR BUSINESS BUDDY. 'Bring it on in 2022'.

Remember: "If You Always Do What You've Always Done, You'll Always Get What You've Always Got." Henry Ford

Mentoring Programme – Building HR Compliance

Aim: To build capability and confidence in HR compliance for busy CEO's especially where they are employing staff for the first time.

Support:

1. ½ day strategy meeting
2. Weekly 1-2-1's
3. Email and telephone support throughout the programme
4. Production of essential documentation to include:

- 2022 contract of employment
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Grievance Procedure
- Holiday cards
- Appraisal forms
- Induction checklist
- Recruitment checklist
- Personnel records checklist

Duration of programme:

12 weeks



Mentoring Programme – Don't Be a Busy Fool

Aim: To bring clarity and confidence to busy CEO's and developing leaders, especially where they employ staff.

Support:

1. ½ day strategy meeting
2. SWOT analysis
3. Determining of leadership style
4. Weekly 1-2-1's
5. Email and telephone support throughout the programme

Mentoring to include:

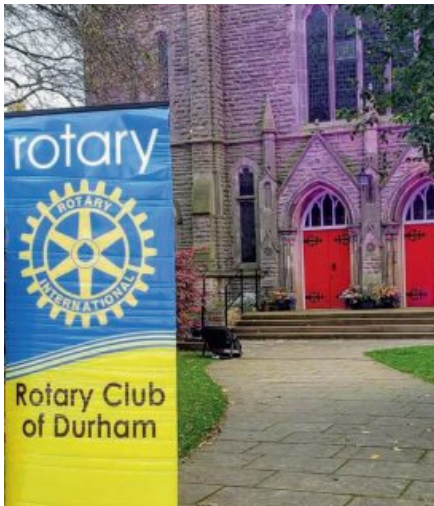
- Getting organised
- Time management
- Motivating staff
- Dealing with conflict
- Playing to strengths
- Building a strong team
- Building self confidence
- Bringing clarity

Duration of programme:

12 weeks

Did you know that grants are available to cover these programmes? For more information, just drop me a message.

Joanne Howe
Howe Consultancy
07921 256 981
info@howeconsultancy.co.uk
www.howeconsultancy.co.uk



FABULOUS FUNDRAISING

Just some of the organisations supported by Rotary Durham, Elvet, Bede, Houghton, Herrington FC and Durham Rugby Club in 2021 supported all the way by www.facebook/fundafest.co.uk

Many more inspirational community festivals coming in 2022.

For more information on Rotary fundraising or organising your own festival please contact Rob at rob@fundafest.co.uk



IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN...IT'S CHRISTMAS PARTY SEASON!

In the hope that we will be meeting in person for our festive celebrations this year some employers will be turning their mind to setting out the rules. This may include messages such as 'don't drink and drive', 'look after yourself' and 'don't do anything you will regret when you have to face your colleagues again in the New Year'.

A quick and well-intentioned 'be good' message from line managers is better than nothing but what else should employers be doing to avoid any awkward moments, or even worse any claims of inappropriate behaviour or even sexual harassment?

Firstly, let's set out the position in relation to employment legislation. Here the law is relatively clear – sexual harassment is defined under the Equality Act as when someone engages in unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, which has the purpose or effect of either violating someone else's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual. As well as physical attacks, unwanted conduct could be verbal and include imagery, pranks, jokes, and 'banter'.

Employers need to be able to demonstrate they have taken all reasonable steps to prevent any inappropriate conduct, which does not simply mean signposting someone

to a staff policy. Instead, employers should make sure they are:

- Communicating what behaviours are not acceptable.
- Making sure all staff know that offence is not judged by whether the person dishing out the banter meant to offend, but whether the person hearing the banter was in fact offended – the 'I was only joking' is not a watertight defence.
- Raising awareness of harassment by association – for example, a white British individual may hear a racist remark and take issue with this as they have a friend or family member from a different ethnic background.
- Setting out how employees can raise concerns and explaining how the company will address this.
- Providing regular training around equal opportunities.
- Ensuring confidentiality is key! Harassment is a very sensitive subject, specifically for the victim who just wants to feel comfortable at work.

So let's make this season fun, friendly and joyous with no HR (or hangover) headaches.

www.holgatehr.co.uk



The best gifts come from the heart.

In the season of goodwill, and a time of new beginnings, why not give your friends the gift of a new job.

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DON'T BOTHER SETTING NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS THIS YEAR

I am asking you not to make New Year resolutions this year. I mean, what's the point really?

I would, on the other hand, encourage you to set yourself some goals (especially the really big and exciting ones), and I am asking you start your planning (and delivery of your plan) right now. Don't wait until the New Year, get started straight away and get ahead of the curve.

Why not set that exciting and ambitious goal and get the ball rolling well before January? Imagine how good you will feel on the 1st of January knowing your goals and already working towards them. What a great way to get your 2022 started.

The simple fact is every time we work with successful professionals, they set clear goals and build plans to achieve them. They could be personal goals and plans and business goals and plans. The two overlap and interlink so it's great if you can have both in place.

Simply the best time to set your goals is right now. Yesterday has already gone so you can't set them then, and tomorrow is a terrible time to set them (it never arrives).

Think of yourself a year from today. What would make you feel fantastic. What would make you proud personally and professionally? And let's not think small here. What are the massive and audacious goals you could set that would excite you a lot and frighten you a little? These are the kind of goals we need to be setting.



Nevil Tynemouth

Once you have your big goals, break them down into quarterly steps and measures. What will success look like in three months? What will make the February 2022 version of you proud and thrilled in equal measure.

My favourite expression is: "There is nothing in life you have to do". It's an expression I keep coming back to both personally and with the people I work with and support. The expression doesn't give you a blank cheque to do nothing, it's the exact opposite in fact. This expression should help you clearly understand the opportunity for you to decide what you really want, to document this and to get started on your plan right now.

When you adopt this approach, holding

yourself accountable (making your plan visible and sharing it with other who will keep you accountable) you start to live your life (and business) on purpose.

The last two years have taught us all a vital lesson, life is short, and we are here for a good time not a long time!

What are you going to plan in for 2022 to make it your best year ever?

To contact Nevil, email him:
nevil@newresults.co.uk, connect with
him on LinkedIn or visit the website
www.newresults.co.uk



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Enlightening Business Support

PLANNING GREEN LIGHT FOR NEW COUNTY DURHAM TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS FACILITIES



Elddis Transport's Nigel Cook (left) and Richard Toner are working with Lichfields on plans to develop the former GT Engineering site in Delves Lane into new storage and distribution space.

A North East road transport, logistics and distribution company is gearing up for expansion and growth after plans worth close to £1.5 million to develop its operations were given the green light by planners.

The move has seen Consett-based Elddis Transport secure approval to transform its recent acquisition of the former GT Engineering site in Delves Lane into new storage and distribution space as part of plans to secure additional onsite capacity for its warehouse operations.

Work on the site, which will allow commercial vehicles to unload/load goods as part of an expanding logistics operation, will see the installation of a new roof, access doors and improved car parking along with refurbished office accommodation and the addition of dedicated new training and meeting rooms.

The news follows approval earlier in the summer for Elddis to proceed with plans for a permanent new commercial HGV and trailer park in Newton Aycliffe on land off Jowett Way, which offers access to local transport hubs and the main A1M. This is part of a long-term strategy by the firm

to improve its current facilities and will see new vehicle and pedestrian access, landscaping, lighting and security measures including CCTV and fencing installed at the park to boost haulage operations.

Planning approval comes after Elddis sold its site at Old Pit Lane near the Arnison Centre in Durham to Premcor Estates, which is developing the site to create a new discount food store and retail units. Funds from this sale are being re-invested by Elddis in the Delves Lane and Newton Aycliffe projects, with the aim of supporting future growth and success for the firm and its 320-strong workforce.

Jonathan Wallace, senior director of Newcastle planning and development consultancy, Lichfields, who secured planning approval from Durham County Council's planning department, said: "This is great news for Elddis and contributes significantly to their ambitious plans for expansion. We have worked closely with Durham

County Council on these various projects that will not only secure skilled jobs but will also see funds re-invested in the area, with positive spin-off benefits for the local economy."

Planning approval, which comes as Elddis marks 50 years in business is part of future growth plans said Richard Toner, commercial director at Elddis.

He added: "Our success is driven by focusing on customer needs and quality services. Planning approval provides the platform to move on to the next level and underline our commitment to investing in the business, creating additional quality vehicle space and facilities for longer term growth and success."

Founded in 1962, Lichfields offers a broad range of planning and development consultancy services including development management, consultation, economics, EIA, heritage, neighbourly matters and urban design. Its clients include developers, landowners and operators in the housing, retail, leisure, commercial, waste and recycling and infrastructure sectors; as well as local authorities and government bodies.

More details about planning issues and matters here: www.lichfields.uk

IN CONVERSATION WITH...

ALISTAIR MCLEOD

Chief executive officer,
Gray Fox Consulting.

Tell us about your role at Gray Fox Consulting.

I established the business two years ago having formerly been a director at Waterstones IT Consultancy. My role is to develop and grow the business whilst offering an IT and business consultancy service. We partner with SMEs to provide strategic guidance that enables business growth through the adoption, alignment and leveraging of technology.

We want to challenge traditional approaches to business management and ensure our clients invest in solutions that will add tangible value at a competitive rate.

What services does the organisation provide?

At Gray Fox, we help leadership teams build the necessary skills and know-how to lead their business in the digital economy. We do this through tailored digital strategic advice as well as challenging and supporting them on business transformation and technical delivery.

We are also helping many clients define and procure digital solutions or help them find technical delivery partners.

Having began my career as a software developer and becoming a company director, I have that added value which is understanding both business and tech. That is our USP – we add business value.

What's your proudest business achievement?

It has to be establishing and growing Gray Fox in the midst of a global pandemic! The clients are what make the business and to know that we have added value and made a difference to them is ultimately my proudest achievement.



Alistair McLeod

What challenges have you encountered?

Establishing the business. I didn't account for a pandemic. I had to really dig deep into my resilience and have the confidence and belief that I could make it a success.

How has the industry changed since you began your career?

IT has been revolutionised. The evolution of the internet and, particularly, cloud-based platforms has transformed the sector. When I first started my career, the cost and time to provision IT solutions was enormous, putting it out of reach of most SMEs. The internet has totally changed this, offering businesses more flexibility and an affordable price. You only have to look at the after-effects of the pandemic that changed work place culture and remote working. Businesses could respond much quicker than before.

Who are your heroes in and out of work?

In a business setting, it has to be Jim Collins, an American author, researcher, speaker and consultant who is focused on the topic of business

management, sustainability and growth. He has a good way of simplifying the challenges businesses face. I saw him speak in London and he was fantastic.

Outside of work I am a huge Newcastle United fan, so Kevin Keegan is up there! I also really admire David Attenborough, who has captivated and educated the nation – spanning all ages, as to the beauty of our natural environment.

Is there a mantra you always aspire to do business by?

The customer is always first and to create added value in everything you do. Its important to always be nice and have fun along the way.

How do you like to unwind?

I enjoy simple pleasures such as reading, going to the gym and my partner and I enjoy cooking. We also like dining out. Ora, located in the heart of Tynemouth and Kaltur on Dean Street, Newcastle, are particular favourites.

wearegrayfox.co.uk/about



Hassan and Sagheer Khan with Karen Goldfinch getting their award last year. Image: The Bigger Picture Agency.

BUSINESS AWARDS RECOGNISE RESILIENCE

Businesses in North Tyneside are about to be recognised for the resilience and diversification they showed which helped them survive and revive during the pandemic.

The annual business awards hosted by North Tyneside Business Forum recognises the achievements of the best businesses in the borough but in February's presentation evening there will be special accolades for those that overcame the difficulties created by COVID.

Chair of North Tyneside Business Forum, Karen Goldfinch said: "The last 20 months have been very difficult for a lot of businesses; many have completely changed their business model to continue trading despite the challenges that have come their way. There has also been a lot of new businesses start up, some doing incredibly well as they develop their new venture with passion and enthusiasm, it's been inspirational to see the determination to succeed we have in our area. We as a Forum believe that these businesses should be recognised for their tenacity and perseverance and for the way that they have continued to serve their customers and maintain their staff."

Applicants can enter any of the four categories, and all category winners are automatically entered for the overall North Tyneside Business of the Year Award. Category winners receive a certificate, prize and trophy as well as substantial recognition and publicity. The ceremony will take place on Thursday 3rd February 2022 in line with Public Health guidance. Tickets will be limited to finalists

and sponsors only; more information will be issued in due course.

The categories are:

- **Can Do** – a business which has shown resilience throughout the pandemic.
- **Diversification** – a business which has diversified their product/service offering to keep their business afloat during the pandemic.
- **New Business** – a business which has started since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020 and has grown despite challenges.
- **Heart of the Business** – nominated by the business for a member of staff which keeps the business going and has overcome their own challenges.

In addition to the four categories, the public will nominate and vote for the Heart of the Community Award which recognises the way that businesses support their local community. Previous winners have supported local initiatives and causes, employed local people, provided excellent customer service and basically went the extra mile to be at the heart of their local community.

Last year's winner of the Heart of the Community Award was H&S Convenience Store in Wallsend for the way they helped their customers through the

worst of the pandemic.

Hassan Khan from H&S Convenience Store said: "We are very community based and look after the people around us. During the lock down we made food parcels and shared them to anyone that needed them. It was great to be nominated by our customers for the award and I'd ask people to look at the businesses that have personally helped them and nominate them too."

Applications can be made at www.northtynesidebusinessawards.co.uk

The North Tyneside Business Forum is run by a management group made up of members from various industry sectors in the Borough and gives support in the form of networking, events and signposting for growth and development. Membership is free and open to any business of any size with a trading address within North Tyneside. The Business Forum is supported by, but not run by North Tyneside Council.

The Forum is FREE to join and is for any business with a trading address in North Tyneside.

For more information email business.forum@northtyneside.gov.uk or visit www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk
T:0191 643 6000

...HIGHLIGHTED STORIES...

Ivy's Memory is Evergreen Thanks to Granddaughter Author



Dr Rebecca Williams Dinsdale from Penshaw has written two books aimed at helping people seek positivity and reflection. Now however, she has delved into her own family tree and discovered that her grandmother's life not only provided her with a role model to follow but that she also positively affected the lives of thousands of people across the globe.

Ivy Madeline Williams was born in 1904 into an affluent family on the South coast but sadly her father became addicted to alcohol and she and her five siblings were plunged into severe poverty. In 1927 she trained as a medical and surgical nurse in Weymouth Hospital before relocating to Glasgow's notorious Gorbals where she became a midwife. Her next career move took her to Moorfields Hospital in London and then to Manchuria.

"I felt she deserved a book written about her and as I started researching, I discovered more and more that made me even prouder of her life.

"I'm blessed to have had such a resilient soul as a grandmother and as well as discovering all about her amazing life, I now know a little bit more about myself which I can use to help others just like she did. I miss her a lot but her spirit lives on and I hope my readers will be inspired by her life just as I was."

Inspirational Business Places its Resources in Blyth

Nikki Masterman spent almost a quarter of a century working for large corporate companies in the world of human resources. She gained a wealth of knowledge and skills based on experience rather than the more traditional academic route to the top of her career. However, a bad experience with an employer led to her taking the company to a tribunal where she successfully represented herself thanks to the expertise she had in the subject.

The experience however led to her falling out of love with HR and she temporarily spent time working away from the sector. A chance conversation at a networking meeting led Nikki to re-evaluate her career path and she

decided to set up her own HR firm primarily to help small businesses and individuals going through disputes who didn't have the expertise to help themselves.

The result is Inspired HR, and she has just moved her team into new office accommodation on Blyth Quayside.

"I'm very excited to move into our first office. The team have a great skill set and we are quite unique in our business model which is rare in the UK due to us having our own employed solicitor," said Nikki.

Inspired HR has four arms to the business - employment legal services, HR consultancy, health and wellbeing and a recruitment agency. Most of their clients have 30 employees or less and



they cover any sector with existing businesses in healthcare, charities, trades, financial services through to beauty and hairdressers.

Paul's Song Gives Positive Note to Bereaved this Christmas



A Tyneside dad and granddad who was widowed six years ago has put his emotions into a song which he hopes will help others deal with the grief of losing a loved one and the feelings of loneliness which can be intensified during the Christmas period.

Paul Grant (61) from Heaton lost his wife Jackie (aged 53) to cancer in 2015 and like many people has learned to live with the hurt and emptiness associated with losing someone close to them in their lives.

Care worker Paul has always been involved in the North East music scene and his love of music prompted him to write a song which helped him personally to express his feelings of loss and pain. Now however, he is hoping that the lyrics and meaning behind them will help others in a similar situation to himself.

The result is "*I Miss You*", an emotional power ballad that has a distinctive Christmas feel - something that Paul was keen to portray in the song.

"I sincerely hope that people hearing the song will gain a little piece of comfort which will rekindle their own fond memories of their loved ones and help them get through this Christmas."

I Miss You by P Grant and the Collective is available on Spotify.

Contact Highlights PR to get your story seen!

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Dance auditions for ISG's Christmas productions.

INVESTING IN CREATIVITY

When the pandemic brought much of the entertainment and events industry to a standstill, one North East company took it as an opportunity to expand.

From managing huge events to working closely with individual performers, there's not much that premium entertainment providers ISG can't do.

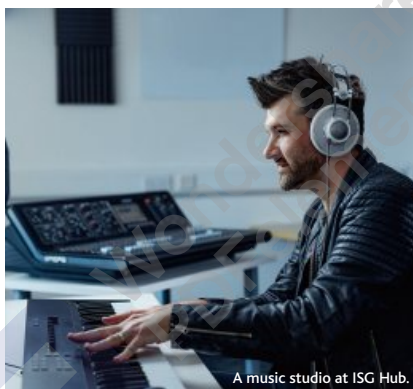
Formerly known as the i-Stage Group, the business specialised in providing entertainment to national and international companies whilst also managing and delivering large scale event experiences. However, when this ground to a halt during lockdown, ISG channelled their focus into business development and growth.

And the entertainment experts have gone from strength to strength in recent years, developing the production side of the company to complement their events and talent divisions to work with more artistes than ever before.

A growing business needs the space to match, when the opportunity presented itself to take over the former Jupiter Centre at Sunderland's NE BIC, The ISG Hub – a multi-functional creative space – was born.

With a full renovation due to be completed in 2022, the new building will include rehearsal rooms, state-of-the-art recording studios, media suites and a dance studio, along with meeting and conference rooms.

And while the Hub will benefit the artistes and production team working within the company, the



A music studio at ISG Hub.

organisation believes it will also be an invaluable asset for those in the arts and culture sector across the region.

The ISG Talent roster includes many polished acts – offering everything from award winning vocalists to tribute artists at the top of their game – but it's not only the established performers who benefit from their expertise.

From holding open audition events like Bridges Got Talent at a Sunderland shopping centre to building relationships with local colleges, ISG are also passionate about working hard to shine a spotlight on emerging talent.

Newly launched Platform North East is yet another example of this – a weeklong programme concentrating on equipping singer-songwriters with the skills and expertise they need to succeed in the industry.

Supported by Arts Council England and the Culture Recovery programme, unsigned artistes aged 16 and over can gain valuable insight during sessions covering song writing, building an audience and developing a stage presence.

The talented hopefuls will learn more about marketing themselves and how to use social media, along with the opportunity to compose and produce an original song in-house at the Hub. And ISG are committed to helping artistes get



Paul Waite (second left) with the ISG team.

their name out there at the end of it thanks to a partnership with Kycker, the country's leading music distribution and publishing platform for new performers, which will help them distribute their work to online stores and streaming outlets.

Paul Waite, CEO of ISG, believes the company is the strongest it has ever been.

"While lockdown was certainly a challenge, we did everything we could to continue working throughout and it has allowed us to plan for our accelerated growth and open up new opportunities for us to work with performers of all skill and experience levels," he said.

"We have a really incredible team – which also grew during lockdown – with a hugely diverse pool of expertise between them, many of whom joined us specifically to push and develop our new ventures.

"Entertainment isn't an easy industry to get into which is why we believe in equipping performers with all the skills they need to navigate it, so that everyone who works with us has the best possible opportunity for success going forward and our customers and clients receive market-leading experience."

For more information visit
www.istagegroup.com

Meet **unifi** and Empower your business with Microsoft Dynamics

Introducing Unifi, created to be the leading Microsoft Dynamics partner for small and medium businesses in the North. Microsoft Dynamics removes the need to invest in dated technologies such as on-premise servers or costly hosting. This powerful suite of business applications empowers organisations to achieve growth, agility and operational excellence.

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**Don't ever say, "It won't happen to me."
We are all at risk and the stakes are
high - both for your business data and
your businesses financial well-being.**

1. Good password management is crucial

The key aspects of a strong password are length (the longer the better); a mix of letters (upper and lower case), numbers, and symbols, no ties to your personal information, and no dictionary words.

Tips

Don't use the same password for everything.

Don't keep them written down near your device in case of theft and

Don't use traditional passwords like Password1. Remember because of social media a lot of your data is out there for all to see so please don't use anniversary dates, wedding anniversary etc. as this information is usually on our Facebook page.

2. Update software when it prompts you too

Installing software updates for your operating system and programs is critical. Always install the latest security updates for your devices:

- Turn on Automatic Updates for your operating system.
- Use web browsers such as Chrome or Firefox that receive frequent, automatic security updates.
- Make sure to keep browser plug-ins (Flash, Java, etc.) up-to-date.

3. Clicking without Thinking Is Reckless

Just because you can click, doesn't mean you should. Remember, it can cost you a hefty sum. Malicious links can do damage in several different ways, so be sure to inspect links and ensure they're from trusted senders before clicking.

4. Avoid Phishing scams

Beware of suspicious emails and phone calls. These are emails, texts sent from a trusted source asking to provide confidential information

5. Stick to your own devices

Try to limit using another user's device when possible. Never share your credentials with others, and never give anyone remote access to your computer.

6. Back Up Your Data

These days, storage doesn't cost much. There's no excuse not to have a backup of important data. Back it up on a physical location and on the cloud. Remember, malicious threats and hackers don't always want to steal your data, but sometimes the end-goal is to encrypt or erase it. Back it up to have an ultimate recovery tool.

7. Install antivirus/anti-malware protection

Only install these programs from a known and trusted source. Keep virus definitions, engines and software up-to-date to ensure your programs remains effective.

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01325 582121 • 0191 8160444 or email sales@lucidgrp.co.uk

ON HOW TO PROTECT YOUR FROM THE CYBER CRIMINALS



8. Secure Your Mobile Device

Security doesn't end at your desktop. It's important to get into the habit of securing your presence through your mobile device as well. Use strong passwords and biometric features, ensure you turn off your Bluetooth and don't automatically connect to any public Wi-Fi, and download with caution.

9. Connect Securely

Cyber security tips about this have been dished out by nearly every tech expert under the sun, but many

still don't follow this advice. You might be tempted to connect your device to an unsecured connection, but when you weigh the consequences, it's not worth it. Only connect to private networks when possible, especially when handling sensitive information.

10. Monitor and test your networks

Continuously monitor all systems and networks to detect changes or activities that could lead to vulnerabilities. Invest in Cyber essentials protects you against 80% of threats.

Lucid Technology solutions can provide additional cost based services to help combat cyber crime including:

Lucidsecure – Humans are now the weak link in cyber security, so this ensures your employees know what to look for when it comes to a phishing exercise. Every month an "fake" email is sent to all staff members to see who clicks on the link and who doesn't so you can identify who needs cyber training. If they click the link automatically takes them to a cyber training exercise to complete – prices are £3 per month per staff member.

Cyber essentials and cyber essentials plus – are an accreditation from the national cyber security centre which is a government backed scheme that will help you to protect your organisation, whatever its size, against a whole range of the most common cyber attacks. Why should you get Cyber Essentials?

- Reassure customers that you are working to secure your IT against cyber attack
- Attract new business with the promise you have cyber security measures in place
- You have a clear picture of your organisation's cyber security level
- Some Government contracts require Cyber Essentials certification – I.e. MOD, some Schools and Unis

Pen testing – ethical hacking

We basically arrange with the CEO or senior management a prearranged time to ethically hack your network and to see how easy it is to get in, must hackers aren't very good cause they can't cover there tracks. This helps you establish the best way to protect your information and assets. A vulnerability scan is used to identify, rank, and report any risks while a penetration test is used to exploit vulnerabilities that could slip through the security controls and features of a system. An experienced pen tester can mimic the techniques used by cyber criminals while ensuring no damage is caused. We can conduct these tests outside business hours or when your network or web applications are least active, minimising the impact on everyday.

Find out more

www.lucidgrp.co.uk



RAZORBLUE APPOINTS INDUSTRY EXPERT TO DRIVE MARKET GROWTH

A leading managed service provider has appointed a familiar face, bringing an industry expert to its board to drive growth in the business applications market.

Microsoft Gold Partner razorblue, which boasts seven offices and completed its second acquisition in as many years earlier in 2021, has welcomed back Chris Gill as its Managing Director of Business Applications.

Chris was a founding director of the business and has since held senior roles working within the Business Applications space, as well as Supply Chain Management and Warehousing.

His return marks an exciting focus on growth of this division which helps businesses improve profitability and efficiency through digital transformation.

Chris said: "It's a great joy for me to be returning to razorblue, and to be given the opportunity to develop the Business Applications division. It feels very much like coming home, and the familiarity of ethos and company values will mean I can hit the ground running."

GROWTH AT THE PRECISE RIGHT TIME FOR SCANTIME

A Gateshead based training and automation solutions company has expanded into new markets, taken on new staff and built a new training facility to cope with demand for its specialised work.

Run by father and son team David and Chris Simm, Scantime Automation has its facilities near to the Metro Centre, but its services are used by businesses all over the UK, Europe, and the USA particularly in the troubleshooting and training of Programmable Logic Controllers (PLCs.)

Despite the effect of COVID, Scantime has had



one of their best performing years after radically changing the way they operated. Unlike many other businesses in their sector, they adapted their operations and continued to carry out their training face to face at their clients' workplaces but also by creating new online training courses from their new state of the art training room.

WHYAYE AND HAPPYSIGNALS ENTER INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

Newcastle upon Tyne-headquartered digital transformation specialist whyaye has announced a major new partnership with Helsinki-based Employee Experience Management Platform provider HappySignals.

The partnership will see the two companies use a human-centric approach to IT service management to align IT systems and processes around hard user experience data in order to recognise the holistic IT landscape, and ensure experiences and personnel performance are optimised.

Founded by Maureen Robson Norman, Anna Bisset and Lisa Smith – who met while working on a Royal Bank of Scotland project in 2014 – whyaye was set up in 2019 to bring a fresh, new approach



to the UK consultancy landscape.

whyaye's core service areas include business change and adoption, enterprise transformation, product and platform assurance, programme delivery and operational resilience.

The partnership between whyaye and HappySignals aims to help drive business and process improvements within businesses through accelerating transformation and improving cooperation, and to dramatically improve and continue to strengthen employee happiness and productivity.

UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP WITH IT FIRM WILL LEAD TO NUMEROUS BENEFITS

Leading IT firm, razorblue has entered a partnership with Teesside University to explore mutually beneficial ways for the two organisations to work together.

The partnership will see the University working with IT solutions provider razorblue across a broad range of areas including student recruitment, joint research and the development of academic and training programmes.

With a head office in Catterick, North Yorkshire and seven offices across the UK, razorblue provides IT solutions for business including managed IT, cloud computing, software, connectivity, cybersecurity and more.

Both organisations have signed a two-year memorandum of understanding to leverage the benefits of working together.

Dan Kitchen, Chief Executive and founder of razorblue, said: "We're delighted



to have signed this partnership with Teesside University."

"For us, recruitment is more important than it ever has been, so to be able to work with the University and showcase ourselves as a leading-edge employer will be a fantastic opportunity."

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DON'T GET LEFT IN THE COLD: GET MODERN AND COMPETITIVE IN 2022

As we reach the end of another year in which most organisations have kept their businesses operating smoothly in the face of changing covid regulations, it is important to acknowledge what an exceptional achievement this is. Businesses across the North-East have illustrated their tenacity, sense of community, and ability to adapt. However, it is vital that businesses maintain this innovative spirit in order to be modern, agile, efficient and ensure they continue to remain competitive in their marketplace, therefore it is essential to continually evaluate your operational processes and technical landscape.

How do you know where to start? Is it affordable? and will your investments scale with any growth you achieve across the coming year and onwards? This is where a modern technology partner comes in. The right partner can help you challenge and improve your processes, show you solutions that better fit your needs, and support you in maximising and adopting new or existing solutions more effectively. Synergi empowers businesses to



Peter Joynton, CEO

modernise their operations and boost their agility. Our ethos is to always do the best by our clients, so let me offer some tips for staying modern and competitive moving into 2022.

Unlock your cloud potential

At this point most businesses are operating at least partially in the cloud (If you aren't then this is your first step!). However, many organisations are using their cloud solutions simply for email and basic file storage. These are useful tools of course, however there are also a host of powerful features that either exist within your cloud solutions and can be easily integrated to deliver further value to your business.

For example, often businesses utilising Office 365 tools and SharePoint intranets do not realise that they also have access to Microsoft's powerful automation and business intelligence tools within the Power Platform. By doing more with solutions you already have, you could innovate and transform your operations.

Another emerging Microsoft cloud technology that businesses could benefit from is ERP, CRM, and business application hub, Microsoft Dynamics. This modular solution is comprised of multiple applications that work individually and together as well as integrating seamlessly with the rest of the Microsoft 365 suite, helping businesses bring their people, data, and processes together. Our newly branded Microsoft Dynamics practice Unifi is leading the way with these solutions.

Evaluate your cyber security

Working in the cloud comes with a host of benefits, but it is important to also consider, as with any technology, how your data is protected. Cyber criminals are constantly innovating their threats and consequently businesses need to be regularly analysing their defences. Synergi's managed services team offer managed and co-managed solutions. These are bespoke to client needs, helping to deliver innovative and proven technologies such as password-less authentication and Synchronised Security.

So, as you reflect on a challenging 2021 and plan for a successful 2022, make sure you consider the importance of technology in unlocking your organisation's potential.

We'd love to help! You can reach us on 0191 4770365 or email enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk



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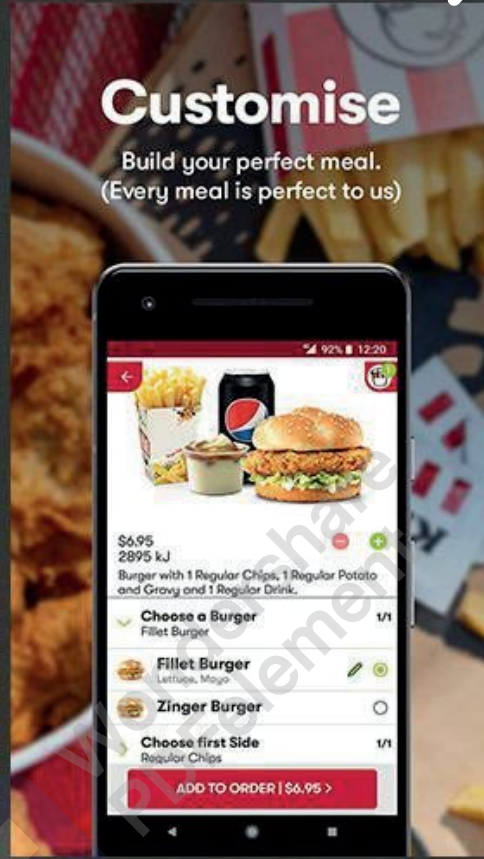
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TECHNOLOGY GROWTH AND SUCCESS IN 2022



Stephen and Dave O'Connell are looking forward to a successful 2022 for Advantex

New work for a drinks manufacturer, a schools construction firm, Europe's oldest floating warship and investment in infrastructure to improve its ultra-fast internet connectivity services, are among a plethora of projects capping another year of success for North East technology specialist, Advantex.

The Gateshead firm, which is eyeing continued expansion and increased revenues in 2022, is moving forward on the back of new product introductions, investment in a highly skilled workforce and a healthy order book. This sees a raft of professional, education and industrial clients keen to benefit from the latest in advanced IT, network and connectivity services, which will help them to develop their own national and international operations, deliver efficiencies and secure commercial advantages.

Advantex's operations director Dave O'Connell, said: "Every single piece of work is important to us, showcasing our expertise in turning around projects quickly and cost effectively. We are working with clients long-term to meet their strategic requirements through technology, infrastructure and connectivity investment. We have seen, and continue to see, strong demand from all sectors as organisations look to migrate to the latest digital technologies to secure enhanced connectivity, long term cost savings and ultimately, scalability as their own operations grow and develop."

Indeed, organisations who see the value of working in partnership with adept IT companies, who offer the wherewithal, experience and strategic insight to bring different options and a singular added value approach to project success,

has been a signature theme as the economy has come out of the other side of the pandemic - and one that will continue to play out in future.

For example, working with national construction firm Galliford Try under PSBP, schools across the North of England are being equipped by Advantex to secure their current and future edtech requirements. And through closer working with clients throughout the tender and delivery process, Advantex is implementing the IT framework compliant solutions the region's students need to work in safe and secure digital worlds.

Greater collaboration is unquestionably one of the priorities of a forward-thinking organisation's digital strategy. In this realm, investment in savvy partnerships will increasingly be the cornerstone that allows tech partners to bring forward ever more innovative solutions and risk-averse delivery, connectivity and application of equipment. These solutions will invariably have the capacity to be quickly and cost-effectively upgraded or extended, meeting any future demands due to funding or changing requirements.

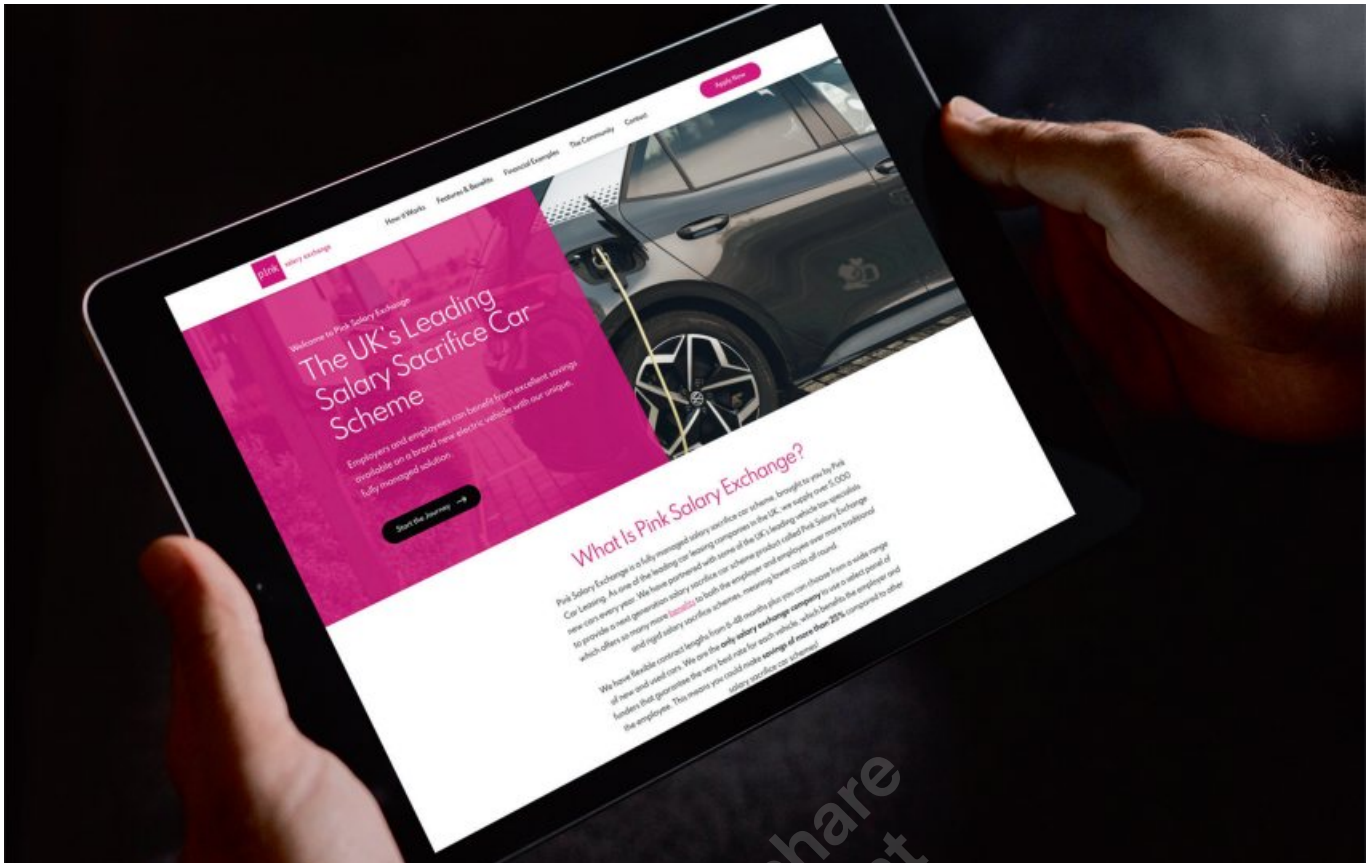
Stephen O'Connell, sales director at Advantex, added: "If 2021 has been the year when global business and trade has tried to find a measure of re-balance in a post pandemic world, in the process picking up the pieces in unprecedented

times and trying to get back to life as usual, then what else does 2022 herald?

"Various trends have emerged in the wake of pandemic, and some remain because of it. Included in these are greater remote working, cloud usage, and new cybersecurity measures including enhanced superfast and secure connectivity. Covid will continue to impact on the way companies do business, and the way employees work. We will see accelerated uses of digitisation and virtualisation - the need for cloud, security, privacy, and automation will hurl businesses forward into an ever more net carbon world where technology, and the advantages it brings, plays a seminal part."

With better internet speeds, more secure connectivity and remote working solutions in an increasingly digital space, businesses will be adopting new approaches to their network security. Using remote, powerful and secure IT infrastructures, businesses can add computing power and storage as and when they need it. So, scalability will mean cloud-based solutions will continue to dominate the business world not only over the next 12 months but well beyond.

More at www.advantex.uk.com



CAR BROKER LAUNCHES INNOVATIVE EV SAL-SAC SCHEME

A game-changing salary sacrifice scheme to incentivise access to electric vehicles (EVs) at affordable rates has been launched, with critical support from a Newcastle digital products agency.

Pink Car Leasing, a leading national vehicle car and van leasing company, recently launched its unique Pink Salary Exchange, which is described as light years ahead of any other salary exchange scheme.

The company says its HMRC approved Pink Salary Exchange will help give a welcome boost to the UK's emerging EV market, as well as helping fleet operators achieve net zero.

One of the other big benefits of this new scheme is that information, along with an extensive range of EVs, are quickly accessible via a web-based platform designed and created by Newcastle-based digital products studio NE6.

For the past two years, Pink Car Leasing has been working across various industries to create its new product. There has been close liaison with experts in manufacturing, insurance, taxation, and finance to ensure the product is the best in the UK. Pink Car Leasing has also been supported in this initiative by two of the world's biggest car manufacturers – Tesla and Audi.

Pink Salary Exchange is the UK's next generation salary sacrifice car scheme, offering benefits to both the employer and employee over more traditional and rigid salary sacrifice schemes, meaning lower costs all round.

The product puts new EVs in the reach of millions of employees, who were previously unable to afford the on-going monthly costs. Unlike any other salary exchange, businesses with just a single employee can sign up to the scheme. It also offers flexible leasing contracts from as short as six months in duration, meaning employees on fixed-term contracts can reap the benefits it offers.

In addition to giving employees the opportunity to 'own' either a fully electric or hybrid car at affordable prices, it also benefits businesses by reducing fleet costs, aiding, and improving 'grey fleet' compliance and safety.

All the benefits and features are explained on a creative and highly responsive platform developed by NE6. Steven Gibbons, director at NE6, said: "This was an exciting product for us to work on; a real disruptive entry to the salary sacrifice vehicle leasing market. The online journey for visitors is swift and simple.

"Built in Next.js, a React technology framework, the project was accelerated over a four-month build to help the client get the product to market as quickly as possible.

"Everything can be managed through the portal, whether by the employee or the employer. It's a highly responsive platform that can be tailored

to individual needs. An employer can manage the scheme according to their fleet management operations and policies.

"The online management portal keeps an employer on the right side of all legal and HR fulfilment. It is fully integrated with other tools to keep things simple, up-to-date, and compliant. It also offers real-time insurance quotes along with real-time availability of electric vehicles."

Caroline Hill, MD, of Pink Car Leasing, said: "When we were looking for a partner for this project we approached four potential suppliers and NE6 not only gave the most coherent proposal but when it came to delivering the project on time they actually exceeded our expectations."

Businesses registering to be a part of Pink Salary Exchange can be set up – and employees able to select the vehicles of their choice – within 24 hours.

Because the company works with a large network of funders, its range of new and used EV and hybrid vehicles is the biggest of any salary sacrifice scheme provider, and the most competitively priced.

The amount a person pays for the car of their choice includes maintenance, insurance, and road tax, and with the deduction coming from an individual's gross salary, instead of net, it reduces the real cost to the employee and saves National Insurance contributions.

NE6 continues to develop the initial project by adding and developing payroll integration, offering employers greater flexibility and ease of use.

Further information about Pink Car Leasing's Salary Sacrifice Scheme is available from its website, www.pinksalaryexchange.co.uk

For more details about digital transformation and digital products, visit www.ne6.studio



TEAM EFFORT COMPLETES BLYTH SPORTS CENTRE REFURBISHMENT

Active Northumberland's £5m refurbishment of Blyth Sports Centre is receiving rave reviews from the people of Blyth after the third and final phase of the two year project completed in October.

The project, with design and project planning by Newcastle-based JDDK Architects, was split into three phases to minimise disruption and keep the Centre open to as many of the local community as possible but was severely affected by the Covid pandemic and subsequent lockdown and social distancing restrictions.

JDDK Associate Director and Project Architect, Nicky Hodgson, commented, "The initial brief from Active Northumberland was to keep as much of the Centre open to the public as possible whilst there was ongoing construction work, hence the initial phasing of the project. Nobody, of course, could have predicted the pandemic so what was an initially challenging scheme became even more so, but there's been a fantastic effort by the whole project team to complete the scheme which altered and evolved over the two years. The main contractor, Brims Construction, and their Site Manager, Peter Swinbanks, were a pleasure to work with and made every effort to be more than accommodating during the difficult Pandemic working conditions."

The first phase of the scheme, the refurbishment of the Swimming Pool and changing facilities, was completed before the Coronavirus pandemic, opening in February 2020. The second phase, included the new gym and fitness area, two new fitness studios, new spa facilities, including a Jacuzzi, Sauna, Steam Room, new wet and dry changing rooms and new classrooms which will be used by the county council's Learning & Skills Service to provide a range of learning opportunities for the local community.

AWARD-WINNING INTERIOR DESIGN SPECIALISTS TO WORK ON LUXURY APARTMENT SCHEME

The property developer behind Hexham's luxury apartment development, The Wool House on Gilesgate, has appointed an internationally acclaimed, award-winning interior design consultancy to begin work on the look and feel of the finished scheme.

DAKOTA House of Design, located in Jesmond, has won many awards for its work and brings a diversity of experience to each project. The team is recognised as a big player in the industry and its work spans hotels and spas, high-end residential, restaurants and bars, retail and offices.

Bob Skelly, director, said: "When we looked at DAKOTA's portfolio we were impressed by their work – in fact, only last month, they won an award for their interiors at the Malmaison in Edinburgh. They have worked on some very prestigious and impressive individual homes in London too.

"We are aiming to raise the bar in apartment living with The Wool House and will spare no effort to create exactly the type of living spaces



our buyers are looking for.

"We expect many to be last time buyers who now wish to downsize, having brought up their families, so we are pulling out all the stops to make sure the interiors really deliver on the wow factor!"

Established in 2008, DAKOTA operates with the simple belief that good design should not just be relevant and functional, it should be stimulating and enriching. The team works collaboratively to support its clients through the design journey by translating ideas into engaging creative solutions which are ideally suited to the needs and aspirations of the end user.

Commenting on their appointment, Peter Hodgson, managing director of DAKOTA, said: "We were delighted to be appointed to develop interiors for The Wool House, which has all the makings of an award-winning scheme."

LEADING REGIONAL CONSTRUCTION FIRM TO CREATE STATE-OF-THE-ART MUSIC RECORDING FACILITY AT DURHAM UNIVERSITY

Leading regional construction firm Sendrig is delivering a new innovative music recording facility at Durham University's Collingwood College site.

The iconic single storey new build project, which started on-site in June 2021, will further enhance the campus at Durham University, part of a series of regeneration projects to improve student experience and encourage a return to collegiate life post-pandemic.

The project, which was won through the NEUPC (North East University Procurement Framework), is due to complete in July 2022, ready for the 2022-23 cohort to start in September.

Constructed on an existing car park, the building will create more space and flexibility for music performance, consisting of a new custom music recording studio, complete with a live room, drum booth, vocal studio, circulation/break out space and practice rooms.



Divided into three sections - recording, social and practice - the layout has been designed to eradicate disruption to the recording studio from the practice rooms and will also include photo-voltaic panels to the roof.

Sendrig, which is headquartered in Jesmond and has a satellite unit in Team Valley, will operate as the main contractor in a team that also includes GSS architects, Link MEP Consulting Engineers and Jasper Kerr Structural Engineers.

Commenting on Sendrig Construction's appointment, Michael Lee, director, explains:

"We are delighted to be working with Durham University on this project. Collingwood College has long been synonymous with performing arts and sports, so it is great to be part of upgrading the facilities with this brand-new building. We have worked with the university for a long time on different projects and this will be yet another example of its commitment to improving campus life."



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NEW YEAR, NEW OFFICE?

Patrick Matheson from Knight Frank gives us a run down of some of the best offices available in the North East right now.



ST NICHOLAS BUILDING

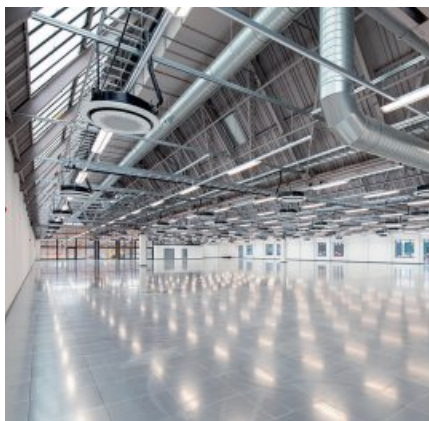
2,297 sq. ft.

A ground floor, prime Grade A office is available in this impressive, listed building in Newcastle city centre.

It has a manned reception, shower and bike facilities and on-site car parking.

The building is a two-minute walk from Central Station and has a wide range of shopping and leisure facilities within a short walk.

£22 per sq. ft.



BALDWIN, LINGFIELD POINT

26,277 sq. ft.

This contemporary, self-contained office in Darlington is on a single floor plate to give maximum efficiency and has its own front door.

It is an impressive, bright office space with exposed services, air conditioning, excellent natural light and car parking is in abundance at a 1 to 3 ratio.

The Baldwin offers one of the most cost-effective total occupation costs in the UK.

£14.50 per sq. ft.



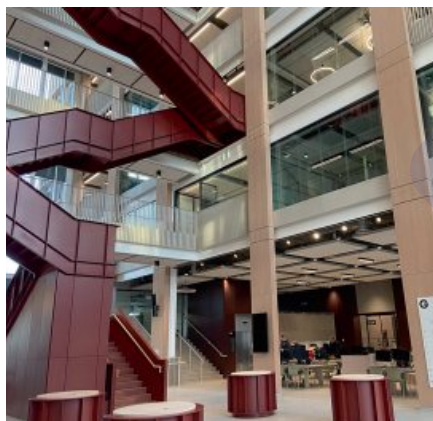
THE BEAM

2,083 to 21,570 sq. ft.

The Beam is the flagship of Riverside Sunderland – an ambitious regeneration scheme, creating a vibrant place to live, work and play.

Benefits include a welcoming reception team, 24-hour access, feature courtyard, flexible fibre options for IT connectivity, shower and bike facilities and offsite car parking.

£18.50 per sq. ft.



SUNDERLAND CITY HALL

3,434 - 22,340 sq. ft.

City Hall is Sunderland's brand new, stylish office building at the heart of Riverside Sunderland's new Central Business District.

These Grade A offices offer impressive public facilities and amenities including a café, a wellness suite, Apple shop style 'floor walking' reception greeters and rehydration stations.

Sunderland Central Station and two Metro stations are a 5-minute walk away and the city's core retail and leisure facilities are on its doorstep.

£21.50 per sq. ft.



NO.3 ST JAMES GATE

4,865 - 10,000 sq. ft.

Offering one of the most connected and accessible locations in Newcastle, No. 3 St James Gate has two brand-new, self-contained, style-conscious offices.

A stone's throw from Central Station and in a busy location, these contemporary spaces have large, highly-visible windows perfect for companies looking to showcase their brand. The building has fibre infrastructure offering 'Plug and Play' connectivity and Backbone Connect for premium, business-grade internet without the need for a wayleave.

£20 per sq. ft.



8 NELSON STREET

1,113 - 8,569 sq. ft.

These fully-fitted-out offices in Newcastle city centre provide a going-to-work-experience like no other in the region. They boast wellness facilities, informal working spaces, a fitness studio, lounges with refreshment areas, a private roof terrace and cycle & shower facilities.

With its impressive façade, feature entrance and boutique hotel inspired interior design, 8 Nelson Street would make a fantastic HQ for a single business or can be let on a floor-by-floor basis.

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Contact Patrick on 0191 594 5015 or patrick.matheson@knightfrank.com



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THE NEW TREND?



Laura Ruxton

Laura Ruxton, director at specialist architectural healthcare practice, Dunwoodie Architects, gives her views on the current trend towards home working.

We were recently engaged to carry out a return to work exercise for a large UK company which employs 2,700 people. They currently have a high proportion of employees still working from home. With our own experience of working from home and the reality of many people still doing this or a hybrid model of office based and remote working, I did a little research on the impact of the pandemic on our working patterns and found out very encouraging information that tells me the pandemic didn't only have a negative impact. It forced us to adapt and respond as a society and workforce. Some of the impacts of the pandemic on our working patterns will be long lasting, often with a positive impact on employees' satisfaction and productivity.

When, almost overnight, Covid-19 restrictions came into our lives, some organisations were much more prepared than others. A few were already leading the way in supporting the policies, mindset and culture required to enable effective hybrid working. Many were already using or at least trialling digital platforms that enabled them to encourage remote or hybrid working. But even then, very few of those early adopters were ready and able to manage their entire workforce going remote.

Employers across the UK worked hard to minimise disruption, support staff wellbeing and provide the right tools and services, all while dealing with their own personal fears and challenges during a global crisis.

Now that restrictions are lifted and a sense of normality is in our day to day lives again, it feels like we can finally take a breath. And we learned valuable lessons that will stay with us: like we are more capable of rapid and significant change than we realised, that we can be trusted to get work done in less traditional ways. It also turns out these new ways of working could accelerate the UK's economic recovery, boosting our GDP by 6.5% over the next two decades. With the additional benefit that they can give people better access to jobs, improve our collective health and wellbeing, and even help limit our impact on the environment.

Following a survey of employers and decision makers the Centre for Economic and Business Research found that remote working had a positive impact of 4.9% increase on customer satisfaction, a 3.6% increase in employee satisfaction and a 3.4% increase in productivity. The increase in customer satisfaction was most noticed in the public sector, going up by 6% in the

public administration and defence sector and 7% in the health sector.

In addition, 45% of people who are currently out of work would be more inclined to take a job if it had the option of remote working. This represents 3.8 million people across the UK, of whom 1.5 million have a disability, 1.2 million are parents and 500,000 are carers.

Looking at the above figures it is easy to understand the benefits of increasing remote working and why so many companies have decided to continue supporting a model of home or hybrid working. In a recent survey to employees working remotely, 90% of employees say it helps them build their working day around other commitments, improving their work-life balance and saving them time and money as they reduce their commute. These are all very important facts, but some people still argue it's not just about making life better for your employees, however it has also been proven that new ways of working can make employees more productive. Increased remote working has resulted in an extra two hours of work a day for the average employee.

Perhaps it is time for those thinking of maintaining a rigid nine to five office based working day to learn lessons from the pandemic and move toward a new way of working that will ultimately benefit not only employees but employers with a more productive and satisfied workforce.

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Damiano Rea, Director, Heaton Property

BASKING IN GOLD

We have won a gold award in the Property Academy Best Estate Agent Guide (BEAG) in association with Rightmove. This puts us in the top five percent of UK lettings and estate agencies. When the news came in, a colleague asked why I was staring at the ceiling. "Leave me alone. I am basking" came the reply. Exit a slightly confused co-worker. It is fair to say we are all absolutely thrilled.

The BEAG is unlike most industry awards where you spend a couple of grand on a table at the awards ceremony, travel and hotel for staffs and guess what? You win an award. Strange that nobody who applied but did not book a table ever wins anything?

The BEAG is different. Setup in 2008, the goal of the Property Academy was to help estate agency business owners run better businesses, to foster and share best practice and ultimately, to raise industry standards. So, winning a BEAG involves rather more than writing a fat cheque to event organisers.

For a start, agencies have no idea they are being considered for an award. Working with comprehensive data provided by Rightmove, the Property Academy analyses every aspect of the business available online and today, that's about everything other than the agency favoured brand of coffee (Lavazza if that gets included in next

year's criteria).

Every single listing is tracked then results are quantified – how long is a listing live before the property is sold or let? This is a vital test as no landlord wants their property gathering dust, so days to sale or let are averaged. Listing performance makes up 70% of the agencies score and at this stage, Property Academy makes a 'golfing cut'. The top 2,500 UK agencies go through to the next stage when things get really interesting.

Enter the Mystery Shopper. A professional mystery shopper makes one sale and one lettings enquiry via Rightmove. The response is measured against criteria that consumers have indicated trigger feelings of 'like and trust'. The agency has no idea the enquiry is a test so, is unable to turn on the charm as they might at an interview for a different award.

Getting the gold plaque to stick in the shop window is lovely but, there is always room for improvement. The Rightmove account manager will provide detailed feedback to the agency, enabling them to plan improvements where needed and compare their business model with industry best practice. And to identify upcoming trends.

One emerging development is agencies becoming community hubs. While our core business remains sales and letting, our staffs have a wealth of knowledge about their patch. You want organic fruit and veg in Heaton? Our people know where to find it. Same with restaurants, pubs, brewhouses, gyms, yoga venues, origami classes and pretty well anything else our owners, landlords and tenants might wish to find out about.

At this point I should do a Hollywood awards speech mentioning anybody and everybody. But nobody wants that. Instead, I will state the obvious. I do not answer all phone calls or emails. I was first to get my hands on the award but to all our staffs, both customer facing and our building and maintenance crew, I say "Thanks". I raise a Lavazza espresso to you all in salute!

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Heaton Property is an award winning full-service estate agency from the North East set up in 2005. In September 2021 the company won gold in the 2021/2022 Best Estate Agent Guide.



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A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF...

RACHEL JOHNSON

Director, Ashdan Estates

What did you set out to achieve this year?

For us, 2021 was our year to really expand and grow as a company. With only a couple of years "under our belt" within the property industry, and with one of those years filled with uncertainty and lockdowns, 2021 was our year to really push ourselves to our max and see where we wanted to take our company.

Has everything gone according to plan?

With the continuation of the uncertainty from 2020, our plan was put to the test, as were we!

After a few months of waiting, we finally handed over the keys to a completed refurbishment property and received keys for our newest refurbishment project. Alongside this, we navigated a move to university for one of our team members and a Covid-19 case outbreak within our ranks.

However, after attending courses, undertaking new learning experiences and communicating through Zoom within our own household, we still achieved many of our goals for the year.

How has the ongoing Covid crisis affected your business and how have you mitigated this?

The Covid-19 pandemic caused a lot of uncertainty. Alongside a worry for older family relatives, we had to navigate the unknown surrounding how the property market would react.

The boom of the early 2021 market came at a great time for us, as we were at that time selling one of our finished properties and had another project in the pipeline waiting for us to get started on.

However, the stamp duty holiday and its subsequent extension, left those in the property industry waiting. Local searches were delayed, solicitors and others were working with a multitude of caseloads and an unprecedented amount of house buyers were waiting for completion. This left us waiting as well.

For us, all we could do was wait. We kept a good communication line open between us and our buyers, and with the vendor of our newest project. It was all we could do given the circumstances.

What are you most proud of this year?

We, as a team and a family unit, have continued to work strongly together. Even with a Covid-19 case for one team member and another preparing for a move to university, we have still managed to work together and continue our journey within the property industry. This for me, has made me proud.

What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

Working on yourself, physically, mentally, and emotionally is just as good for you as it is for your business.

I believe this to be true. If you, as a person, are not feeling your best and because of this, you're not performing at your peak, your business will suffer. It may not be evident in the short-term but the long-term implications of this are visible. To make sure your business is working correctly and to the best of its ability, you must also be working to the best of your ability. Whether you do this through reading self-

development books or listening to a podcast, exercising more, taking time for yourself etc. All of this leads to a better version of you. And this, in turn, leads to a better functioning business.

How has your team changed?

Our team has lost one of its cherished members. My younger brother, Ryan, has this year started his university journey and moved away from home. It was an adjustment, as we were in the final stages of completing a property refurbishment and his help was noticeably missing. But, he is starting his next journey in life, but will always have work with us and his place amongst the team here for him in his summer holidays!

What have you learnt about yourself this year?

2021 has been a year to remember. With the aftermath of 2020 and the Covid pandemic, 2021 has left me feeling a bit lost. There were moments of self-doubt and confusion for my future, but ultimately, I've found my way through it. My ability to work through this confusion, and come out the other side, does make me proud. It may be a cliché to say but my inner strength has really kept me going through not only the last year, but during the year before as well. This year has been one of positive self-growth and new learning experiences.

What's been the most enjoyable business social event you have attended?

I recently started attending face-to-face events again and it's safe to say that these were missed! Some of my favourites must be the networking event at Low Barns Nature Reserve, the social media experience in Durham and a visit to Beamish Hall.

Describe 2021 in three words...

Confusing, uncertain, adaptable.

What does the remainder of the year hold?

The remainder of the year is filled with networking events, the growth of our social media and more learning to come with that, and the lead up to Christmas. For us as a family business, this time of year allows for us to start preparing for our Christmas festivities as a family and plan how we will start the year right come January 2022!

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“
...This year has been
one of positive
self-growth and new
learning experiences...
”



SO WHAT'S HAPPENED IN 2021?

In January this year I think everyone was praying to their various gods, even the atheists were looking for someone to pray to, that sometime this year we would see the end of covid. Of course we never did and now we might even be heading for another lockdown – though I really hope not.

I hope readers will indulge me in talking about some of the things that has happened within my BIV Bowes life and my personal life over the year.

In our rating work we were instructed on a City Centre bar and were told that a reduction in the Rateable Value of 25% was to be agreed if it was offered. Of course we ignored that instruction to agree a reduction of nearly 39%. It was a very gratifying result!

Straying across to residential which of course I don't do often I had a look at two apartments in Hadrian's Tower. To be honest I am still not sure about this development, but the views are undeniably expansive. Not as expansive as however as those from SIXTY, the roof top bar/restaurant which I went to with friends shortly after it opened. My friends were a little dismissive of the surroundings saying that once one has seen the view "that's it". I think it's the sort of place to take a visitor to Newcastle to get a good city wide view and have an experience. I will take some friends, family and London based clients there for such an experience.

Speaking of London I have had two "entertaining" experiences in the Capital this year. In the first case, a client is currently renting a three storey retail unit in the suburbs for £10,000 per annum. Dilapidations totalling more than £400,000 has just been served and we will recover sufficient from the tenant to refurbish after his departure. Our local agent has told my client that he anticipates a rent



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Phil Bowes

of over £30,000 per annum for the ground floor alone! My other London experience has been to introduce a client to a small plot of land of around 2,500 square feet, about a mile out of the City. He didn't understand why I was showing him this until I explained that he owned it! Needless to say we are progressing with plans to release latent value on his behalf.

Staying with land and this time buying for people, we have successfully concluded the purchase of a site where I felt the asking price was not unreasonable – but we are still paying around 36% of asking price. "Shy bairns get nowt!"

I have also had two birthdays this year. In August BIV Bowes celebrated 30 years in business and in

October I celebrated 60 years in existence. I also in October forged a new relationship so am pleased to say that I am not spending Christmas alone this year!

May I take this opportunity to wish all clients and friends of BIV Bowes a very Merry Christmas and here's to 2022 being an excellent year for all of us in all ways!

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The continued adventures of...

Ziggy!

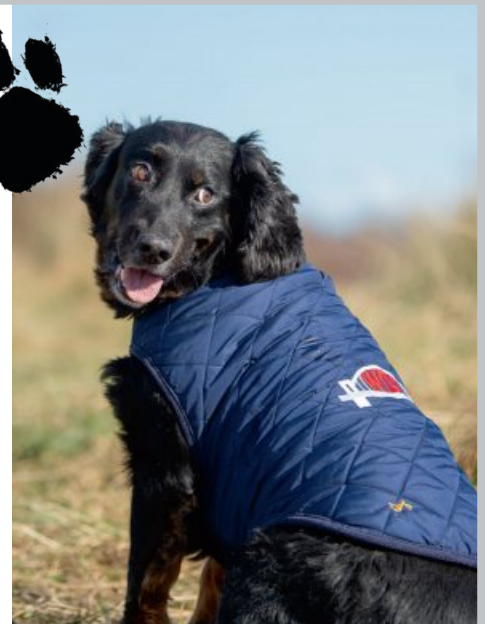
Hi everyone,

Almost Christmas and getting ready for our two week break. Cally and I will have some tripe cakes again for Christmas dinner – mmm yummy! Hope you all get what you asked for!

James from Gosforth asks:

Q: Every year gusts of wind dislodge one or two of my roof slates. The roof is in its original 1920s condition with no under-felt. There are adverts in the papers for a 'foam spray solution' for old roofs. These are guaranteed for twenty or so years. Is this the easiest way forward, or should we look to get the whole roof redone?

A. The fact that slates are slipping every year probably indicates that the nails which hold them to the timber battens are rusted through. Roofers refer to this as nail fatigue, and it is definitely time to have the roof stripped off and re-covered. Having foam sprayed on to the undersides of the slates may sound like a wonderful high-tech solution but it is actually a bad idea. It is at odds with the recommendations of the Building Regulations, which require a clear 50mm ventilated gap between insulation and roof covering. The foam sets hard and removes the two vital attributes that allow a traditional roof to last and perform so well for so long – the ability to breathe and the ability to move. The foam completely encloses the timber battens and the top surfaces of the rafters, which might cause them to rot. It also sticks tight to the slates and makes it almost impossible for them to ever be re-used. You will also probably find that the cost of the spray-on foam solution will be three or four times that of having the roof re-covered in the traditional way. Try to find a roofer who will remove the existing slates carefully, and re-use as many as possible. Also make sure that the roofer uses a breathable sarking felt, and allows it to sag between the rafters. The ridge tiles and any hip tiles should be re-bedded using lime-and-sand mortar to match the original; do not allow the roofer to use sand-and-cement.



Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: wldnortheast.co.uk or through my Dad's good pal Michael Grahamslaw at Northern Insight on mjgrahamslaw@outlook.com



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helpful and efficient service with a quality outcome –
look no further." (Google review)



LEADING NORTHERN PROPERTY FIRM EXPANDS TO TEES VALLEY

Leading Northern chartered surveyors and estate agents, Bradley Hall, is celebrating further business growth with an expansion to Tees Valley.

Bradley Hall creates further growth with the launch of its Tees Valley branch in Wynyard specialising in all areas of residential and commercial property consultancy. The firm has promoted Lesley Parry to office manager at the new branch and chartered surveyor, Callum Armstrong will also be based in the office to support the delivery of its full-service property consultancy across the Tees Valley region.

With ten years of experience working in residential sales and lettings, property valuations, and property management in both corporate and independent established estate agencies; Lesley has been appointed to lead Bradley Hall's newest branch in Tees Valley.

Callum Armstrong began his career with Bradley

Hall four years ago as a placement student with the firm and then graduated to join Bradley Hall's commercial services specialising across the Land, Development and New Homes department.

Lesley Parry said: "I am incredibly excited to be assisting with Bradley Hall's expansion across Tees Valley and am enthusiastic about our future in the area.

"There is a lot of activity in Tees Valley across both the residential and commercial development sector. Since we have been in the region, we have secured substantial partnerships with the likes of Robertson Homes and Vivre Executive Homes, both of which offer their clients beautiful luxury properties. With the potential for great opportunity, I am very excited

to see how Bradley Hall Tees Valley progresses in the future".

Neil Hart, group managing director of Bradley Hall Chartered Surveyors and Estate Agents said: "The expansion of Bradley Hall to Tees Valley is a natural step forward for the firm. With the promotion of Lesley to office manager, and the move of Callum Armstrong to the Tees Valley office, I am confident that the team will bring about a great deal of success and grow quickly. Whether specialising in residential or commercial agency, Bradley Hall supports a range of clients working collaboratively with local and national organisations to support the regeneration and levelling up the region".

The property company operates across the North East and North West, with offices in Alnwick, Durham, Gosforth, Manchester, Morpeth, Newcastle, Sunderland, Leeds, and Tees Valley. With over 30 years of experience in the industry, Bradley Hall offer full-service property consultancy to the North East and North West, with a strong and professional reputation, establishing themselves as one of the region's most trusted agencies for all commercial and residential property matters.

www.bradleyhall.co.uk

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THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME



At this time of year, I always think how fast the year has gone, and what the new year is likely to bring professionally for Howarth Litchfield, architecture, and society as a whole.

No one needs reminding what a strange two years the last have been. I hope like everyone that a new normal is now here and we must all be positive for the future.

So, I thought I would try to make a few predictions, focused on design and buildings – of course. What will the next year and beyond bring? Here are seven areas where I believe change will be inevitable:

1. Evolution of house designs

We are going to see more emphasis on the adaptability of house designs to cope with home/hybrid working. I am seeing clever use of space in one off-houses, but this is not yet being transferred into estate houses. I would like to see more imaginative and clever spaces that have built-in offices/studies and bed spaces.

2. Energy efficiency

We have just seen the end of the COP26 Climate Conference. It is quite easy to knock the conference, but it is pushing everyone (slowly) in the right

direction. I would like to see building control increase the level of requirement for energy performance in buildings so that it is mandatory and not an optional extra. This will help challenge all good designers.

3. Cost of energy

We are going to see energy prices continue to rise, so all clients will look to measures in self-generation and energy reduction. I think building design needs to change to take on this increasingly important issue. Design of buildings must incorporate energy generation features from the outset – not merely as an afterthought.

4. Building changes

Whether a new build or a listed building, we need to look at how buildings can be improved. We need to allow more creative re-use and improvement of existing building stock. In the North East we must review our city centres to encourage occupation by shops, flats and the entertainment industry so that we can ensure the longevity and vitality of our lovely towns.

5. The planning system

I would like to see a faster, simpler planning system that is focused on quality. The current system is struggling to cope, and I have frustrated clients bending my ear daily about the time taken to get over the planning hurdle. I hear there are insufficient planners to cope with demand, so then the system needs to change if we are to encourage development.

6. Howarth Litchfield

We continue to grow the practice and our expertise across multiple sectors, working throughout the region and country. Central to all our work is the need to think sustainably and develop green energy solutions for all our clients. We look forward to exciting commissions across the medical, veterinary, dental, bespoke housing, commercial, industrial, heritage, hotel, retail and education sectors - from nursery schools through to universities.

7. Fashion

It is always interesting to see what is fashionable in architecture and where trends are going. The industrial look is still popular both in new build and old structures. Just as we look back and can identify design styles from certain decades, what will be the defining design elements of this era? I hope the fad of black cladding is short-lived!

Above all else, I hope all sectors in the North East strive to innovate and be successful. We will continue to support our tremendous clients as they push the boundaries of development across the region.

Neil Turner, director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email n.turner@hlpuuk.com www.howarthlitchfield.com

Eothen Care Homes

Compassion, comfort and companionship



Eothen Care Homes enhances the lives of older people by providing experienced and specialist care at our three North East care homes

Whitley Bay



carehome.co.uk rating 9.9

Gosforth



carehome.co.uk rating 9.4

Wallsend



carehome.co.uk rating 9.9

Our purpose-built Whitley Bay and Gosforth homes provide our happy residents with spacious, en-suite rooms, as well as gorgeous, landscaped gardens and a range of events and activities. Our kind and caring staff are there to help residents live fuller, more rewarding lives. Both homes are close to local transport links and shops.

"We laugh together, we comfort one another. It's absolutely amazing." A Whitley Bay resident.

This home has been specifically designed to enhance the lives of people living with dementia, with specially-trained staff seeing to our residents' specific needs. The home provides residents with lots of independence, features spacious grounds - including a special reminiscence area - and even has a hair salon, cafe, library and pub!



THE WHITE DIGITAL TEAM CELEBRATING A YEAR OF SUCCESS IN THEIR BAR

Staff at a North East web developer and digital marketing agency are supporting the region's thriving digital sector as they say cheers after a year of growth and an office move.

In the past 12 months, White Digital, which is based in Darlington, has taken on nearly 100 new North East clients and five members of staff all from the region, with turnover increasing by 50 per cent.

In March, the firm moved into its new premises: the former Sloan's Bar in the town's Grange Road.

Managing director Douglas Dinwiddie said: "The bar is the perfect fit for us; we plan to run lots of events, so it's an environment which works well for this.

"We're already hosting the Entrepreneurs' Forum and Darlington Round Table Christmas parties here, while Darlington Business Club did their first networking event here after lockdown.



"We also have plans to host client drinks as well as street parties, where we invite all the businesses from Grange Road – it is quite a close-knit community and so it's an excuse to get people together.

"It's important to also create a great place to work for our team, which isn't only inspirational but is also a fantastic place to have fun – and the bar is perfect for providing a separate space to our desks where we can laugh, learn more about each other and grow as a team."

Since launching in 2015, the agency has grown rapidly, with the past year its most successful to date.

MEDIAWORKS TO DELIVER TRANSFORMATIONAL DIGITAL AD CAMPAIGN FOR SHOPPING CENTRE GIANTS

Eldon Square, the UK's third busiest shopping centre in the UK, has partnered with Mediaworks to leverage its unrivalled media buying and data-driven targeting expertise. The agency's approach will plug Eldon Square into its global partnerships with leading digital platforms, publishers and traditional advertising channels.

The partnership aims to inspire the regions shoppers and bring them back to the city centre by reminding them of the premium retail and dining experiences that Eldon Square, in Central Newcastle upon Tyne, offers as the destination of choice for the region.

Mediaworks will be integrating paid social platforms such as Facebook and Instagram with other bought media platforms such as Sky Adsmart, in journey display networks, DAX and DAX Outdoor as it manages Eldon Square's 18-month media planning requirements.

Tania Kelly, marketing manager at Eldon Square, said: "We partnered with Mediaworks because they have an incredibly talented team with unrivalled experience and knowledge in the retail space. The targeting capabilities and attribution tracking they offer across digital and mass media platforms gives us the opportunity to deliver a seamless online and offline advertising campaign."

CREO COMMS APPOINTS AGENCY MANAGER

Sunderland-based communication consultancy Creo Comms has appointed a new agency manager to help drive forward the growth of the business, after seeing increased demand for its services.

Laura Farley joins the city centre agency with over 10 years' experience working in marcomms, events, sales and people management.

Having previously worked in the marketing and communications team at Sunderland housing association, Gentoo, and more recently as business development manager for leading independent hospital group, Spire Healthcare, Laura will be responsible for the smooth running of Creo Comms and ensure the business has the right systems and processes in place to maintain exceptional standards of customer care and services to its clients.

Laura said: "I'm thrilled to have joined the team at Creo Comms. I'm looking forward to the new challenge and working closely with the team to ensure we are delivering what we set out to do.

"The agency works with a range of clients locally and nationally, and I am looking forward to meeting with them and ensuring we're doing all we can to support them to the highest standard."

Creo has doubled the size of its team since the start of the year, reflecting the strong performance of the consultancy since relocating to its new



four-story headquarters on Foyle Street, where the team deliver a broad range of creative comms services to their clients including Sunderland City Council, the Department for International Trade, Legal & General, Health Education England and Castles & Coasts Housing Association.

Louise Bradford, managing director of Creo Comms, said: "I'm really pleased to welcome Laura to the Creo team, and look forward to seeing the impact she can have on the business as we head into 20

Creo offers PR and communications support, as well as design, social media marketing, web design and video production.



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A YEAR IN REVIEW: WRIGGLE MARKETING

In a year like no other, Gosforth-based Wriggle Marketing look back on a period that proved unpredictable to all and brought unique challenges to both the digital marketing industry and the wider business sector.



From the start of what turned out to be a year filled with uncertainty and complexity, Wriggle Marketing produced a record year, with a stream of client wins, team expansion, and tentative plans for further growth despite the ongoing circumstances.

This year, Wriggle welcomed a multitude of new clients from the food and drink industry through to the legal sector and gained a strong reputation in the manufacturing industry. Through being proactive and focused on generating a consistent return on investment for its clients, while navigating the challenges of the past twelve months, has proved to be one of the brand's most significant achievements.

Headed up by CEO Nick Gianfreda and MD Mitchell Harrison, 2021 has seen the business double its headcount with 14 team members bringing a wealth of expert knowledge in a range of different specialisms. To fully resource the new client roster, Wriggle installed a host of new faces; positioning the team as thought leaders and trendsetters in the industry. The expansion of this skilled workforce brought with it the necessity of increased space and so in September 2021, the business set to work renovating a neighbouring building to increase its regional footprint. The newly regenerated property now occupies a bespoke 2,000 sq. ft studio adding 40% additional space to the existing office.

As the world once again opened up it became clear to the team that the needs of both new and existing clients had changed. The media wildly documented the changes in consumer buying habits in light of the pandemic and the Wriggle team were quick to respond. The pandemic showed just how sensitive a shopfront can be and so many clients

looked to digital to bridge the gap. The immediate nature of digital marketing meant that solutions could be found for customers that were now looking for 24/7 communication and easy access to information. Recognising such a shift, the team bolstered its offering providing digital solutions built to be reactive and adapt to consumer trends as well as offering bespoke support for those with more specialist requirements. To adapt, Wriggle continued to offer solutions from Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), Pay Per Click (PPC), web design, and Conversion Rate Optimisation (CRO) as well as broader delivery across all digital platforms.

As part of the company's growth strategy, the bespoke digital marketers are continuing their recruitment drive at pace with turnover set to rise by over 60% in 2022. The brand plan to strengthen the senior management team while also recruiting for specialist and generalist roles in a bid to increase the workforce to 20+ members by June/summer 2022.

Building upon key learnings from the past twelve months, the senior team look to grow clients in a range of sectors with the aim of developing a robust and diverse business model. The expert skills of the team allow for such flexibility with a strong focus on adapting to different markets and adopting a conscious approach to avoid pigeonholing clients. Wriggle look to maintain a focus on SEO and have a strong desire to develop the overall service offering and stay abreast of developments in the digital landscape, without diluting what they are known for; bespoke SEO services.

Outside the walls of the new office, for 2022 the team look to continue their work with local universities and schools to inspire the future generations of digital marketers. Alongside this, Wriggle will also be selecting a local charity as its 'Charity of the Year' and will create a calendar of events to raise funds and generate increased awareness.

www.wrigglemarketing.co.uk







MARKETING AND MEDIA MATTERS

JASON KNIGHTS

Managing Director of Blue Kangaroo Design based in Gateshead.

They are a design agency that works specifically with entertainment character licensing and toy industry clients all over the world. He is also a Northern Powerhouse Export Champion. Here we find out more about his business and career.

Did you always envisage a career in the Media industry?

No not at all, it's something that I stumbled into really. I've worked in a few different and diverse roles but really enjoyed the print industry which then led me into the creative sector.

What has been your career path so far?

I left school with no qualifications and joined the Army, when I came out, I did everything from washing dishes, fitting curtains, working as a security guard right the way through to owning a creative agency. Each job has taught me important skills and lessons that have led me to where I am today.

What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

The biggest challenge that I have had to deal with is myself. I lack confidence due to not having any formal education which in turn can lead to Imposter Syndrome. It's been known for me to be in a meeting and expect to be thrown out, which I know sounds bizarre when you consider how successful the business is but you can't always control how you feel.

Who do you most respect in your industry?

From the minute I set up Blue Kangaroo Design I have been mentored by Keith Whisson from a company called Shiremoor Press. He has always been there through the good times and bad times to offer advice and support. Andrew Moultrie who is the CEO of BBC Studioworks has also been a huge inspiration throughout my career within the licensing industry. He has been a great advocate and has always made himself available if I needed a chat or get some advice from him.

How did you adapt your business during the coronavirus crisis and support clients?

We were fortunate that we have always worked remotely so having to adapt hasn't really been a major issue. We did loose creation types of work like exhibition design and build as well as event work. The team here at Blue Kangaroo are amazing and they are the most creative people that I have ever worked with, so when new opportunities have come along, they have adapted very quickly.

What is your greatest strength?

I like to think that I am a real people person and know how to get the best out of my team. I'm a great believer in the adage that you should treat people the way that you would like to be treated yourself.

What is your biggest weakness?

I'm not afraid of hard work and sometimes I find it difficult to switch off and say "no."

What has been your proudest achievement?

In 2019 I was invited to The Queen's Garden Party along with my wife Melanie to celebrate the work I have done with the Department for International Trade in exporting. To have her with me made me feel so proud as she has supported me from day one so to share the day with her was very special.

What are your remaining career aspirations?

I'm passionate about helping promote the digital and creative services industry in the North East. Those that know me will say that I am continually bragging about how creative we are 'up north' as well as recommending other businesses to our clients who are based all over the world.

How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

The creative industries must constantly evolve every day to keep up with the changing landscape. I see technology making huge changes but ultimately you still need a creative mind to come up with the ideas. Retail is an ever-changing area so that's the part that I see being the most challenging and exciting area of change.

To find out more about Blue Kangaroo design see www.bluekangaroodesign.co.uk

“
...Each job has taught me important skills and lessons that have led me to where I am today...
”



Photo: The Bigger Picture Agency

Jason Knights

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF...

JOHN PORRETT

Managing Director, Unique Magazines

What did you set out to achieve this year?

2021 has been about back to basics – making sure we offer brilliant customer service to our customers, making it as easy as possible to contact us – be it by email, live chat or on the telephone. Building a great team and buying in to our vision – To provide people of all ages, all over the world, with easy access to a vast range of printed magazines and comics that are informative, engaging, and educational. Working directly with independent publishers to obtain copies of their publications, driving quality traffic to our website www.uniquemagazines.co.uk and improving margin through efficiency.

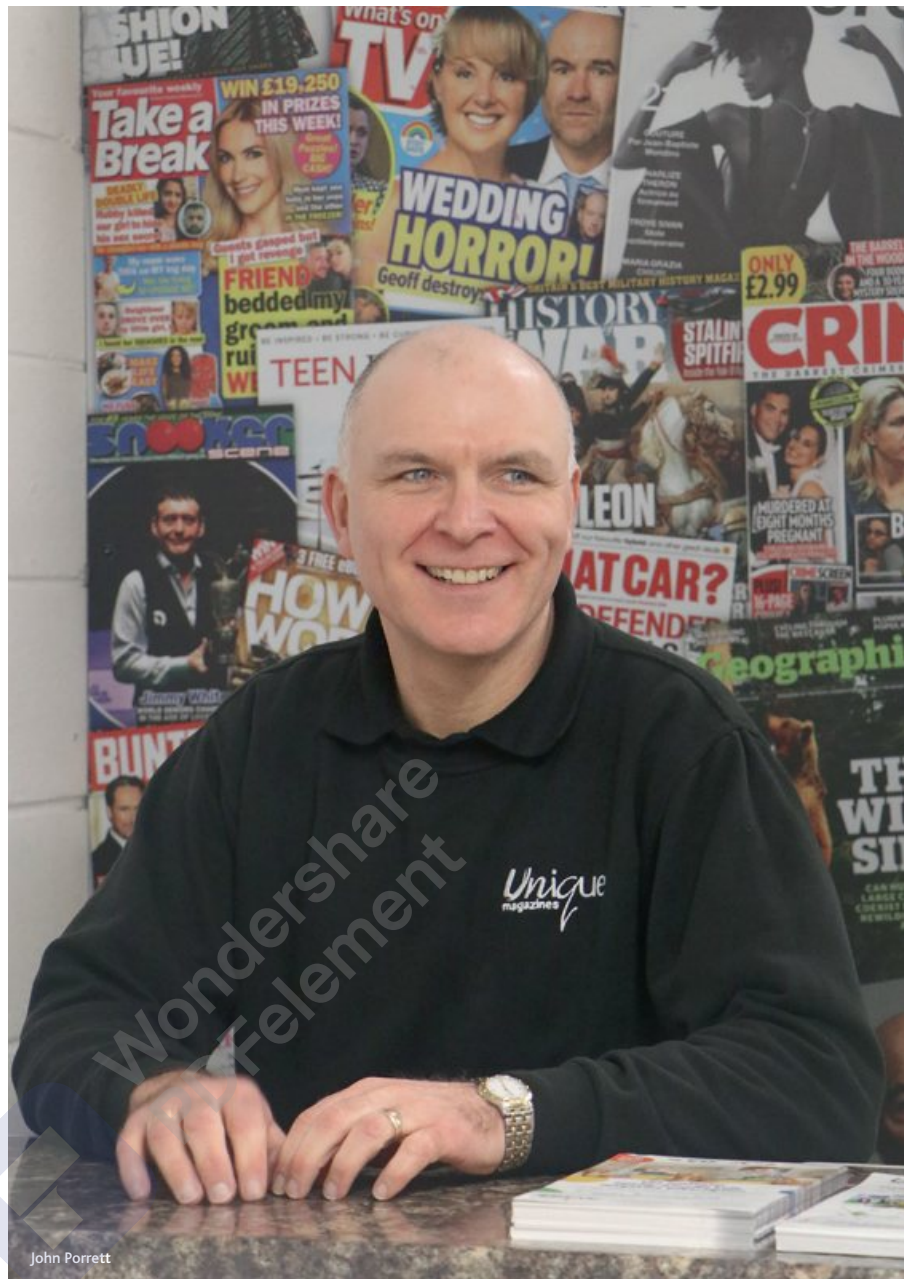
Has everything went according to plan?

There are always other challenges that pop up that you have not planned for, but overall things are going in the right direction. We have a great team in customer service who have a passion to provide brilliant service and we can see this is making a difference via customer reviews and KPIs.

We are answering calls within 10 seconds with 89% off all calls being answered within our KPI of 15 seconds. Our google ranking continues to improve and we are increasing the number of publications that we obtain direct from the publisher versus from a distributor/supplier. We are also seeing margin improve too.

How has the ongoing Covid crisis affected your business and how have you mitigated this?

The biggest impact on our business has been sales increasing by 105%. As the country spent months at home, they turned to magazines to keep them entertained, inspired, and distracted. In some cases, they helped people learn a new skill or further develop an existing passion. This all sounds great for business but with a reduced team due to isolation, social distancing and working from home this was a big challenge to get the volumes of magazines out to our customers. The Royal Mail were pushed to the limit with online sales going through the roof nationally which had a negative effect on deliveries to certain post code areas and worldwide. The team collectively made a great effort to get the magazine orders packed and dispatched every day to our customers in the UK and worldwide.



John Porrett

What are you most proud of this year?

Maintaining the growth, we achieved in 2020 and the brilliant feedback we have from our customers about the service we are providing from the customer service team to the guys in distribution. Our business is all about service and when it's acknowledged by our customers it makes you feel you really are making a difference.

What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

Enjoy the journey – Good or bad.

How has your team changed?

We have a very young team with the average service length of two years – we strive to maintain the current team through training, investment, and career development. Consistency helps to create sustainability and growth.

What have you learnt about yourself this year?

Life is short and it's not all about spending all your time on your business, enjoy the small things in life. I now have two grandkids and they are growing so quickly, and I don't want to miss any

part of it.

What's been the most enjoyable business social event you have attended?

Focus dinner with Mark Forrester via the entrepreneur's forum, great business success story and a great insight into the future of the car industry with great likeminded people in attendance.

Describe 2021 in three words...

Challenging, exciting, opportunities.

What does the remainder of the year hold?

We constantly look at continuous improvement in our systems, procedures, and people.

The remainder of 2021 is building partnerships with independent publishers and building collaboration with likeminded businesses.

Focusing on our six key drivers – service, personal care, trust, reputation, ease & convenience in using our website and contacting us, quality of the magazines we provide.

www.uniquemagazines.co.uk



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A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF...

STACEY NOTTINGHAM

Owner, Bombshell Design

What did you set out to achieve this year?

To continue growing our client base expand the number of employee's at Bombshell Design. Not only that but also to become a Ltd company.

Has everything went according to plan?

We had to change our dynamic when covid first hit. There was a lot of knee jerk reactions from companies, which was understandable but panic stations set in, not just for our clients but ourselves as well. We realised that traditional styles of marketing had to change and needed to be more digital, better websites, online social media presence, digital marketing campaigns etc. We put this in place and it has enabled Bombshell to have a fantastic few years in business.

How has the ongoing Covid crisis affected your business and how have you mitigated this?

After the initial lockdown we adapted and knew people needed to be more digital so we changed our approach. This has reflected in businesses changing their model in how they market themselves and how we then in turn put a digital strategy and better online presence in place for them. This has enabled us to grow our business and the clients too. We have grown our team now so things are going well...

But there are both positives and negatives.

I'll start with the negatives. Naturally businesses are having to cut back. The economy has taken a hit and understandably businesses are looking as to where they can cut costs. Often one of the first areas they look to reduce costs is in Marketing. Companies feel they have nothing to market and as such need to remove those costs. This in turn means that companies won't continue with social media campaigns, nor will they want to produce printed literature to promote anything.

The positives are that some companies have been busier than ever throughout this pandemic. They on the flip side have needed to continue with these marketing strategies to let people know that they are available and the services they can offer. Social media marketing has increased as people are aware that they now need a good digital presence to create an awareness and stand out from the crowd and a website that works! Not only that with retail premises and business workplaces shutting, those companies that are forward thinking really felt they needed to get on the digital bandwagon quick. They had to change their marketing strategy and as such were able, with my assistance to generate a real and strong digital shop window.



Stacey Nottingham

One of the most important things that companies can do is still maintain a digital presence. I know that Bombshell Design still are. I have been in business for 17 years and I have a good reputation for cost effective solutions for SMEs. Due to the UK being on lockdown, the British public, now more than ever are browsing the internet and social media platforms as they have more time on their hands. Online sales have risen and companies ethically have an opportunity to raise their awareness. If you fall off their radar, someone else will fill the slot. If they are looking, you need to be there to be seen.

What are you most proud of this year?

That we have continued to grow in still uncertain times and to showcase why people should use Bombshell design for all their marketing needs.

What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

Be true to yourself, be strong and stand out from the crowd! Your business will always evolve and grow, adapt and align so enjoy the ride. Embrace change and trust is the key to any relationship! Also I was once told my someone very wise –

Always regret something you do do, rather than regret something you don't do!

What have you learnt about yourself this year?

To try be as positive as I can even when overcoming hurdles. There is always a solution. Growing a business especially in a pandemic can be hard but if you have the right people around you the sky is the limit.

What's been the most enjoyable business social event you have attended?

Just generally being back face to face and having a little normality.

Describe 2021 in three words...

Challenging, reset and goals.

What does the remainder of the year hold?

To go into 2022 with a positive attitude, to grow Bombshell more and to reflect on 2021, to enable us to grow and evolve.

bombshelldesign.co.uk

For PR, social media, content marketing...



...and a partridge in a pear tree!

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...CHRISTMAS CHEER IS HERE...

It's the most wonderful time of the year - Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what their Christmas message to their customers is this year.



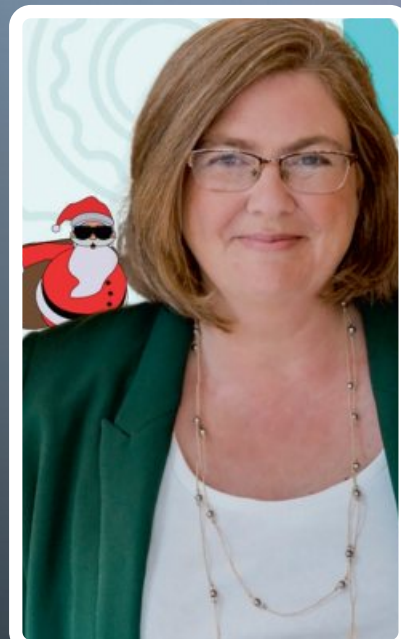
"At this time of year people put extra pressure on themselves to create the 'perfect' Christmas. I think this year that may be even more likely to happen. Rather than think it's got to be perfect, (as nothing is including us!) aim to have an as enjoyable and stress-free Christmas as you can. Plan your weeks and days leading up to the 25th. If you can't get all the presents you might want to buy, then so be it. You are not a miracle worker. Above all remember to look after yourself. Happy Festivities"

Anne Morrison, Therapist and Coach
www.annemorrison.co.uk



"Best wishes from the staff at Northland Wills. We hope you have a peaceful one, but our emergency helpline is open throughout the holidays just in case you need us. 07850127649 / 01670 788200"

Neil Fraser Northland Wills and Trusts
www.northlandwills.co.uk



"Wishing all our clients a good festive break and hope everyone enjoys their secret Santa pottery creations!"

Lorna Watkinson
www.vibrant-thinking.com



"Christmas is always a challenging time for the young people and families we work with. Our mentoring programme is going to be exceptionally busy over the Xmas break, we are currently on the lookout for any type of gift or food donations that we can pass on to young people and families to help them have a memorable festive period!"

Paul Kirkpatrick
www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk



"We'd like to wish everyone all the best for this Christmas and for 2022. It's been a strange couple of years but it's great how so many businesses have pulled through and are preparing for a busy Christmas season. It's just great to see! Enjoy Christmas and here's to a prosperous New Year for us all from the North Tyneside Business Forum.

"From my business, I'd like to thank all my clients, and contacts for their support this year, it's been a privilege and a pleasure to get to know you and your businesses, I've loved helping you get on the right path for your business. Here's to a very Merry Christmas for us all and a prosperous New Year too.

Karen Goldfinch Chair North Tyneside Business Forum and owner Karen Goldfinch – Your Business Pilot
www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk www.facebook.com/yourbusinesspilot

Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call Keith on 07814 39 79 51

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM HIGHLIGHTS PR

I'd like to wish all my clients and everyone who follows me on social media a very Happy Christmas and a great New Year.

PR wise, the business has gone from strength to strength and that is down to the loyalty and trust shown by my clients, so thank you for that.

Highlights of the year PR wise include several TV appearances for clients including Rie Pearson, an expert in combatting domestic violence, The People's Kitchen who do such a good job helping vulnerable people in Newcastle. Karen Goldfinch from the North Tyneside Business Forum and the Maritime Volunteer Service.

Radio also had its fair share of successes - too many to mention both on BBC Newcastle and other independent stations. But it's online and in the mainstream printed media where my work is most prevalent.

All the best, Keith

Just think - your business could be highlighted in 2022 too! Simply call me on 07814 397951 or email keith@highlightspr.co.uk or visit the floating office.



Keith Newman

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Contact Keith Newman for more details.

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07814 397951

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A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF...

NICOLA HALSE

Owner, Riverside Marketing Solutions

What did you set out to achieve this year?

I set out this year to grow the business, gain several extra clients and more importantly for me, enjoy it.

I'm proud to say, I've done that and more! The new clients I've started to work with this year have got great businesses and I've loved promoting their brand, increasing their exposure, representing them at events and ultimately, see their business grow.

Has everything went according to plan?

Of course not, but surely that's part of the fun? There will always be bumps along the way but you learn from them, I've learnt not to say yes to everything and have some time to myself if possible, if you have a calmer and positive outlook, I think that even when things go a bit wrong, you can manage them without panicking and getting too stressed.

How has the ongoing Covid crisis affected your business and how have you mitigated this?

In all honesty, the Covid situation has actually helped my business. Many businesses realised that even during the lockdown periods they needed to maintain their presence whether that was via their website or social media. In the present climate, many smaller companies cannot afford a full time marketing or business development manager therefore my flexible, no contract services have proven really popular.

What are you most proud of this year?

Professionally, it's my business doing better than I ever could have imagined when I initially launched in April 2020, I'm working with fantastic clients and have loved helping to build their marketing presence.

Personally, I'm so proud of my son who got fantastic GCSE's results, the last 18 months or so has been such a difficult time for young people but with hard work and determination he got the results he deserved so now it's onwards and upwards.

What's the best piece of business advice you've received this year?

The best piece of advice was actually given to me by my husband who simply said to take more time out for myself, he's ran his own business for many years so has the experience and knowledge to



Nicola Halse

be able to tell me where I might be going wrong (and right!). I've now realised that in order to help anybody else, you ultimately have to look after yourself first.

What have you learnt about yourself this year?

I've learnt that I'm pretty resilient and although I don't like admitting it, quite competitive too. I never thought I was, however, I think I'm competitive in a good way (hopefully!), I just want to do the best for my business and for my customers, I always want them to be the best in their marketplace so I suppose, yes, I'm quite competitive!

What's been the most enjoyable business social event you have attended?

It's got to be going to Durham Cathedral to see the Museum of the Moon, I'm a member of

Durham Business Club and we've definitely been spoilt since the return to face to face events this year but this was the best one for me. Amazingly, I had never been to Durham Cathedral so to go for the first time and see the moon installation was brilliant.

Describe 2021 in three words...

Challenging. Positive. Enjoyable.

What does the remainder of the year hold?

Lots of parties and spending time with the family hopefully! It's been a manic year and I haven't had much time off so I'm looking forward to recharging my batteries, taking some time off over the festive period and looking forward to another good year in 2022.

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REVIEW OF THE YEAR'S PR HIGHLIGHTS

As 2021 draws to an end, our annual and random observations about the Good, the Bad and the plain Ugly PR moments that have stood out in a year dominated by the Covid pandemic.

The year began with schools closed and the nation back in lockdown as infection rates rose, as predicted by health experts but denied by the Government. Worse was to come in America as Trump supporters stormed the Capitol building in Washington, seeking to overturn his election defeat and urged on by inflammatory rhetoric from their orange-faced and seriously deranged demagogue.

Back home, Marcus Rashford continued his campaign on child nutrition by revealing the truth about the quality of the free meals parents were receiving. Sub-contracted to companies, such as Chartwells, parcels supposedly worth £30 were actually containing items worth no more than £5.

The nation's Covid hero, Sir Tom Moore, sadly passed away whilst the vaccination programme began at a truly astonishing pace helped by the thousands of volunteer helpers. Hancock falsely attacked Pfizer for delays in the vaccine roll-out whilst Madonna chose February to travel 11,700 miles in her private jet for a winter break, visiting five countries to prove the rich were beyond the travel bans the rest of us accepted.

In March, Oprah Winfrey interviewed Harry and Meghan, Piers Morgan stormed out of Good Morning Britain and Johnson proposed a tunnel between the UK and Northern Ireland. Back in the real world, the Metropolitan Police were under attack not only because one of their own was accused, and later convicted, of the murder of Sarah Everard but also for their savagery at the subsequent vigil.

Prince Phillip died with most coverage concentrating on his positive contributions for a welcome change

while April also saw the launch of the European Super League which must go down as the ultimate PR disaster.

Dominic Cummings' seven hours of testimony in May to House of Commons committees revealed Johnson's preference for 'bodies piled high' over a third lockdown, GB News launched to much derision and programmatic adverts booked by AI from brands which quickly distanced themselves from the fledgling channel, Jeremy Clarkson's farming programme provided him with his first positive PR for years, whilst HSBC joined forces with Shelter to offer homeless people banking facilities.

The three lions briefly roared in July whilst Hancock was caught on camera playing away from home and eventually resigned. The 'pingdemic' was blamed for all shortages with Brexit never mentioned as Richard Branson won the billionaire's race to be first into space although Jeff Bezos would prove more successful in this spectacular waste of money. The much anticipated British and Irish Lions tour to South Africa proved to be less of a showpiece for rugby than we hoped for.

Southern Water's £90m fine in August for dumping raw sewage and the revelations of ownership and dividends paid to main shareholders combined with David Cameron's efforts on behalf of Greensill questioned Tory policies and the Taliban took control of Kabul to the Government's complete surprise, especially Foreign Secretary, Dominic Raab, who was 'unavailable' on a luxury holiday in Crete.

In September, the same people who had criticised Emma Radacanu at Wimbledon, fell over themselves to congratulate her victory at the US Open. The groceries and petrol shortage together with the

rise in gas prices also apparently had nothing to do with Brexit whilst the delayed launch of *No Time to Die*, gave cinema operators a brief moment of respite. October saw the damning report on the Government's handling of Covid, the sale of NUFC to Saudi Arabia's PIF and the ensuing criticism from virtually everyone bar Newcastle supporters who preferred anyone, whatever their human rights record might be, to Mike Ashley.

Chancellor Sunak leaked details of the Autumn budget and received a slap on the wrist from the Speaker and we moved on to the most important Global Conference ever held. COP26 could determine whether we attempt to limit global warming or carry on disregarding the effects of climate change, but with the fossil fuel industry having most delegates there, more than any country, whether it turns out to be just more 'blah blah, blah' or actually achieve anything remains to be seen. In the meantime, Johnson flew down to the Garrick Club to plot another assault on UK democracy but changed his mind and threw Owen Paterson under the bus instead.

So, with confidence in our MP's and the Government at an all-time low, let's hope 2022 proves a turning point not only for the UK, but also for the global environment.

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.

A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF...



Stacey Sweeney

STACEY SWEENEY

Owner, Scarlet Butterfly Media

What did you set out to achieve this year?

Most of our existing clients are keen to keep their images regularly updated, however we focused on developing our videography offering with our photography clients and visa versa. We have a strong presence in the Financial, Charity, Property and Education Sectors but we were also looking at the Construction Industry and others to fully explore our other services such as drone images. We also work with some great clients who are also introducers such as PR Companies and Event Organisers, so our goal was to expand our business network.

Has everything went according to plan?

Pretty much so. We seem to have been really busy and successful during the year, however we haven't added as many new clients as we would have liked to.

How has the ongoing Covid crisis affected your business and how have you mitigated this?

Every cloud has a silver lining. Our offering has been in demand to substitute for in-person activity. A prime example would be the school promotional videos, as parents of prospective pupils were unable to visit the school.

What are you most proud of this year?

From a numbers perspective, we continue to have strong growth in turnover and profitability. There have been several highlights, but I do love the work we do with primary and first schools especially.

What's the best piece of business advice you have received this year?

The very best sales people are great listeners.

What have you learnt about yourself this year?

Self development is an ongoing task, which must be embraced. Also whilst my business is recognised for our collaborative approach with our clients, there are times when I need to ensure that the scope of the project is clear. We have seen quite a lot of "stretch" requests beyond what was originally agreed, but we are accommodating within reason.

What has been the most enjoyable Business social event you have attended?

We have supported the Open North Foundation over the past 18 months and really enjoyed their first Anniversary Celebration at Ramside Hall.

Describe 2021 in three words...

Collaborative, Unpredictable and Successful.

What does the remainder of the year hold?

Working up to 29th December, then have a few days off. This tends to be the season of events and dinners, so we have a few booked in.

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VIDEO - A WHOLE NEW WAY TO VIEW MARKETING

Why is video so important in marketing? To find out, we caught up with Luke Holland, Founder and Managing Director of North East based Turps Film, to discover why so many businesses are turning to video to aid sales generation.

It's pretty well known that content marketing is an effective way to build your brand and reach a target audience, but why is video growing so much in significance?

"Video production has skyrocketed over the last few years, and I'm not just saying that because I run a video agency!" Luke said.

"According to Wyzowl Research, 92% of marketers say video is an important part of their marketing strategy and that, when they're done well, video can be a powerful tool for a brand to spread its message to large audiences. There are so many benefits to using video in your annual marketing strategy".

Luke went on to highlight his top three benefits of using video in business.



Videos are a great way to explain your product

"Video content is an extremely useful way to explain who you are and what you do. This can be especially helpful when it comes to sales pitches and bid tenders when you need to highlight company USPs in a short space of time. Customers will only buy your product when they understand what it does and how it will help them so it's not surprising that video content is a good tool for this. In fact, according to Wyzowl, 94% of marketers say using video content has helped increase user understanding of a product or service."

Videos have a good return on investment

"According to 88% of marketers, video marketing provides them with a positive ROI. When you consider that only 33% said the same in 2015, it shows that consumer sentiment toward videos is much stronger now...and our findings support these claims.

A recent video Turps Film made for a timber manufacturing company helped the company secure £2m from their stakeholders to reduce their environmental impact."

Content that Turps Film produced for a local housing authority has led to mass investing from regional commissioners. By telling the organisation's story through video, they were able to explain the huge importance of a project in a concise and informative manner. Such has been the success of the video that the authority anticipates additional funding to reach £45m over the next five years. WOW!

And a video produced for St Oswald's Hospice helped them raise over £100,000 in December 2020. Hugely impressive figures.

Videos are in high (consumer) demand

Nearly nine out of ten people reported wanting to see more videos from brands in 2021, making video an excellent tool for lead generation and brand awareness.

In many ways, because people were isolated in their homes during 2020-21 and some teams were working with less budgeting and resources than pre-pandemic, the demand and viewing of video was accelerated.

"If there's a piece of content that you're considering right now, it's 100% worth figuring out how it could translate into video content and, if you're not sure, you can always chat with us to explore it," added Luke. "We're always happy to talk about your current strategy and share ideas about how you can start incorporating video!"

The team at Turps Film can be reached via the web: turpsfilm.co.uk or get in touch with Luke directly at luke@turpsfilm.co.uk

“

...Video production has skyrocketed over the last few years...

”



**Bland
guidelines.
Are they
killing your
brand?**



Brand guidelines creak with rules.
They tell us the right and wrong way to use your logo.
What tone to use when communicating with consumers.
Your ideal photography style.
The most appropriate fonts for your brand image.
They dictate how to present your brand so it stands out from the crowd.
Brand guidelines make your brand easy to manage.
Sounds perfect, right?
Perhaps not.
More often than not, the marketers beloved guidelines are created to maintain order, consistency and design sensibilities.
Seldom do they take a deep dive into what is arguably the most important part of any brand – emotion, spirit, how it feels.
For any brand that really wants to stand out, rely less on your guidelines and get more in touch with feelings.
Emotional engagement is the most powerful tool out there.

Thoughts from





BRINGING NORTHUMBERLAND'S ADVENTURE TO LIFE

Veronica Swindale, MD of nesma, caught up with David Cook about the new business he launched during the pandemic.

It's called Northumberland 250, a destination and experience business that encourages you to embark on a memorable road trip across Northumberland's vast and varied landscapes, whether that's using your own car, bike or one of their adventure-ready Land Rover Defenders!

When David completed the CIM Diploma in Professional Marketing (L6) with nesma this year, he accelerated his development and took his career to the next level. Never for one moment did he think it would give him the tools and confidence to nurture a new start-up alongside his day job in the sports travel sector.

Where did the idea for your business come from?

For as long as I can remember, I have been passionate about travel and exploring new places. Whatever country we were exploring, Ella (David's partner) and I would spend hours and hours plotting the perfect route and seeking out the most scenic camp spots. Only a few years ago, we often overlooked our native Northumberland favouring The Lake District, or The Scottish Highlands and Islands. It was only after a stern word from Ella's Grandpa, an impassioned Northumbrian, that we set out, maps in hand, to fully discover what lies on our doorstep. It soon dawned on us that Northumberland is an exceptional place indeed. After covering every inch of the County, we set

about creating our own logical route to travel Northumberland where you can enjoy everything it has to offer along the way. After sharing the idea with others, the Northumberland 250 concept was born and began to grow.

Where do you get your inspiration?

Inspiration for conceptualising the road trip stemmed from experiences exploring other recognised routes around the World. The Cabot Trail in Canada, The NC500 in Scotland and the Icelandic Ring Road are all experiences that we felt were more about the journey than the destination, which helped us visualise how a Northumberland-based route may work.

With a busy day job too, what motivates you?

To spend as much time outdoors as possible! Since launching the business, I have found myself doing all sorts of things that go beyond sitting at a desk. Such as getting too close for comfort with Chillingham's herd of Wild Cattle to being dive-bombed by arctic terns on the Farne Islands to lighting the Kipper smokehouses in Craster. It has been incredible to meet some of the remarkable people who live and work in the region and help make Northumberland such a special place to visit.

How do you market your business, and which tactics have been most successful?

The concept has spread organically on Instagram (@nland250), and this platform has been a powerful tool for growing the idea. We've also developed

excellent relationships with a range of North-East creatives, thinkers, and businesses with whom we work together on various projects. It's great to have that network to bounce ideas off one another, leading to some great collaborative opportunities.

What is the customer feedback on their experiences so far?

So far, the response has been overwhelming. We have reached audiences in all corners of the globe, and everyone with whom we've spoken tell us how they can't believe they've never considered visiting Northumberland before. Many visitors have fallen in love with the County and are already planning their return trip! Our latest guests to hire the Defender experience told us it was the best holiday they've ever had, that did put a smile on our faces!

What has been your most satisfying moment to date?

With every Official Map purchase, we donate money towards the Kielderhead Wildwood Project, a mission to plant 39,000 trees across vast swathes of remote Northumberland. This Summer, we had the opportunity to visit the project site and hear the Northumberland Wildlife Trust's vision for the area. For me, donating our first £500 to the project must be the most satisfying moment to date. The Wildwood team are doing some incredible work behind the scenes to protect our landscapes for generations to come, and we are proud to support and help raise awareness of this vital work.



Veronica Swindale with David Cook at his CIM Graduation.

In hindsight, is there anything you would do differently?

Start sooner! Looking back, I realise I lacked the confidence to launch the project and perhaps questioned whether I had the authority to conceptualise the idea. I masked this by telling myself everything had to be perfect before beginning. However, this was just a clever delay tactic. Other than that, nothing at all. I learn best by doing and then pivoting if need be!

A CIM qualification encourages you to think strategically and understand the complete picture, developing a skill set that is not only useful for marketers but a great asset for both business managers and owners too.

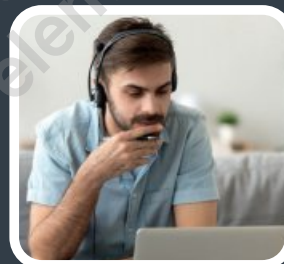
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WHAT DOES 2022 HAVE IN STORE FOR THE WORLD OF EDUCATION?

As we approach the end of 2021, thoughts turn to what 2022 may bring to the world of education. We've experienced a hiatus in longer term education policy under this Government, through the combination of an Education Secretary who seemed ill-prepared for the role and the cataclysmic impact of Covid-19.

Our new Secretary of State, Nadhim Zahawi, has largely kept his powder dry, but recent decisions such as delaying the removal of BTEC funding perhaps indicates he is willing to listen and is prepared to be pragmatic when required. The long awaited publication of a new schools whitepaper early in 2022 gives Mr Zahawi the opportunity to determine education policy for the rest of this parliament and potentially beyond.

Arguably not since the reign of Michael Gove has any Education Secretary set a clear vision for the English education landscape. Gove had a marmite-like reception, but at least it was clear what he wanted to achieve. Mr Zahawi has the opportunity to do the same, backed by a fresh ministerial team and without Nick Gibb, whose influence on championing a very traditional approach to curriculum was very significant.

Mr Zahawi has already indicated the whitepaper will focus on further improving standards in literacy and numeracy. What

we await to see is what's beyond this, such as further drive to complete Gove's academisation policy or further changes to teacher training and working conditions.

I expect further encouragement for schools to become academies, but through incentives rather than compulsion, building on recent work to encourage C of E and Roman Catholic schools to join/form multi-academy trusts. Although 52% of pupils attend academies, only 39% of schools are academies (78% of secondaries but only 37% of primaries). As Church schools are the largest providers of primary education, conversion here would create significant momentum towards full academisation.

At NCEAT, we anticipate other like-minded schools joining us in our Trust. The response of our schools in supporting their local communities in the last 18 months has been magnificent, but the pandemic has stretched the education sector to its limit. In the face of this, it won't be surprising if more schools decide their future lies in being part of a Trust rather than as standalone schools. Together we can support educational recovery from Covid-19 through collaboration within a MAT structure which is greater than the sum of its individual schools.

www.ncea.org.uk



Alan Hardie, CEO at NCEA Trust.

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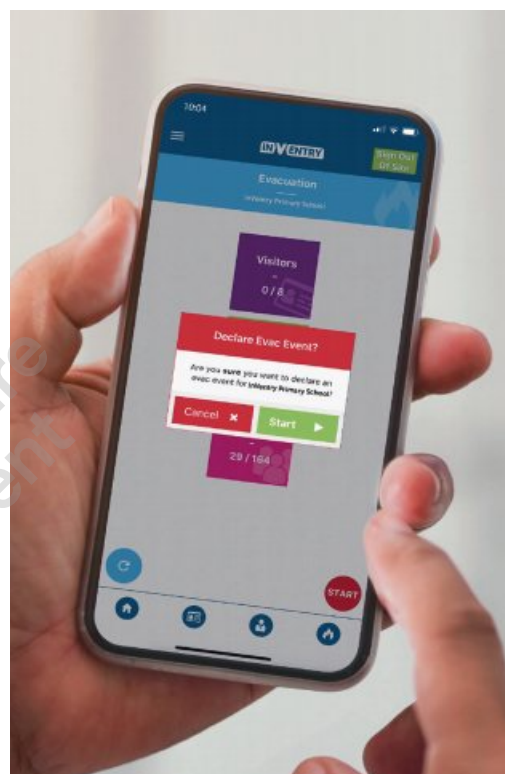
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CHOOSING A SCHOOL THAT'S RIGHT FOR YOUR CHILD

By Tony Jackson, Headmaster at Barnard Castle School

Choosing a school for your child is one of the most challenging and important decisions you will have to make, and we do not underestimate the magnitude of such a judgement.

We place enormous emphasis on ensuring each and every pupil feels a sense of belonging at 'Barney'; only then will they come close to maximising their potential.

It is important your child flourishes whilst at school, which are the most important and formative years of their lives. At Barney, our students exceed their academic potential as a result of inspiring teaching, delivered in an easy, open and respectful environment at the heart of which are the caring relationships that exist between the teachers and students.

The achievements of Barney in recent times are as a direct consequence of the teachers and wider ancillary staff who spend every day inspiring, supporting and guiding our young people. Barney has always possessed a wonderful environment, with happy children and staff at its heart.

Whilst we are extremely proud of what our students achieve academically, we also recognise the vital importance of preparing the next generation for an ever-changing and increasingly competitive and global marketplace.

We expect our pupils to work as hard as they can, and do as well as they can. However, we tell them that academic success will only open a door; it is what they do when they walk through that door that counts.

As such, we pride ourselves on our co-curricular activities because it is in these environments that most life lessons are learned. We want our young people to problem-solve, work in a team, demonstrate leadership and have emotional intelligence. Resilience and humility must also be at the very heart of our young people. All these attributes are delivered most effectively through



Tony Jackson

extra-curricular activities.

Be it missing out on a part in a play, or performing on stage, or standing with teammates to defend a goal or a try line; winning and losing. All these experiences help develop in our children the attributes they will need, and the more exposure they can get, the better, which is why our activity programme is so varied. Beyond the traditional spheres of music, drama and sport, we currently offer more than 100 activities to our students, which includes a bespoke 'Mind, Body and Soul' programme for Year 7 and 8s. We often find that a number of our pupils create and lead their own activities as well, demonstrating leadership and innovation.

We want Barnardians to be the types of people who light up a room when they enter it. This requires confidence, resilience and compassion, all built up over a period of time, and in a variety of ways, both within and beyond the classroom. No leader can achieve anything major without the influence of the staff who make it happen. This is

especially the case in our school.

We tell our parents that our collective role, as parents and teachers, is to arm our children with the tools with which to clear the path ahead of them, not to clear the path for them. This means we have to allow them to fail at times, in a supportive environment. If we do that together, we are doing our best to prepare our young people for the challenges ahead.

Situated on the outskirts of historic market town Barnard Castle, we run an extensive transport service from across the North East and in North Yorkshire to Barney. We also provide full or flexible boarding options in our friendly, welcoming boarding houses.

If you are interested in hearing more about what makes a Barney education so special, please get in touch with a member of our Admissions Team on 01833 696030 or admissions@barneyschool.org.uk www.barnardcastleschool.org.uk



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ALL CHANGE

By Kieran McLaughlin,
Headteacher, Durham School.

The last year has been one of great change for Durham School. Of course we, like every school, has had to adapt to the challenges of the Covid pandemic and fleetness of foot has been essential as we grappled with a constantly changing scenario. However there was also a more fundamental change to our nature as we underwent a merger with The Chorister School in Durham, which had been the choir school for Durham Cathedral for over 600 years.

Going through a merger of schools is never easy, and there were a huge number of things to consider: the use of the site, the deployment of staff and, importantly, the effect of such a move on staff, pupils and parents at both schools. One aspect of our new identity it was important to learn and understand, particularly for me as Principal of the newly formed Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation, were the challenges and opportunities that life as a Cathedral chorister present.

There are around 45 cathedral choir schools in the UK and they all have a different approach to managing life for the choristers at their respective cathedrals. Some are prep school and finish at 13 and some are all through schools; some are independent schools and some are state-funded; some are physically intertwined with the cathedral precincts and some are at a distance away.

What they all have in common however is a commitment to supporting and promoting choral music in the Christian tradition. In Durham, the Cathedral and the Foundation work closely together on finding new choristers and allowing them to honour their cathedral commitments, whilst still making the most of the opportunities of being a member of the wider school community.

To understand this, you need an appreciation of what a commitment chorister life is. The pattern



Kieran McLaughlin

of the week is slightly different for boys and girls as duties at the cathedral are shared, but a typical day begins with a choir rehearsal at 7.40am. This lasts for an hour and then pupils move to registration and the rest of their busy school day. At the end of school, choristers have another hour-long rehearsal and then perform Choral Evensong in the Cathedral at 5.30pm. The day then ends formally but of course there is homework, music practice and even relaxation to be fitted in. There are weekend commitments in the cathedral for the choristers too.

It's quite a busy week to say the least, and the achievements of the choristers are all the more impressive when you realise that the youngest members of the choir are eight years old. So, given this level of commitment, why do they do it?

Even just half a term into my new role, I can see exactly why the life of a chorister is such a special one. It is a huge privilege to sit in a building which is over a thousand years old, and integral to the identity of the north-east as a region, and take a leading part in the worship that goes on

there. One of our aims in the new foundation is to "educate...choristers...so that they can sing the daily praises of God" and anyone who sits in the pews of the cathedral during those services would understand just how glorious the sound really is. The choristers experience a training that goes above and beyond that of many professional musicians and the results are there to hear. Moreover, their singing is a genuinely spiritual experience and, whatever one's particular faith, it is hugely moving to listen to them sing.

For my part I am delighted to be part of the education of choristers and that the merger will enable that choral tradition to continue and indeed to expand. It's a special part of what we do and, if this is something that you feel your son or daughter would like to be involved in, please do get in touch.

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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A FAMOUS CONNECTION

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster, RGS Newcastle



One of the more famous alumni of the RGS was Admiral Lord Collingwood who was Nelson's second in command at the battle of Trafalgar, which is why one of our houses is named after him. He then started his naval career as a midshipman at the age of 12 and went to sea at the age of 13.

Consequently, on the anniversary of the battle I recently went to the annual Collingwood memorial service at the Cathedral which was attended by descendants of Admiral Lord Collingwood, representatives from the city of Newcastle including the Lord Mayor and High Sheriff as well as serving and former personnel from the Navy. Members of the RGS's Navy CCF section also took part and then went on to another commemoration later that day at the Collingwood monument at Tynemouth.

Collingwood had his home at Morpeth, in Northumberland, and it is said that when he was there on leave he loved to walk over the hills with his dog called Bounce. Bounce has been described as an almost perfect naval dog except for its dislike of gunfire and it has been written that Collingwood used to sing Bounce to sleep with Shakespearean sonnets adapted for dogs (I wonder whether he first learnt those sonnets here at the RGS!). However, so the story goes, when Collingwood was out walking Bounce, he always started off with a handful of acorns in his pockets

and, as he walked, he would plant an acorn whenever he saw a good place for an oak tree to grow so that the navy of the future would not be short of timber for ships. Some of these oaks that he planted are probably still growing more than a century and a half later. I understand there is a similar story about the French masons who built Melrose abbey planting oaks because they knew that 400 years on they would be needed for re-roofing the building.

Planting trees now is just one of the many ways that we today can look to the future and support the environment. In preparation for the COP26 climate change conference in Glasgow, over half term, one of our Sixth Form, Abby T, was the panellist representing young people on a webinar organised by the Born Free Foundation. She encouraged any young people listening to come up with a range of measures both at school and at home. She spoke passionately and eloquently when unscripted in response to questions that were put to her and went on to talk about turning anxiety into something positive. In response all

school tutor groups have been putting forward suggestions to the School Council for discussion for meaningful action that both pupils and the school as a whole could take. In parallel, the school is developing an ESG policy that will allow us to set ourselves meaningful targets, even if our energy use for heating is likely to go up this winter owing to the continuing need to ventilate spaces. Some of the suggestions put forward by students are simple things that any individual could do like reducing single-use plastics and disposable face coverings; some require significant investment, for example replacing all lights in the school with LEDs attached to motion sensors, which is something we have already started rolling out.

While the actions of individuals and single organisations may have limited impact on their own, collectively there is real potential for making substantial change. I hope we have now reached a tipping point that future generations will look back to and recognise this period as the time in history when we took meaningful action to address global warming. Up until now the lack of consensus on the need for action and the lack of political will to do so have hampered efforts but our young people are starting to find their voice and drive change. Metaphorically speaking, each of them, in their own way, can be, should be and is planting their acorns, just as Collingwood did all those years ago.

www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk

Be Your Best in Junior House at Durham High School



* Junior House Open Day
Saturday 29 January
10am - 12.30pm

Book your place today
at dhsfg.org.uk.
Girls 3-11.





SAFE, SECURE AND HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL

The last 18 months has been strange to say the least. Nobody could have prepared for COVID 19 and it was impossible to predict how it would affect all of us and for how long.

Certain sections of society and business were affected more than others but, along with the NHS, you'd probably say that education was an area which faced some of the biggest challenges. Only now, as we head into 2022, are we starting to see the situation return to anything resembling normality.

"It was an extremely stressful time for pupils, staff and parents," says Simone Niblock, Headmistress of Durham High School. "We all knew that something was starting to grow in importance, but when Boris Johnson announced the closure of schools, it really was a case of putting our contingency plan of action in place as quickly as possible.

I cannot deny that it was an extremely worrying time, but I am immensely proud of the way everyone pulled together. I was starting my second year as Head of the school and we had exciting plans coming to fruition, but it has only been in the last few weeks when I feel that we can now start to properly move forward again.

However, although none of us could predict what the last 18 months would throw at us, I really do believe we are emerging from the pandemic as a stronger school."

Durham High School is one of the leading independent schools in the region and is the only girls' school in Co. Durham. Its reputation is so strong that girls travel to Durham from across the region including South Tyneside, Sunderland and Teesside. Its educational standards are extremely high, and so too are the levels of care and attention given to pupils. For many parents, the school is a hub which leads by example. In a large majority of cases, parents are involved in business. Many own businesses which, of course, have also been affected by COVID.

"It is heart-warming to know that our parents really appreciated what we were doing to protect pupils and how we continued to operate," adds Simone. "We had to quickly switch from face-to-face teaching to providing everything online. Once everyone had got used to working online from home, I am delighted with the way everything settled into a routine. As well as lessons, we conducted assemblies, School Council meetings, Art exhibitions and virtual concerts online. We even encouraged all our pupils to keep fit with weekly sporting challenges and online sports lessons from our PE Department, as well as pupils, and staff, following the Joe Wicks YouTube revolution. End-of-year results were excellent, and we had our usual number of pupils moving from Sixth Form to university.

There has also been an interesting spinoff from working online because staff, pupils and parents are now relaxed, in most cases, about using video conferencing tools such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom. As a result, we are continuing to hold some parental meetings online. This is particularly beneficial if, for example, one parent is away from the region owing to work commitments. We are even streaming some of our artistic and theatrical performances. For example, we have our Junior House Nativities coming up at the end of term. We will be putting this all online

so even though, for the first time since December 2019, we will have parents in the audience here at the school, it means that relatives can also see the girls performing. When we streamed our Nativity Plays on Facebook last Christmas, we received lovely comments from grandparents and other relatives as far away as Dubai and Australia.

The last time we visited Durham High School was in the summer of 2019. It's hard to believe what has happened since then. However, it's wonderful to report that when we called in to meet Simone again, that the school still felt that like its usual bubbling, vibrant self. There's a lovely feeling when you walk through the front door. Pupils are no longer separated into bubbles. Lunch is no longer staggered over two hours. Play time has returned to being the usual gaggle of pupils scattered around. However, there is still a determination from the school to maintain hygiene levels, with regular hand sanitising, wearing of face coverings in busy areas and enhanced cleaning still in operation.

"We are looking forward to achieving great things. We are busy working towards our Artsmark and we are always keen to be involved in as many projects as possible. We are very much focussed on providing a holistic education and giving our pupils every opportunity to succeed. As with all schools, STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) remains a key focus, but we must not forget about STEAM (addition of arts – humanities, dance, drama, music, design and new media), which plays a huge part of school life. The last 18 months show how resilient, creative and forward-thinking pupils, staff and parents can be.

Most importantly, though we have been physically apart for large parts of the last 18 months, as a school community, I truly believe we have never been closer."

For more information about Durham High School, go onto www.dhsfg.org.uk or call 0191 384 3226. You can also follow the school on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram.

“
...I really do believe
we are emerging from
the pandemic as a
stronger school...
”



FOSTERING CURIOSITY

A Year 6 curriculum focused on delivering skills that are important for future success, with no formal SAT testing, fosters curiosity for the important journey into Key Stage 3 and beyond, says Head of King's Magna Middle School at Queen Ethelburga's Collegiate (QE), Steven Turner.

At QE, our mission is for all members of our community to aspire to the Hill Standard 'To be the best that I can with the gifts that I have'. As Head of King's Magna, the middle school of QE's unique four-school model, we harness this individuality through an innovative curriculum. This is a curriculum which supports the transition between the Collegiate's primary education at Chapter House, our Preparatory school, and the demands of GCSEs and beyond in our two senior schools.

In a difference from the traditional school model where children stay in primary education until the end of Year 6, here at QE students join King's Magna in Year 6, and stay with us until Year 9. We find many students are ready for a new challenge at the end of Year 5, so we made it our focus to develop a unique curriculum for this transitional year, with content designed in partnership between secondary school subject specialists and highly experienced primary age teachers.

The core curriculum consists of English, maths, science, personal development, history and geography, all taught by experienced Year 6 class teachers. In addition students will have specialist teaching for Art, Music, Drama, Computing, Design Technology, Modern Foreign Languages and Physical Education. Students can personalise their curriculum with two optional enrichment options within the timetabled day, covering areas of the Creative Arts and Sport which are beyond the traditional curriculum. The whole approach is designed with the ultimate aim of fostering curiosity, placing an emphasis on those skills that are important for future success such as critical thinking, collaboration, digital skills, communication, creativity and entrepreneurship.

Importantly, we have made a crucial decision not to assess our Year 6 students using SATS testing. Students are instead assessed formally at three points during the year using standardised and moderated "common evaluation tasks" - these are used to track progress and identify what each student can do and what they could do to improve further. This decision allows us to focus on delivering those skills that the students need to be successful in Key Stage 3 and beyond.

The breadth of opportunities in King's Magna, from Year 6, is wide and varied, standing alongside the school curriculum. Students have access to over 100 clubs after school or at weekends, as well as a varied trip programme. Our co-curricular activities span over five key categories: Creativity; Culture; Community; Leadership; and Health and Exercise. Students are challenged to take advantage of these opportunities which lead towards the King's Magna Enrichment Award. Participation in ten different activities from across the different categories leads to the



Steven Turner

coveted Gold Enrichment Award at the end of each year.

In addition to the high quality academic and co-curricular provisions, students at QE enjoy some of the best boarding facilities that are on offer in the UK, supported by a dedicated team of house tutors, who ensure that everyone is looked after in a safe, happy and productive environment. Boarding at QE offers facilities which supports our students' development and allows them to thrive. King's Magna boarders have access to fantastic sports facilities, which encourage them to maintain a healthy lifestyle and manage their own fitness, with the support of gym staff, teachers and coaches. Our innovative THRIVE@QE pastoral programme has been developed to promote well-being and resilience in students throughout their QE journey. With over 30 different sessions each week, King's Magna students take full advantage of what is on offer and engage readily with the dedicated pastoral team.

This all-encompassing, holistic approach to developing the whole student, which is at the heart of everything we do here at QE, creates a supportive, vibrant and caring school environment throughout King's Magna. We are committed to equipping our students with the skills and knowledge they need to move seamlessly to our College or Faculty at the end of Year 9, growing and maturing into their teenage years with confidence.

Find out more and book on our next Open Day on 29 January at qe.org





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EDUCATION IS THE ONLY WAY TO OVERCOME GENDER INEQUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

COP26 has put the spotlight on how women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men. Gender inequality, like climate change, is one of the biggest issues of our lifetime.

Findings from the United Nations reveal that women are hit harder by the effects of climate change, in part because they make up such a large portion of the world's poor. UN figures show that 80% of people displaced due to climate-related disasters are women and children.

The answer to solving gender inequality and climate change is complex to say the least. The efforts at COP26 have shone a light on these pressing issues but to overcome them, education is key.

How can education help advance gender equality in climate change?

The Government announced £165m of UK funding this week to boost women's climate leadership and support those most vulnerable to climate change. Within those programmes, education was a strong feature.

At NCFE, we believe that through shaping smarter learning, we can help to build a fairer society, create opportunities to progress, and ensure no learner is left behind, regardless of their status or background. This means helping more individuals to realise their true potential – in turn, establishing more sustainable communities.

In the UK, the Government's ten-point plan for a green industrial revolution will see the creation of up to 250,000 green jobs in many different sectors. We must ensure that women are equipped with the knowledge and skills – as well as the means and motivation – to access these opportunities.

For women already in the workforce, we need to help them understand how their skills and experience can map across to jobs related to climate action, and provide them with the transferable skills they'll need so that no one is left behind.



How education can boost environmental progress.

NCFE is committed to embedding sustainability into the curriculum. We're working with established and emerging experts in the industry to identify areas of need and to help develop clear pathways into green jobs.

This must start from early years and run right through the education system – explaining to young girls that they can have "green jobs", breaking down stereotypes, and communicating the different pathways they can take to a career in this field.

We know there are many great female role models working in the green sector, like Tracy Machnicki at Britishvolt and Charlotte Bonner at The Education and Training Foundation – who work closely with NCFE.

Charlotte Bonner, National Head of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) at The Education and Training Foundation (ETF), talking about the link between gender inequality and climate change, said: "Social responsibility and eradicating inequality is an integral part of the sustainability agenda – the two are intrinsically linked. By reducing gender inequalities, we can ensure the solutions to climate change and other

sustainability challenges are equitable and just."

Tracy Machnicki, Social Value Manager at Britishvolt, an organisation that delivers sustainable, low-carbon batteries and is committed to accelerating the transition to a zero-carbon future, comments: "With the clean energy business offering fresh opportunities, it is the perfect time for women to take the helm and deliver the employment of the future. This is a really amazing time for the planet. COP26 is the perfect platform to amplify this message."

As always, collaboration between the education sector, employers and government is vital to making real progress when it comes to gender equality in climate change. NCFE will continue to work with industry stakeholders to ensure our products and services are setting women up for successful careers in STEM and climate action. We'll also be furthering our commitment to help break down barriers to education, enabling everyone to access the highest quality of education – to both address climate change-related gender inequalities and to empower women to become future leaders in climate action.

[ncfe.org.uk](https://www.ncfe.org.uk)

NEWCASTLE SCHOOL FOR BOYS LAUNCH NEW HIGH LEVEL SIXTH FORM SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS

For boys entering into Year 12 in September 2022, Newcastle School for Boys will be launching their new High Level Sixth Form Scholarship Awards, offering up to 100% scholarship awards for those showing exceptional talent.

The talent identification programme will allow boys to access the exceptional sixth form education at the School whilst being supported in their pursuit of excellence in their chosen area. The scholarships will be offered to boys performing to the highest level academically, in music or in sport.

The Gosforth-based independent school saw the launch of its new sixth form centre in 2017 and regularly sees its boys producing results well above the national average both in its A Level and Cambridge Technical courses.

Headmaster, Mr David Tickner said "We're delighted to launching this scheme for September 2022 and to be able to recognise the exceptional talent of those wishing to join our Sixth Form.

We offer exceptional support at our sixth form to allow boys to pursue academic excellence whilst still following their passions outside of the classroom. Our Sixth Form focuses developing the whole boy to put them in the best possible place to achieve happiness and excellence in their future lives."

The School will be hosting their Sixth Form Open Evening on Thursday 18th November, 6.00pm. This evening will allow those interested to learn more about the education on offer, speak with subject leaders and receive further details on the scholarship scheme.

"We really look forward to welcoming boys and their families along to our open evening and assessment day," said Head of Sixth Form, Mrs Tori Snowden.

This is a very exciting opportunity for us to open up our Sixth Form offer via the launch of this scholarship. We very much look forward to meeting with the applicants to learn more about their passions and talents."

Those wishing to apply for the scholarship scheme can do so by contacting



the School and submitting an application by the closing date of Friday 17th December. Applicants will be invited to an assessment day on Saturday 29th January 2022 with offers to be issued in the following weeks.

To apply for the scholarship scheme or to register to attend the Sixth Form Open Evening, please head to the School's website www.newcastleschool.co.uk. Any queries can be directed to the School's Admissions department on 0191 255 9303 or admissions@newcastleschool.co.uk



ENTRANCE AND SCHOLARSHIP ASSESSMENT DAY

Saturday 29th January 2022

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FOR SHAPING MY FUTURE"

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MURDER UNDER THE MICROSCOPE IN LATEST POPPY DENBY MYSTERY

A new mystery thriller set in 1920s Oxford celebrates the achievements of female scientists.

A radio documentary about Nobel Prize winning scientist Dorothy Crowfoot Hodgkin was the accidental inspiration for the latest Poppy Denby Investigates novel by popular Newcastle author Fiona Veitch Smith.

Set in 1925, The Crystal Crypt sees the intrepid reporter turned sleuth travelling to Oxford to investigate what first appears to be the accidental death of an up-and-coming female scientist who is found dead in a basement laboratory.

Explaining how she was inspired by the ground-breaking work of Dorothy Hodgkin, Fiona said: "I was wondering where Poppy was going to go next, and I had BBC Radio 4 on in the background and Melvyn Bragg was talking about Dorothy Hodgkin who is a scientist who won the Nobel Prize for Chemistry in 1964.

"She had received numerous nominations but was overlooked for years until eventually, a few male scientists who were appalled that she had never been honoured, applied pressure for her recogni

"The headline in the British newspapers the next day was 'Oxford housewife wins Nobel Prize' – I was absolutely outraged when I heard this, so I had to stop what I was doing and listen to the rest of the story."

During her lifetime Hodgkin was extremely influential in the development of 20th century medicine including confirming the structure of penicillin, vitamin B12 and insulin and when Fiona discovered she had a basement laboratory in Oxford in the 1920s it was too much of a temptation to resist.

"I discovered that Dorothy had a laboratory in the basement of what is now the Science Museum in Oxford where she and her colleagues worked on experiments involving Xray crystallography.

"That suddenly got the creative juices going and the plot of a murdered female scientist in a basement laboratory in Oxford in 1925 for Poppy to investigate was born."



BOOTLEGS RETURN TO NEWCASTLE

With the country at last opening up to live entertainment what better time to celebrate the upbeat mood than by seeing the World's Premier Beatles Tribute act, the Bootleg Beatles, this month at Newcastle City Hall on December 17th.

The show will include all the hits and more, but also feature a special set dedicated to Let it Be , celebrating the long awaited release of the critically acclaimed Peter Jackson Beatles documentary The Beatles: Get Back. The set will include a stunningly authentic re-enactment of the Beatles famous 1969 rooftop concert, plus the iconic anthem 'The Long And Winding Road' and the album's title track 'Let It Be'. Tracing the Fab Four's journey through the Swinging Sixties, with every detail forensically observed from the costumes and instruments to their flawless renditions of the classic hits from every era of the world's most famous songbook, this is an incredible experience. But it's not only their sound that is authentic; they bear an uncanny resemblance to the Fab Four. As one reviewer said, "It's not John, Paul, George, and Ringo ... but you simply won't believe it".

TRIO OF CORONATION STREET FAVOURITES HEADLINE FATAL ATTRACTION CAST

Three of TV's most popular faces are set to star in a new production of Fatal Attraction, based on the classic Paramount Pictures Corporation film and playing Newcastle Theatre Royal Tue 25 – Sat 29 Jan 2022.

Kym Marsh will perform the iconic role of Alex Forrest, Oliver Farnworth her lover, Dan Gallagher and Susie Amy his wife, Beth.

One of the most iconic films of the era, Fatal Attraction was one of 1987's highest grossing US Box Office release, securing six major Oscar nominations at the following year's Academy Awards, including: Best Actress for Glenn Close's mesmerising depiction of urbane sophisticate Alex Forrest, Best Supporting Actress (Anne Archer), Best Writing Adapted Screenplay (James Dearden), Best Director (Adrian Lyne), Best Editing, and



Best Picture. Michael Douglas - at the peak of his Hollywood powers - was omitted from the list only as he was nominated elsewhere in the Best Actor category for his role as Gordon 'greed is good' Gecko in Wall Street, which he went on to win. Fatal Attraction's success was such that the film inspired a generation of psychosexual thrillers in the years that followed.

Tipped to be provocative and gripping in equal measures, Fatal Attraction is a tale of seduction and suspense that asks the question; what happens when desire becomes deadly?

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BAXTER**
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ENTERTAINMENT



The Playhouse lit up in September 2020 for the Light It Up In Red Campaign which highlighted the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on the theatre and live entertainment industry around the world.

PLAYHOUSE WHITLEY BAY LOOKS FORWARD TO ITS BUSIEST YEAR YET

Its March 2020, Boris Johnson PM announces to the nation "You should avoid pubs, clubs, theatres and other such social venues", as a result the world of live events as we know it, is turned upside down.

Just like every other setting across the UK, ASM Global venue Playhouse Whitley Bay endured over 18 months of no live music, performances and of course Panto - something the historical North Tyneside venue is very well known for.

Fast forward to Friday 23rd July 2021, and something magical happened. After what felt like a lifetime, the doors of the historical North Tyneside building swung open once again, and as the music hit and years of memories circulated around the building once again, the Playhouse and its staff never looked back.

"Our first event coming back from lockdown was extraordinary, we expected emotions to be high but to see performers, audience members and even staff having to compose themselves caught the likes of myself, who was fully focused on just making sure everything went to plan as safely as it physically could, well and truly off guard. It was a night many of us won't forget and just solidified how much, not just the Playhouse has been missed, but the industry as a whole." David Kirkland, Playhouse Marketing Manager.

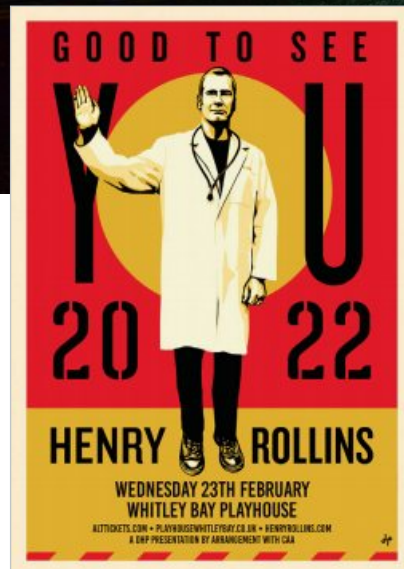
Although Playhouse Theatre Director Phil Smith has

worked in the industry for over 35 years, with some of the world's biggest acts, the past 18 months was still a monumental curve ball.

"The customer experience, including safety, has and always will be our number one priority. The Playhouse is a memory making machine, friends and family have been robbed of some great nights out due to lockdown but our incredible venue, and staff, are back in business, and it is up to us to make sure all our customers, old and new, have the best night possible."

The Playhouse is finishing off 2021 in style by celebrating one of their best-selling pantos to date, as Snow White, starring national treasure Linda Lusardi and her daughter Lucy Kane, broke box office records this November. The landmark venue is looking forward to a bumper filled 2022 calendar and has already confirmed a variety of incredible acts and names including: Friends the Musical Parody, Shaun Ryder, Jimmy Carr, Giovanni Pernice, plus Hollywood stars Henry Rollins and Jeff Garlin!

playhousewhitleybay.co.uk



Playhouse Whitley Bay and Blue Genie Entertainment present

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STEVE WALLS

as Muddles

LUCY KANE

as Snow White

DANIEL MAWSTON

as Patsy the Cook

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ENTERTAINMENT
whitleybaypanto.co.uk

North Tyneside Council



The facade of the Floris perfume shop at 89 Jermyn Street in London, England. Floris was established in 1730 and remains a family-run business.



Edward Bodenham, Perfumery Director at Floris in London, England. Floris is a perfumer based at 89 Jermyn Street.



Household Cavalry on Horse Guards Parade in front of the Old Admiralty Building in London, England. The mounted soldiers are participating in the Changing of the Guards.



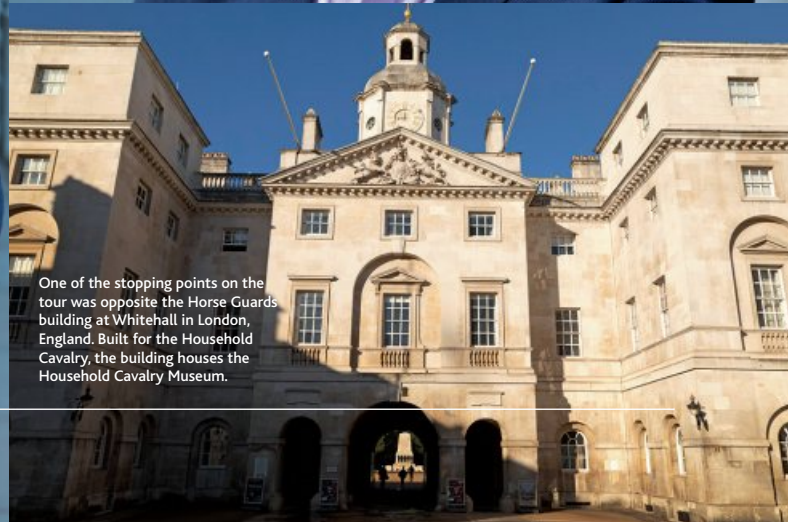
Admiralty House where Ian Fleming was based during World War Two. The former residence of the First Lord of the Admiralty was designed by Samuel Pepys Cockerell and is a Grade One Listed Building.



Tour guide Andy Jackson sipping a Vesper cocktail outside of the Blue Boar Pub in Westminster at the end of Imagine Experiences' 'Bond for a Day' immersive tour.



Brendan Murphy, the CEO of Imagine Experiences, in London, England. Imagine Experiences offers the Ian Fleming and James Bond themed 'Bond for a Day' tour in London.



One of the stopping points on the tour was opposite the Horse Guards building at Whitehall in London, England. Built for the Household Cavalry, the building houses the Household Cavalry Museum.

BOND FOR A DAY IN LONDON

By Stuart Forster

"We want you to be an agent...I'm not your guide, I'm your handler. We're going to go through a few experiences today that will test you," said Andy Jackson in an authoritative tone reminiscent of Bernard Lee playing M in one of the early 007 films.

Along with the seven other participants in the Bond for a Day immersive tour of London, I'd just finished breakfast in one of the private rooms in the Civil Service Club at Great Scotland Yard.

Andy's career included stints in military and police intelligence prior to guiding. Wearing round, wire-framed spectacles plus a union jack waistcoat beneath his blue sports jacket, he informed us that our central London meeting place had been a clearing house for interrogation during World War Two. At that time Ian Fleming – the creator of James Bond, the world's most famous fictional spy – worked for the Naval Intelligence Division and was based nearby at Admiralty House.

The recently launched tour aims to capitalise in the upsurge of interest in all things Bond-related resulting from the long-anticipated cinematic release of *No Time To Die*, the fifth 007 movie starring Daniel Craig. In January the film *Operation Mincemeat*, featuring Johnny Flynn as Ian Fleming, will have its British premiere. Andy explained how that exercise in deception was executed ahead of the Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943. It was one of more than 50 ideas to fool and disrupt the enemy compiled by Fleming early in the war in a document known as the Trout Memo.

As we followed Andy through the streets of Whitehall, to see filming locations used in recent 007 films and places associated with Fleming's wartime career, I chatted with Brendan Murphy, the CEO of tour operator Imagine Experiences. "We wanted to get away from passive tourism and create a more experiential travel experience," he explained. "A lot of tourism experiences put off British residents from engaging in culture and history. They see tourism products and days out as patronising and overpriced," he added about market research conducted ahead of launching the Bond for a Day tour.

"Ian Fleming was a dark horse. What you see in Bond is what Fleming would like to be. What Fleming did is what Bond is. The two are inextricably bound together," said Andy before we climbed into luxury cars to be transported to a shooting range on Camden High street. After testing our skills with pellet guns we discussed Bond movies on our way to number 89 Jermyn Street.

That is the address of Floris, a long-established perfumer whose clients have included the likes of Florence Nightingale, the heroine of the Crimean War, and playwright Noël Coward in addition to royalty and Ian Fleming. The Bond author mentions Floris products in his books and has his central character wear No 89, an eau de toilette which we were invited to try.

The shop's mahogany cabinets date from London's Great Exhibition of 1851. Over a glass of cava, perfumery director Edward Bodenham discussed the establishment of the business by his ancestors back in 1730 and his pride at Fleming mentioning its products: "From being a Bond enthusiast myself and having read all of the books, you know how Ian Fleming really takes time to appreciate every detail in whatever he's wearing or drinking – everything is down to the details. There's a specific reason why he'll pick anything and it's to do with the quality of it, so it's very flattering to be mentioned in the books and the fact he was a customer."

After driving past the Secret Intelligence Service's headquarters at Vauxhall Cross, a building that features in several Bond movies, Andy discussed counter surveillance techniques while leading us on foot from Birdcage Walk to Queen's Anne Gate. It was there that Mansfield Smith-Cumming – known as C, for 'Chief' – lived while founding Britain's intelligence service during the first decade of the 20th century. Staying alert for potential tails, we continued on to St Ermin's Hotel, the base of the Special Operations Executive's covert operations in occupied Europe during World War Two.

Our post-tour 'debriefing' was conducted in the Blue Boar Pub over a round of Vespers, the punchy martini cocktail whose recipe appears in the novel *Casino Royale*. Shaken by the Vesper's boozy bite and stirred by the insightful tour, I thanked Andy before stepping out onto the streets of Westminster.



A bottle of the No. 89 eau de toilette at the Floris perfume shop in London, England. The scent is named after the street number of the long-established store and was a favourite of Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond novels, and is mentioned in his books about the fictional spy.

TRAVEL INFORMATION

Bond for a Day is one of the immersive London tours offered by Imagine Experiences (imaginexperiences.com). Priced from £249 per person, the tour starts at the Civil Service Club in London at 10.00am on Fridays and Saturdays and has a duration of five hours. Apply the promo code LetsdoLondon15 to get a 15 per cent discount on online bookings.

Lumo (lumo.co.uk) and LNER (lner.co.uk) operate trains between stations in North East England and London King's Cross.

MY WEEKEND

LYN HORTON

Chief Executive Officer of
Northumberland charity, Leading Link.

The charity works with schools and the community and has helped thousands of young people by supporting them to identify and achieve their aspirations. Here she tells us about her weekends.



Lyn Horton

Do you ever have to work weekends?

Not every weekend but as we do a lot of work within the communities we often have to fit into their schedules and events. For example, we have taken part in the Chinese New Year Parade in Newcastle, with ourselves and our young leaders working eight weekends consecutively. Working with the Chinese community we learned how to do the dragon and synchronised flag dance and our young people rubbed shoulders with a different community and culture.

We've also recently led on the Blyth Carnival with over 40 local businesses and residents involved in creating an amazing community spectacle.

I never regret working at weekends as we want to be real and work where the community needs us. We are proud to be project led, working where the biggest impact and learning happens, immaterial of what day it lands on.

Are most weekends the same?

Never! I can go from lovely family weekends, to full on community events with work or just simply catching up on the cleaning and tidying! We have a busy family with our girls moving between home and university or moving into their first house, my husband building our extension over months between jobs and simply catching up with friends and families.

We value time together as a family and really try to have a day and evening at least once a month where it is just us to chat and unwind together.

Do you find it hard to switch off?

Fab question and one I don't like to admit but yes!

I'm getting better at leaving my computer at work as I know I really need to look after my own welfare as well as other people's.

During the pandemic and lock-down I made an office in our summer house to try and cut between work and home but I found it really hard! The problem with working from home is understanding and making sure you have a clear cut-off time.

Due to the increase in digital activity through Zoom and Teams, switching off becomes harder and we must be mindful of this. Just jumping on to a Zoom or Teams means you are back thinking about work. 'Just one hour of chat', isn't just an hour, it's the other hour thinking about actions and the work zone you have suddenly entered!

I will sometimes shut everything off and just spend quality time with my family as this makes me feel so much more invigorated and ready to start the next week. There's a lot to be said for switching off.

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

Catch up on emails (about two hours), write some evaluations as I need quiet for this and plan upcoming events. However, I will stress that I do not do this every weekend, only when relevant.

Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

Neither! Housework (I suppose that could count as exercise the speed I run around!)

Prefer big night out or a night in the house?

Both! I love a big night out! I recently went to a black-tie event with the Rotary Club, and I even

booked a hotel with breakfast. However, a night in huddled around the fire with the family could never, ever be undervalued.

Do you watch or play sport at a weekend?

No although it is on TV as the girls and their boyfriends are well into it!

Where do you like to eat out at a weekend?

I'm always up for somewhere different but not touristic. I love good food and thankfully Morpeth has an abundance of great food restaurants. Our family are big on Thai, Chinese, Indian and Turkish! However, I love to have quirky experiences too with a difference. Too many to mention here!

How important is the weekend to you?

We all need a circuit block! However, with me it might not necessarily be a 'weekend' but a space that fits with the family or what needs doing. I just think it's important that everyone allocates a time whether weekend or not, just to have that down time. Downtime or meltdown!

Of a weekend, you'll usually find me most happy...?

Doing something I just really want to do! That might be work as it's a fab project or home doing my own thing, just as long as it's something I want to do and I know why I'm doing it!

To find out more about the work of Leading Link checkout www.leadinglink.co.uk

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All operators, including the new Lumo service from Newcastle to both Edinburgh and London.

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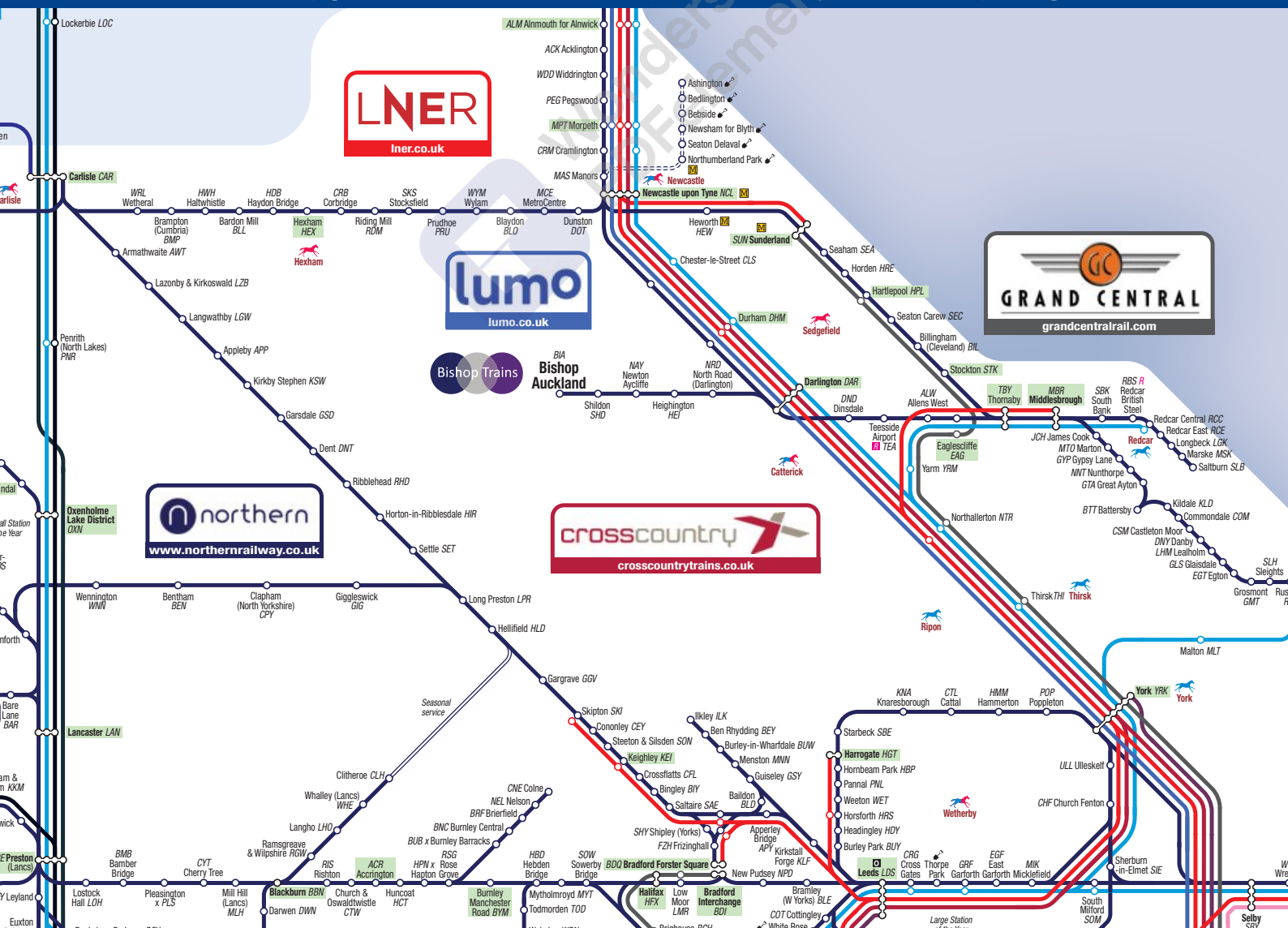
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We also produce the UK National Rail map covering all 2,569 stations (extract below) to help you plan your journeys and give information about the network to make booking tickets easier and more cost-effective.

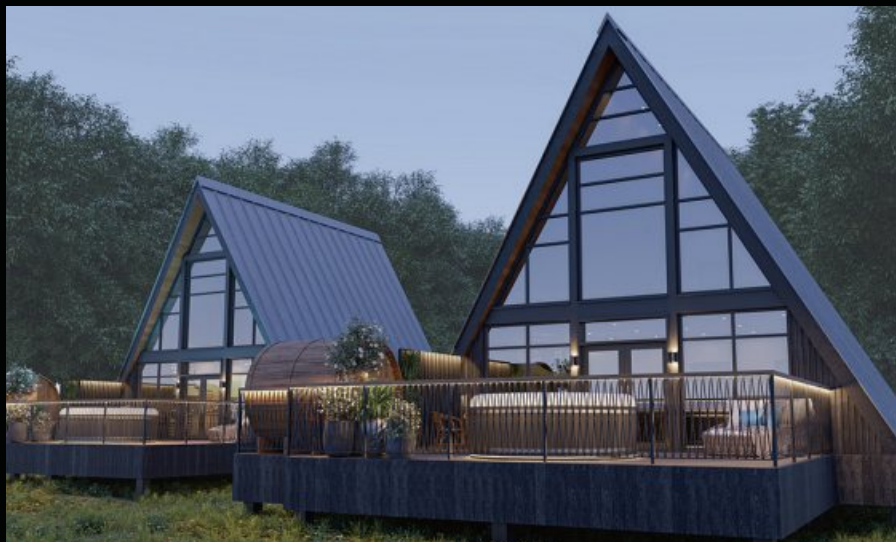
Alex Nelson

For a copy of the UK rail map, visit www.railmap.org.uk



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FIRST GLIMPSE AT RAMSIDE HALL'S TRIANGULAR TREEHOUSES

A County Durham hotel continues to build its reputation as the perfect spot for romance, with a glimpse of how its new treehouses will look.

Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa near Durham has unveiled images of its four new A frame triangular, glass fronted treehouses, which offer stunning views across the 18th fairway of The Prince Bishop's Golf Course.

The new treehouses, which are on two levels, include a bedroom with an en suite on the upper

level and a lounge, toilet and kitchen area on the lower floor.

And guests checking into the lodges will also have access to a luxury decked area outdoors, featuring a private hot tub and sauna.

While the hotel anticipates they will be popular with couples, they are also suitable for families thanks to the addition of a fold out bed on the ground floor.

Work is now underway on the treehouses, which are due to be completed in early 2022, with the hotel taking bookings for February onwards.

The latest development follows on from the huge success of the three large luxury treehouses which were opened last year, with a fourth treehouse of a similar size, but which will be mainly used as an intimate wedding venue also currently under construction.

CAIRN GROUP SUPPORTS NORTH EAST HOSPITALITY TALENT WITH KICKSTART EVENT

A national hotel group based in the North East continues to boost the region's hospitality industry by investing in upcoming talent.

Cairn Group hosted a unique event for its young North East employees on Kickstart placements in the heart of Newcastle as part of its ongoing commitment to skills and training.

The Group has placements UK wide and 11 of the young people – aged between 18 and 24 and all based in the North East – attended a special 'Kickstart Get Together' at The Royal Station Hotel in the centre of the city, giving them valuable training which will help them in their future careers.

Held on Tuesday November 9, the event offered



the Kickstarters training, team building activities and an opportunity to share their experiences of working in hospitality, as well as offer them their first taste of professional networking.

Richard Adams, HR Director at Cairn Group, said: "The event was a fantastic opportunity for our young people to meet, train and share their experiences of the Kickstart scheme. Cairn Group's support of the Kickstart scheme builds on our commitment to skills development for young people. We're extremely positive about the prospects for our industry and it's essential that we continue to develop future talent."



CHRISTMAS AT LEILA LILY'S

An award-winning Newcastle venue has revealed a series of new menus to see diners and partygoers through the festive season in style.

Leila Lily's, at Grey Street – recently named 2021's North East Pub and Bar of the Year for Tyne and Wear – is renowned for the creativity and theatricality of its dishes, chosen to showcase regional produce.

And the new main Christmas Fayre menu is no exception with winter ingredients very much taking centre stage.

Leila Lily's – which is owned by the Malhotra Group plc – has also revamped its afternoon tea menu for Christmas, with a selection of delicacies which, again, offer a contemporary take on traditional seasonal favourites.

Leila Lily's and its sister venue, Grey Street Hotel are also taking bookings from partygoers wishing to celebrate the season with family, friends or colleagues.

Head Chef, Chris Finnigan has created buffet and canapés menus which can be served in either Leila Lily's sumptuous private bar or the hotel's Monument function suite, which can accommodate up to 80 guests.

"So, however you want to celebrate Christmas, we have a venue and menu to suit," said Beth Williams, Head of Sales and Marketing for the Group.

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FESTIVE FELTON

As the countdown to Christmas draws ever closer, one Northumberland pub is gearing up for the most wonderful time of the year.

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas at The Northumberland Arms, Felton and there's plenty to get diners into the spirit of the season.

Festive planning has been underway for months now and it's certainly paid off, with a whole host of seasonal dishes on offer in the restaurant until 24th December.

With a variety of options ranging from traditional dishes to modern, festive flavours – there's sure to be something for everyone to enjoy.

Start with beetroot-cured salmon or spiced chestnut falafel before enjoying a plate of roast turkey with all the trimmings, crispy duck confit or

cranberry nut roast.

Diners with a sweet tooth can satisfy their cravings with an espresso and coconut panna cotta, dark chocolate tart or a Christmas pudding, while there is also a selection of local cheeses on offer.

And this time of year is best spent with friends and family, so what better time than now to plan a special gathering?

With restrictions limiting last year's plans, it's a great opportunity to make up for lost time by getting the family together in the private dining room, which can accommodate groups of up to 12.

Or, for anyone who has found themselves in charge of planning the work Christmas party, then the Garden Room is a fantastic choice for groups as large as 35.

But Christmas doesn't have to be a huge occasion and guests don't need to pull together a big group to enjoy all there is on offer.

It's also a great place to stop by for a festive tipple and admire the venue's seasonal makeover – with a whole host of Christmas lighting, garlands, trees and baubles decking the halls.

And, while the run up to 25th December is a popular time to visit the pub, why not secure an early Christmas present by planning a future trip?

A staycation at The Northumberland Arms makes an excellent gift, with six luxury rooms to choose from.

With attractions including Alnwick Castle, Belsay Hall and Gardens, Northumberlandia and Cragside just a short drive away, there's plenty to see and do during the visit.

However, once Christmas has been and gone, it will soon be time to bid goodbye to 2021 and welcome a new start.

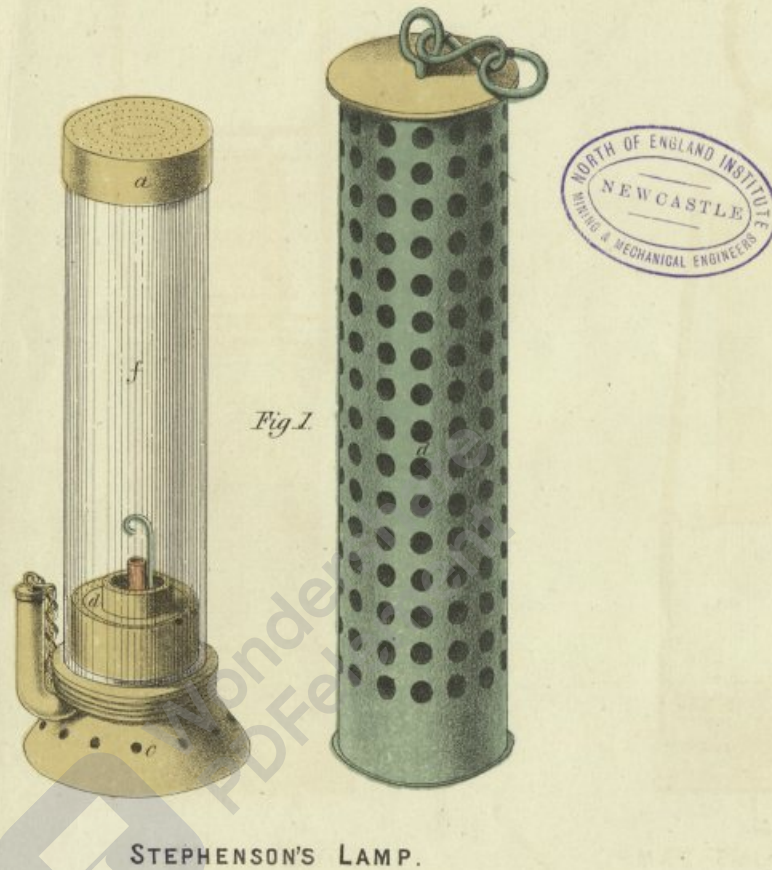
The kitchen team have pulled together some spectacular specials to celebrate New Year's in style, including baked camembert, pan-roasted chicken breast, roast venison loin and salted caramel parfait.

So, whether the Christmas list this year includes festive feasts, party plans or a seasonal staycation, The Northumberland Arms ticks the boxes for all three.

www.northumberlandarms-felton.co.uk



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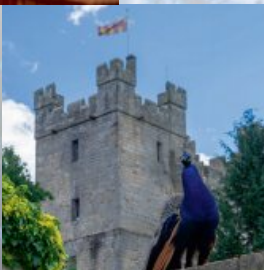
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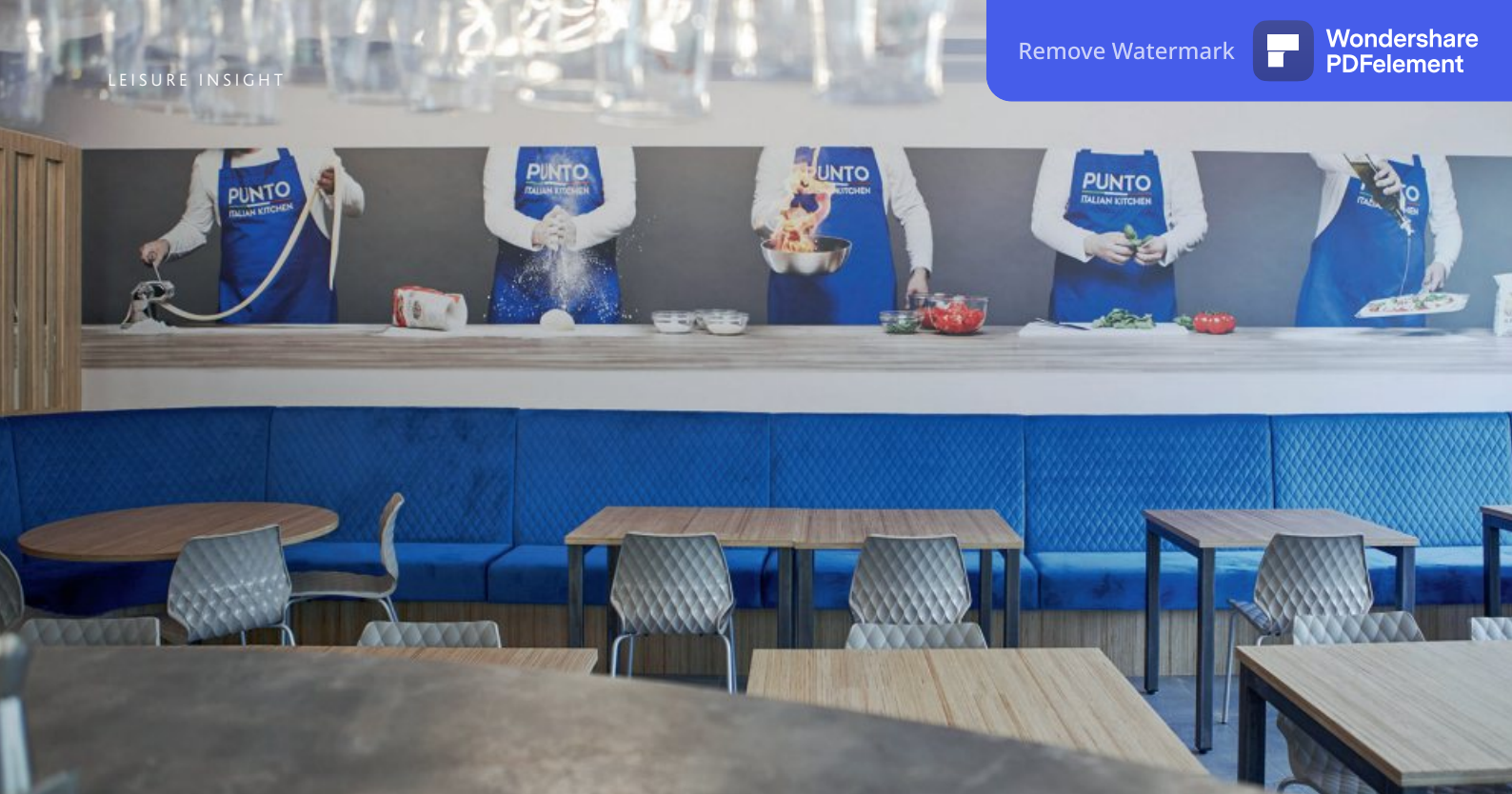


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MAKE IT PRONTO TO PUNTO By Michael Grahamslaw

210 Heaton Road has been in the Rea family since 1981, with the building owned during its various different incarnations as a hotbed of Italian cooking.

Now, for the first time in the venue's history, Brothers Damiano Rea and Zeno Meynel-Rea – who manage the adjacent Heaton Property estate agents – bring their own family's venture to their corner of suburban Heaton.

The Brothers Rea have eschewed the crowded "penne franco/ waxy chianti bottle" marketplace and have set out to create something fun, fresh and contemporary.

The result is Punto – a stylish, high-quality Italian kitchen serving freshly made pasta and sourdough pizza to a mix of locals, professionals and families.

In line with the new approach, Damiano and Zeno have created a versatile dining space which at various points in the day can play Italian coffee house, buzzy bistro or gourmet takeaway.

Punto then is a neighbourhood hub where one can enjoy an espresso at the bar (Italian-style), light lunchtime bite or more traditional sit-down meal.

I am of course an avowed fan of Italian cooking in all of its various guises so pitched up with my son Jack – a grumpy, hobbling figure who had sprained his ankle the night prior – to review the experience.

Early feedback has been exceptional so we blocked out a Friday afternoon to really take our time.

On arrival, we were warmly welcomed by restaurant manager, Andrew, an ebullient host and real credit to the place. Andrew talked us through a deliberately succinct wine menu whilst also inviting us to kick off with a schooner or two of the American pale ale Gamma Ray brewed by the ever-popular Beavertown brewery.

The dining area is decidedly modern, punctuated by rich shades of blue, exposed brickwork and high resolution photography.

At its heart is an impressive, marbled, circular bar whilst an open-style Gozney wood-fired pizza oven lends a real sense of spectacle.

The bright and airy space also possessed a lively atmosphere, all lunchtime chatter, not to mention the occasional hiss of the La Pavoni lever pull espresso machine.

One chat with Damiano and Zeno reveals a pair of unabashed foodies whose knowledge and enthusiasm is infectious. This is realised in Punto's winter menu.

To begin, the restaurant offers a host of antipasti dishes which can be shared tapas-style or used to make up a more formal starter/main course approach. We chose the latter (old habits and that) with Jack enjoying a stunning seafood antipasto comprising calamari, white bait and oven-baked filo pastry prawns whilst I tucked into the bruschetta with pan-toasted sourdough and vine-ripened tomatoes.

These really captured the vim and vigour of Italian cooking and even put a smile back on the eldest bambino's face.

Pizza or pasta was the conundrum facing us for main course with both boasting their respective merits. All of Punto's pasta for instance is made daily on-site by an accomplished team of pastai using the highest quality flour, durum semolina and eggs.



Pizza dough meanwhile is made using finely milled 'doppio zero' flour from Napoli, the restaurant's own starter yeast culture, kneaded and shaped before being aged for three days for unforgettable flavour.

Jack chose tagliatelle pasta with white crab and prawns in a creamy lemon and vodka sauce whilst I plumped for the veggie-laden Fiorentina pizza with spinach, sun-dried tomatoes, fior di latte and two (!) eggs.

A pair of limoncellos with café latte chasers completed what had been an excellent meal which is unsurprising given some strong early feedback.

You could say then that Punto has been 40 years in the making. These two estate agents have brought a new lease of life.

For more information, visit puntoitalian.co.uk

“
...a pair of unabashed
foodies whose knowledge
and enthusiasm is
infectious...
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Les Reay (Owner, Catering Units) hands over their bespoke vehicle to Zak of Tango Durham, which has recently opened.



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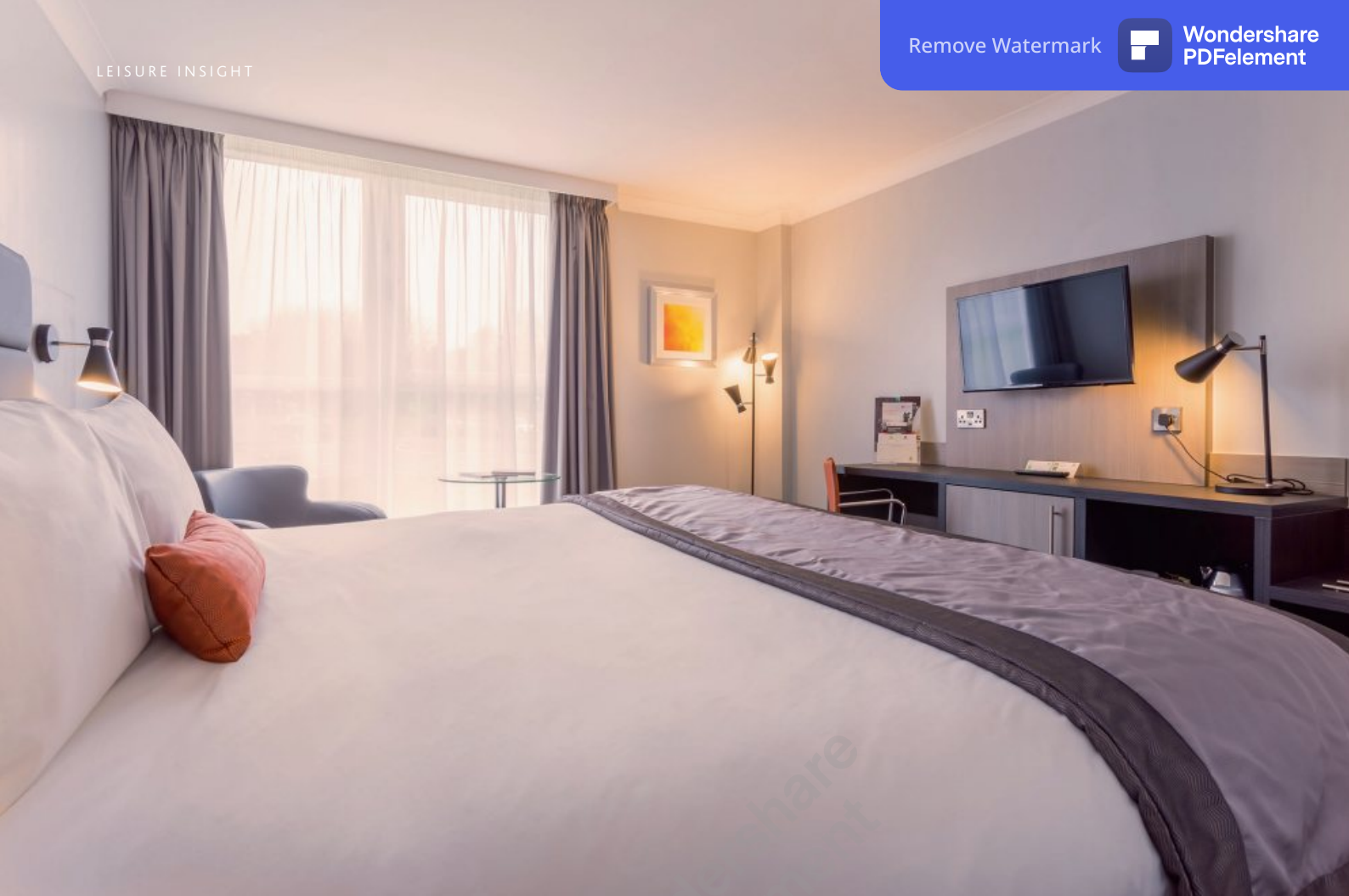


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FOR BUSINESS, PLEASURE OR LEISURE

By Michael Grahamslaw

The Holiday Inn at Seaton Burn has always been something of a firm favourite of mine. Located where the A1 and A19 meet – giving easy accessibility to Newcastle, Ponteland and beyond – the hotel is something of a business exec's dream for meetings, coffees and conferences.

The hotel also boasts 151 tastefully-appointed bedrooms which makes it a firm favourite for those visiting the region for business or pleasure.

The man at the helm is Norrie Oswald, seasoned general manager and business friend who invited me for an overnight stay at an exciting time for the hotel following the easing of Covid restrictions.

The four star hotel is reachable in 15 minutes from Newcastle City Centre and boasts an abundance of free parking on site for hotel guests and visitors.

The reception area – featuring 24 hour front desk- is a stylish space, stamped with that reassuringly familiar Holiday Inn hallmark of quality. Their new open lobby serving Starbucks is an ideal place to meet or relax.

This was also especially true of our deluxe guest room – all navy and teak, punctuated by pops of royal yellow.

Rooms also come very well equipped. Ours, for instance, featured a kingsize bed, a flat screen TV, tea & coffee making facilities, complimentary wifi and en-suite bathroom, not to mention a grand armchair in which to spend the afternoon kicking back with the Sunday papers.

For those feeling a little more energetic, the hotel also features a state-of-the-art leisure club complete with indoor swimming pool, jacuzzi and fitness suite packing both cardio and resistance equipment.

When the fitness demands a break, the hotel's dedicated in-house restaurant is the perfect place to refuel with a sumptuous all-day offering, not to mention an ever-popular Sunday Lunch menu. Whilst room service is also in full-swing, this would be our choice for an evening meal after a lazy Sunday afternoon.

Lisa kicked off with the salmon & brie terrine before following up with a cajun chicken burger. Yours truly meanwhile paired the tomato and red pepper soup with the 'Curry of the Day' (Jalfrezi) served with a carb-y triumvirate of pilaf rice, skin-off fries and naan bread.

All of this was washed down with a really excellent bottle of 'Da Luca' Pinot Grigio. An easy-drinking, Southern Italian white so delicious, I hastily punched it into the Vivino app upon returning to the room to try and source a bottle for home.

The following morning, we breakfasted regally on a host of cooked and continental classics before heading for home, refreshed and ready for whatever the working week would throw at us.

The love affair with the Holiday Inn at Seaton Burn continues.

For more information, visit www.hinewcastlefosforthpark.co.uk





ENJOY CHRISTMAS WITH ADAM & EVE

Adam and Eve in Alnwick, Northumberland have opened their doors after a 250k makeover that has seen the restaurant & bar artfully restored.

From reclaimed lighting rescued from Japanese warships to a deconstructed Soho House barn, it's cosy, decadent and unique.

Dishes are cooked to order by the head chef and the brigade using an array of fresh, locally sourced ingredients from the field and sea.

We love the Bavette Steak with hand cut chips, Cider braised pig cheeks and pan seared Seabass.

Vegetarians will love the & Fig, Apple and Hazelnut salad and Black bean burger.

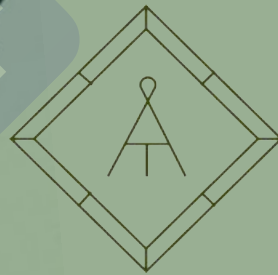
Opening on Christmas Day and throughout the year, make sure you leave room for one of their handmade desserts. Coconut truffles with sorbet caught our eye!

For more information and booking visit
AdamandEveAlnwick.co.uk



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All info on their website, Instagram and FB.



T'IS THE SEASON TO GET FESTIVE AT STACK NEWCASTLE

Lovers of all things festive are in for a treat as STACK Newcastle welcomes back everyone's favourite winter retreat – Hadrian's Tipi – to celebrate the start of Christmas across the city.

The pop-up, famous for its warming fire pits, festive lighting and cosy seating areas is back in action after Covid restrictions cut the event short in 2020. And things are already heating up – with the Tipi quickly becoming the prime spot for large groups, work nights out and party-goers alike to celebrate their Christmas gatherings in style.

There's nothing quite like cosying up beside an open fire with a mulled wine or glass of bubbly after a busy day shopping in Newcastle or as part of your night out.

Feeling hungry during your visit? STACK Newcastle has everything your taste buds could wish for. Tuck into an array of tasty street food from the 12 independent traders serving everything from Bao Buns and Boojie Burgers to Thai delights and the best Parmo this side of the Tyne. The latest trader to join STACK – Redhead's

Mac n Cheese – will be giving their menu a festive twist, so don't miss out on their seasonal Mac n Cheese delights.

Of course STACK is more than just a place to eat with live entertainment daily and this December, don't miss a packed calendar of special festive events along with their usual live line-up.

This year marks the return of the popular children's Mini Elves' Party, which will take place in STACK's main plaza area. The event is completely free entry for all to enjoy on Tuesday 21 December between 11am to 1pm. Expect entertainment from children's characters, plenty of party games and a surprise visit from the man in red too!

The North East's biggest sing-along event – Kroud Karaoke – is back for a Christmas special on Friday 10 December. Sing your heart out with friends and family to all the Christmas classics and get right

into the party season.

The line-up of festive events will also feature Paul Skerritt's Christmas Swing sessions, quiz nights and STACK's newest live music act – Rocks Off Jukebox – the band with no set list. With songs requested by the audience, have 'your song' played live to the crowd who always join in if they know the lyrics to create that famous STACK atmosphere.

If Christmas Day has left you stuffed with turkey and needing some fresh air – head down on Boxing Day for the 'End of Year' quiz and test your memory of this year's happenings. A full line up of events can be found on the website www.stacknewcastle.com/whatson

Hadrian's Tipi will take up residency at STACK Newcastle until the end of January. For details on party bookings or Christmas events, please visit www.stacknewcastle.com

STACK is classed as an outdoor venue which ensures fresh air flows throughout helping customers feel safer from the spread of COVID. STACK continues to make cleanliness and hygiene a priority with hand sanitising stations and regular intensive cleaning. They have strictly followed all Government guidelines throughout the pandemic and will continue to do so should they change at any point.

www.stacknewcastle.com/whats-on



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THE FRENCH QUARTER, OOOLA LA

By Michael Grahamslaw

Since 2017, The French Quarter has carved out a fine reputation for itself offering high quality French food without the formalities which so often accompany.



From its basecamp in Newcastle, the bistro is the baby of Cedric Boc-Ho and his wife Catherine, a Loire Valley/Geordie alliance who have gifted their wealth of knowledge of French cuisine to the good people of Newcastle.

The duo have created a relaxed, convivial venue in the heart of Newcastle (Arch Number Six to be precise) where one can enjoy authentic French food, try new wines and shop from the deli counter.

Largely underrepresented within the North East, I am a huge fan of French cooking and couldn't fathom why it had taken me so long to get round to this reported local gem. I therefore rounded up my son, Jack, for a pre-Christmas treat.

Newcastle's railway arches have become quirky spaces, popular with the city's retailers and restaurateurs in recent times. The French Quarter is evidence of this, with its dining area set across two levels.

The team have created a stylish space with bare wood, bicycles and splashes of green whilst daily specials and "Wines of the Moment" adorn the walls.

On hand to meet us was man of the moment, Cedric, who explained a little about the regularly changing menus and different ways of ordering.

The formule du midi menu is a great entry point and offers an authentic bistro style lunch with

dishes such as moules a la provencale, salade Parisienne and filet mignon de porc.

The a la carte menu meanwhile comprises a sprawling culinary tour de France in small plate, tapas-style form with a variety of charcuterie, meat, fish and vegetarian options to be shared across multiple courses.

Cedric – something of an expert – was also happy to suggest wine by the glass – an excellent Loire Sauvignon for me and a glass of Beaujolais for Jack – a fitting drop for the day following international Beaujolais Nouveau day. Now there is one I'll have to pencil in to my desktop calendar.

Under starter's orders, we kicked off with a sharing trio. Some serious sourdough came served with salted butter and garlic oil, baked camembert was infused with rosemary and garlic, and some toasted croutons were the perfect vehicle for an epic crushed black olive tapenade with garlic, parsley and chilli.

Between courses, we ordered another round of wine from the nearby specials board. The French Quarter really has an extensive selection and it certainly pays to try a few out, especially with snifters available for as little as 75ml, not to mention wine flights with three different sample sizes.

Following on, I chose the garlic king prawns with chilli and a parsley butter. Jack meanwhile sought the expertise of super-friendly restaurant manager, Taryna, who recommended a twist on that old favourite duck a l'orange. A sage choice indeed.

Both of these were paired with sharing plates of green beans, lightly sauteed with garlic and parsley and a superbly stewed ratatouille featuring a medley of aubergine, courgette, bell pepper and tomato.

Following a suitable digestive break, a café glace provided a caffeinated, afternoon pick-me-up whilst a suitably scorched and sugary crème brulee delivered a table-tapping finale.

Stuck for something to do this Christmas? The French Quarter offers a unique, interesting experience perfect for those frost-bitten afternoons and dark, winter nights.

For more information, visit www.frenchquarternewcastle.co.uk



WL DISTILLERY - ONE YEAR ON

Nature. Aroma. Taste. It's been just over a year since WL Distillery relaunched their signature 1st Edition gin in the height of lockdown and now the popular brand is continuing to tantalise the tastebuds of gin connoisseurs across the UK with their ever-growing range.



With a trio of industry awards now under their wing, the County Durham based distillery have been shaking up quite a ginpire with listings in Vogue and GQ magazine. Ingredients have always taken centre stage at WL Distillery, each bottle is infused with nature using handpicked, measured botanicals and natural mineral spring water to ensure the freshest, most authentic taste.

The inspiration for WL Distillery comes from the founder and Managing Director, Scott Wilson-Laing spending his summers in his grandad's garden and the team are committed to combining their passion for gin whilst capturing the charm and nature of the region. Crafted in the North East from start to finish the gins are expertly monitored and created, by hand in the distillery.

Scott Wilson-Laing, Founder and Managing Director at WL Distillery said: "As with many businesses the start of the pandemic made 2020 a challenging year, with a refocus in business strategy and the subsequent relaunch we've benefited from an upward trajectory. As we moved into 2021 we were delighted that our 1st Edition Gin was awarded a trio of leading industry awards in such a short period of time. Alongside, securing our first retail premises at the STACK Newcastle – 2021 has been amazing for the company. We've increased our presence in a number of bars across the region and this is an area we are looking to refocus on post pandemic."

Hot on the heels of the announcement that the distillery had won Silver at the prestigious 2021 London Spirits Competition, the distillery was also awarded Gold at The Gin Masters, alongside Design Bronze at The World Gin Awards.

Scott added: "We are committed to ensuring a fresh and classic authentic gin experience for customers and the awards demonstrate that the spirits we are making are the kind that bar managers and mixologists want to stock and spirits drinkers enjoy drinking."

The award-winning 1st Edition Gin has been complemented over the months by limited edition festive and Valentine ranges alongside the new refreshing sensation, Wilson's Gin Club 'Watermelon and Liquorice'. The festive packs are now back by popular demand, embodying the key festive notes of the season with Christmas Citrus, and its zingy and zesty clementine notes and Festive Flavour with its warming baked apple and cinnamon taste explosion.

Scott added: "The countdown to Christmas is on and along with the return of our popular festive flavour packs, we thought we'd give our signature bottles a festive makeover too, whilst supporting Grace House, a charity that we've worked with closely over the years. It really is a family affair and I've brought my Nana on board to knit some festive hats for our gins, with donations from sales going to the Grace House festive appeal.

As we move into 2022 we have some really exciting developments on the horizon so I look forward to sharing this with our loyal customer base shortly."

Shop online at www.wldistillery.com

Instagram: [@wldistillery](https://www.instagram.com/wldistillery)



Nana Veronica



PARTNERSHIP KEY DRIVING FORCE AT TAILORED LEISURE COMPANY

Tailored Leisure Company (TLC) are a client led Social Enterprise who are making a stand for access in the North East. The award-winning formula for accessible fitness sessions, has proven to be just the right match for a host of partners including the Foundation of Light, Sunderland City Council and Headway Wearside.

Based in South Tyneside, TLC was launched by Director, Tara Johnson due to her own experiences of living with cerebral palsy, as well as her professional experience in the health and social care sector. A winner at the recent Sunderland Echo Portfolio Business Awards 2021 for Corporate Social Responsibility, sponsored by Bradley Hall and a recent PNE Social Impact Award winner, TLC have been a key driving force in developing accessible projects since its inception.

Tara Johnson, Founder and Director said: "Partnership has been a key element of our growth over the last year, 2021 was just the tip of the iceberg for the company. We have so many exciting projects and developments in the pipeline, we really can't wait to see the social impact created."

The team are committed to developing accessible opportunities to get fit, have fun and relax with as little stress as possible and are passionate about overcoming the barriers and social exclusion faced by disabled people. Led by regional research they attracted the attention of numerous national funders over the year to run a host of accessible fitness projects. The community and virtual fitness programmes run alongside a continued funding drive to raise £1.5 million for the development of an innovative, one-of-a-kind accessible short break holiday and leisure complex, the 'Butterfly of the North', which also saw the inspirational founder (Tara Johnson) stand for the first time in over 20 years to raise vital funds towards the endeavour.

Tara added: "The last year at Tailored Leisure Company has been one of phenomenal growth and we are delighted to be working across the North East region thanks to vital funding from key partners.

As we move on an upward trajectory, we'd be delighted to speak with local businesses who can support us on our journey and with the aim of developing

the vital Butterfly of the North complex.

Businesses can back the campaign and take advantage of our corporate sponsorship packages to help the complex take flight. The new complex will support so many and unlock barriers to short breaks and leisure services that families across the North East face on a daily basis, and which is needed even more than ever post Covid-19."

To follow or find out more about the Tailored Leisure Company journey visit tailoredleisure.co.uk



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sachins

Festive journey from the Punjab to the North East

To begin

Poppadoms and pickles

Amuse-bouche

Festive mini onion and Brussels sprout pakoras topped with a droplet of tamarind sauce

Starters

Hearty Daal and spinach spicy soup with a sprinkle of coriander and served with a mini nan bread

Allergies - Gluten

Turkey Twizzlers

Pieces of turkey marinated in punjabi spices and coated in spiced breadcrumbs

Allergies - Gluten & dairy

Gunpowder Chicken

Pieces of chicken marinated in spices and coated in a gram flour batter and served with our gunpowder sauce

Allergies - Dairy

Channa Goshat Tikka

Spring lamb, chick peas and potatoes lightly spiced and coated in spiced breadcrumbs and served with curried mayonnaise

Allergies - Dairy & Gluten

Masala Prawns

King prawns marinated in masala and cooked in the heart of the tandoor

Allergies - Dairy

Main Course

Boxing Day Turkey Tari Wala

Turkey cooked in an authentic medium spiced family favourite punjabi sauce

Allergies - None

Lamb Chop Rogan Josh

Lamb chop's cooked with tomatoes, cream, punjabi spices and chilli oil

Allergies - Dairy

Chicken Malabar

Pieces of chicken cooked in South Indian spices with fresh curry leaves, mustard seeds, chilli flakes and coconut milk

Allergies - mustard seeds

Angel of the North

King prawns marinated in punjabi spices and cooked in a tomato based sauce with fresh spinach, coriander and ginger

Allergies - Dairy

Malai Kofta

Vegetable koftas cooked with gram flour and served in a tomato and onion based sauce with a touch of cream

Allergies - Dairy

Deserts

Brandy fruit cake, served with ice cream or vanilla and star anise custard

Allergies Dairy

Gulab Jaman, served with lightly spiced ice cream

Allergies - Gluten & Dairy

Mango Sorbet

A refreshing sorbet made with mango purée

Allergies - None

Main courses served with rice and mini nan



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OUT AND ABOUT - ABERYSTWYTH



Aberystwyth is the biggest town in mid-Wales and I had not stayed there since 1979 when I applied to the University there and went for interview. The University is the major employer in the town, and the town population of 13,000 is expanded by a further 8,000 when the students are in residence, filling up many of the former boarding houses and hotels on the sea front.

As in 1979 I arrived by train, but this time there was an efficient bus substitution between Shrewsbury and Welshpool with rail the rest of the way. Although my itinerary had changed, I still arrived at Aberystwyth at the scheduled time of 1723 and found the Llwynygog guest house without difficulty.

I was there for a memorial service of Edgar Jones, who died at the age of 99 last year, and whose memorial service was held on the day that he would have been 100. A Durham graduate, he wrote for a magazine I edit for many years. After the memorial, and associated refreshments, I found a bus back into town, although I had uncharacteristically taken a taxi to the church because I could not make head nor tail of the bus routes. If ever a town needed to have a decent bus map showing local routes, and have a PlusBus scheme for people arriving and departing by train, it is this one. Weird routeings, and unfamiliar place names made it difficult to get about, even though the bus station is right adjacent to the handsome former Great Western Railway station. Buses were plentiful but virtually empty. Only the students seem to use them, hardly surprising because you would need a degree to work out how they operate.

The town itself, though, is a gem, with lots of wonderful Victorian and Edwardian buildings, dating from when the railway first arrived in 1864. Of the hotels on the front, the Glengower on the north parade stood out as excellent, and I enjoyed an evening meal there, and the restaurant on the pier offered good views and excellent cuisine too. At the end of Marine Terrace is Constitution Hill with a funicular railway (pictured) which goes up to a small entertainment centre and café on the top. The camera obscura was unfortunately not working when I arrived, the mechanism having been broken, giving a very blurred image. The exhibition was worth seeing, and I returned down the funicular well informed about Aberystwyth's past.

The following morning, I took a ride on the Vale of Rheidol railway, which is the other major attraction of the town, nearly an hour's scenic journey up to Devils Bridge. The narrow-gauge locomotive operating the line waited for an hour at the terminus, allowing a visit to the waterfalls on the short walk (£2, for which I was grateful that the steep path was well maintained with plenty of handrails!). There is a longer walk with 675 steep steps taking 45-60 minutes, admission

£4, round the nature trail and waterfalls, but you could not guarantee getting round in the time that the train waits at Devil's Bridge station. During these out-of-season hours, the train makes a morning trip at 1030 and an afternoon trip at 1400 – one hour up, one hour wait, one hour back. Incidentally, I took a picture of the AA box at Devil's Bridge for all those petrol-heads who are less enthusiastic about main line trains, narrow gauge and funiculars. Aberystwyth was good for two nights, but for longer I would have to investigate those buses for more places to visit further afield.

alexnelson@dunelm.org.uk www.nationalrail.com

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TREEMENDOUS WAY TO REMEMBER YOUR LOVED ONE

A good way to help a charity is to "dig deep" but one North East charity is taking that literally by planting trees.

North East charity Bright Red has supported haematology treatment and research within the region since 1988. They are based at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital and receive no government funding instead relying entirely on fund raising to help them with their work. Part of their work is the funding of Haematology Nurse Specialists at the Friarage Hospital in Northallerton, the Northern Centre for Cancer Care at the Freeman Hospital, Sunderland Royal Hospital, Wansbeck General Hospital, North Tyneside General Hospital and at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Gateshead.

Bright Red have secured a site at Northumberlandia near Crumlington to create their own woodland memorial.

Supporters will have the opportunity to plant their own tree or purchase a tree to be planted on their behalf as part of the woodland memorial, a lasting memorial to celebrate a loved one, and a gift which will last for generations.

The event on December 11th, will have time slots from 9am to 3:10pm, every 10 minutes and each slot can have six people present from the same family for planting.



Lisa Saxton from Bright Red said: "Planting a memorial tree for a loved one is a touching and everlasting way to remember their life and acts as a tribute.

"It's a lovely site which you can visit at any time and has a perfect vantage spot from the top of Northumberlandia - Lady of the North, and of course it will help us to continue our important work supporting patients, families and their carers affected by blood cancer across our region" she said. www.brightred.org.uk



NORTH EAST CATARACT PATIENTS TO BE TREATED IN WEEKS NOT MONTHS

The doors of a brand new Optegra NHS cataract clinic are now open following the official 'cutting of the ribbon'.

In an event attended by optometrists from all the CCGs in the region as well as representatives from the Northumberland and Tyne & Wear Local Optical Committee (LOC), the new Optegra Eye Clinic Newcastle is now providing diagnostic testing and treatment of cataracts.

One in three adults affected by cataract, the

natural, age-related clouding of the lens of the eye, combined with delayed treatments from the pandemic means that waiting lists are at an all-time high.

Throughout the North East region, local CCG stats show that average wait for cataract treatment in the areas is 71.8 weeks - well over a year. To help tackle this, the Optegra clinic will only treat NHS cataract patients.

The Worshipful Mayor of Gateshead, Councillor Dot Burnett praised the launch of the new clinic and said: "We are delighted to welcome Optegra into the North East region with their intention of supporting the thousands of patients who are awaiting essential cataract treatment.

"As an ongoing impact from the pandemic, these waiting lists are inevitably longer than ever, and I am so pleased that local people can now access their treatment more quickly, with the support of this dedicated eye clinic, which is solely offering NHS treatment.

"This clinic will also be a great support to local optometrists and GPs to help direct their patients to quicker treatment which will make a huge difference to their quality of life."

The new state-of-the-art clinic found at Units 1-3 Maingate, Team Valley Trading Estate, Gateshead, houses treatment rooms, surgical theatre with latest technologies, and recovery rooms.



CSP FELLOWSHIP FOR CONNECT HEALTH FOUNDER, ANDREW WALTON

Andrew Walton, founder of North-East Headquartered Connect Health has been presented with a Fellowship from the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy (CSP) in recognition of his sustained contribution to the advancement of the physiotherapy profession.

Through his leadership, drive and influence which has delivered positive and progressive change in Musculoskeletal (MSK) practice and excellence in service delivery, Andrew has always been an early adopter of innovation, from self-referral and telephone triage to online assessment and enhanced digital health and wellbeing tools, models which have now become mainstream practice.

Commenting on the Fellowship, Andrew said: "I am honoured to have been recognised in this way. Looking back over my career, I have consistently tried to focus on doing what's right for patients, deliver value for taxpayers by reducing waste and, as this is exclusively driven by colleagues, provided opportunities for others to develop and progress. Any successes I may be recognised for have only been achieved because I have always been surrounded by great people; leadership is a privilege, and this award can legitimately be shared by literally hundreds of colleagues over almost 30 years."

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'TIS A TIME TO REFLECT; IT WILL BE HARD FOR MANY THIS YEAR

The year started in lockdown, we had one day with our family over Christmas, if we were lucky. As I reflect, I give thanks, I take time to celebrate and appreciate for some it's been exceptionally difficult and give hope that tomorrow is kinder to them.



It has been a mammoth year, the challenges of 2021 touched us all. I'm not going to celebrate getting through the year as if those that didn't failed, there's no winners and losers in this game of business and life. It's been exceptionally gruelling, for some it's been devastating. Some can't reflect on the year gone by in the same light many of us can. My thoughts are with them.

The year for me has been a balance of positives and negatives, no matter how awesome your strategic planning is, nothing stops the twists and turns of life; it was a year of much learning.

As 2021 becomes a memory and we look towards 2022, am I where I expected to be at the start of this year?

No.

In January, facing a further national lockdown, the firefighting continued as the owner of a wedding business. In all honesty January was incredibly stressful. I needed to earn an income. I'd rode the wave of Covid during 2020 but with 2021 ahead and not knowing the long-term impact of the situation I needed to be realistic as a working Mum. I had mouths to feed and bills to pay. As someone who doesn't ask for help, I turned to my community and said 'Help please'. First lessons of the year, community is everything and asking for help is vital in business.

These lessons were crucial to progressing Kind Currency from an idea to a start-up business. My weaknesses would be barrier unless I asked for help. To ask for help though, I would need to share with people. Lesson three, if we don't tell people about what we are doing, how are they expected to know, or as my Nan would say 'shy bairns get nowt'. Once I shared my aspirations for Kind Currency and spoke in the business community, opportunities seemed to present themselves frequently.



Opportunities stir up Imposter Syndrome and then procrastination sets in. However, because Kind Currency is about supporting change and creating an impact, I learnt another lesson. I had to face the fear, choose to challenge, and change. The first opportunity I seized opened the door to many more.

This delivered two further lessons. Say yes to everything and worry about it later. Worrying before prevents you from saying yes. And although I faced fear daily in respect of my health challenges, I had never really stepped into the fear in a business sense. I quickly learnt that it was very much the same outcome, it's far better to step into the fear then stay cocooned inside.

As the year progressed, I faced challenges daily and stepped into the fear many times. It's not been easy but I'm incredibly grateful, for the lessons, for the opportunities but most of all for the people who have come into my world during this year and for the wonderful people that have supported myself and my businesses.

I've had some standout moments of which I am immensely proud. Kind Currency is growing a kind community and I built the website myself woo hoo! Kind Currency was named #SmallBiz100 2021 by Small Business Britain and I'm invited to the House of Lords to celebrate! I became an Ambassador for Be Heard by Northern Power Women, giving me a seat at the table to level up the voices in the media. I shared my story, big step! I owned my chronic illnesses and disabilities, I'm proud to be a disabled entrepreneur. I've been recognised and nominated by wonderful people for several awards. Michelle Jones Weddings put couples, suppliers, and small businesses first. I earned a steady income taking on an admin role to meet the needs of my family. And I faced my biggest fear of all, major surgery, I've avoided it for years, the risks too great but I sit writing this in recovery.

I'm not going to list the negatives, we've all had enough negatives this year. However, I will note that the negatives did direct me onto new paths. Paths that lead to exciting opportunities and brought new people into my community.

So, no, I'm not where I expected to be, but I am exactly where I am meant to be.

Your experiences of 2021 will be a memory tomorrow and for tomorrow I wish you all much hope, may your 2022 be filled with kindness.

What do you know about...

Michelle Jones
Founder, Kind Currency

Michelle Jones has several long term conditions of which the symptoms can be aggressive.

Long Term Conditions.

Long term conditions are those that cannot, at present, be cured, but people living with these conditions can be supported to maintain a good quality of life.

d:Entrepreneur



NEWCASTLE HOSPITALS CHARITY WELCOMES £1.5 MILLION NHS CHARITIES TOGETHER GRANT



L-R: Teri Bayliss, Director, Newcastle Hospitals Charity and Mike McKean, Clinical Lead, North East and North Cumbria Child Health and Wellbeing Network.

Newcastle Hospitals Charity has received £1.5 million in new funding from NHS Charities Together.

Newcastle Hospitals Charity successfully led the funding bid to the NHS Charities Together Community Partnerships Covid-19 Response grant programme on behalf of the North East and North Cumbria (NENC) Integrated Care System (ICS).

The charity has received the maximum funding amount of £1,567,845 for eight, two-year community partnership projects that will be delivered by a range of partners, including within the NHS, community organisations and the charity sector.

The projects to receive funding are helping to tackle health inequalities, improve people's mental health and wellbeing, and offer specialist support to people disproportionately affected by the direct and indirect impacts of Covid-19.

Welcoming the funding, Teri Bayliss, charity director at Newcastle Hospitals Charity, said: "This will have a huge impact for the North East and Cumbria, our charity and our project delivery partners.

"The grant supports our key aim to tackle health inequalities and create healthier communities through place-based partnerships that can make a genuine difference to individuals and families across our region.

"The last 18 months have been extremely challenging for everyone and many people across the country have showed their support for the NHS and healthcare community through inspiring fundraising initiatives and donations.

"We're all familiar with the grace and determination of Captain Sir Tom Moore, who proved an inspiration for many by raising millions for the NHS by walking laps of his garden.

"It is the kindness, generosity of spirit and collective effort of people of all ages and abilities that have made it possible for NHS Charities Together to fund vital health and wellbeing projects in communities across the country. For that we are extremely grateful."

The projects to benefit from the grant are:

Barnardo's which is delivering a youth-led mental health and wellbeing programme with a specific focus on self-harm and suicide prevention in north Cumbria.

A Coping with Cancer North East outreach programme which supports people across the region affected by a cancer diagnosis and their families.

Family Action which provides additional therapeutic support for young carers in County Durham.

Middlesbrough and Stockton Mind's 'Rooted in Nature' project which is designed to increase mental health and wellbeing support for people living in the most disadvantaged areas of Middlesbrough.

North East and North Cumbria (NENC) Child Health and Wellbeing Network which is delivering four impactful programmes that will contribute significant positive outcomes for the region's children and young people, including a Mental Health First Aid 'Train the Trainer' project.

North Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group to support its 'Let's Talk Bereavement' project to encourage more conversations about death and bereavement through delivery of training courses in north Cumbria.

Wearside Women in Need, a frontline therapeutic service in Middlesbrough and Wearside that addresses health inequalities for women.

Your Voice Counts, a project to develop a consistent and equitable model of support for people with learning disabilities and autism in the North Tyne and Gateshead Integrated Care Partnership (ICP) area.

Newcastle Hospitals Charity is leading the delivery of the grant programme and is working in partnership with the County Durham Community Foundation and the Cumbria Community Foundation.

charity.newcastle-hospitals.nhs.uk

Michael laughs (quietly) everytime he is asked the question “isn’t Rotary a GrandDad club?”

He knows Paul Harris was 36 when he formed Rotary. GrandDad? Bah! He knows being a Rotary Club member puts him in a circle of young, vibrant and diverse people of action who discuss the local community’s needs and develop creative ways to meet them.

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“LMAO.”





HO HO NO!

The festive season and over indulgence seem to go hand in hand. Maybe it's time to step back slightly and be aware of what you are eating and drinking and pull back where you can.

Here are some stats to make you think:

- Even a small Christmas pudding requires nearly two hours of running to burn off the eye-watering 1,280 calories, while it would take 21 minutes of jogging to shift just one mince pie or five Rose's chocolates.
- A brisk 35 minute walk would be needed to shed one slice of Christmas cake, or a 12 minute stroll for a single Ferrero Rocher.
- The ultimate shocker is a full turkey dinner with all the trimmings contains around 5,200 calories which means it would take a run of over 45 miles to burn it off.

Of course you can be sensible without taking away any of the enjoyment of Xmas, here are a few tips to curb your calorie count:

Pick and choose

Choose the days you are potentially going to eat more and pull back on the days between.

A sensible breakfast

Skip the croissants and sugar rich cereals at breakfast, instead look to have a protein based breakfast such as eggs with smoked salmon.

Water

Keep your water levels up this will keep you feeling fuller and helps you avoid overeating.

Nibbles

Stay away from nibbles. If they are near where you are sitting, move them away, it's too easy to eat your way through a large amount of snacks without even registering how much you have eaten.

Cut down on carbs

Avoid overloading on starchy carbs by replacing roast spuds/mashed potato with parsnips or sweet potatoes.

Avoid grazing

Once you've selected your food from the buffet, step away. When food is within easy reach you will be prone to grazing and take in calories you don't need.



David Fairlamb

Avoid skipping meals

If you're going to a party straight after work, avoid skipping lunch for fear of overdoing your daily calorie intake, you will end up extremely hungry and eat way more than you would normally.

Clear the table

Dinner with family and friends often means spending longer sitting around the table. The longer you linger the more likely you are to keep picking, even though you have had enough. Clear the table therefore avoiding any further temptations.

Factor in the drinks

Alcohol is packed with empty calories. Research shows alcohol not only increases your appetite

but can weaken your willpower, meaning you are even more likely to overindulge on festive nibbles. Adding ice to alcoholic drinks will dilute them. Choosing lower-alcohol drinks such as spritzers and slimline mixers will also cut your calorie intake.

Be mindful

Try not to lose touch with your appetite regulators, listen to your body and give it a chance to feel hungry before you eat. Look to eat slowly and savour your food.

Treat sweets as treats

If you have a box of chocolates, avoid eating the whole lot at once. Put a small handful in a bowl and the rest out of sight, making it an occasional treat means you'll enjoy it more.

DAVID'S SUMMING UP

Enjoy your festive food but be mindful of what you are consuming if you are trying to look after your weight. To keep your calories down, double your protein, not your carbs.

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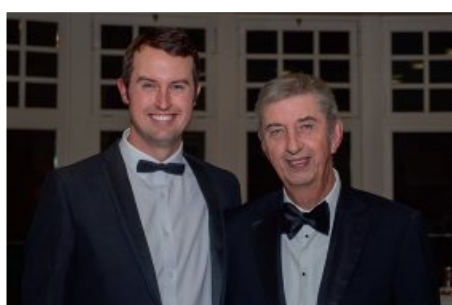
David Fairlamb

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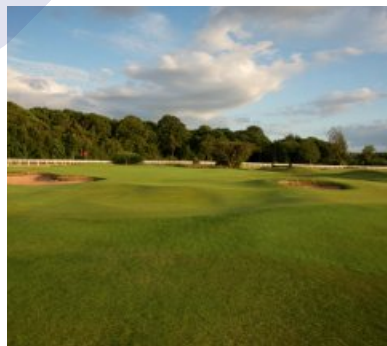
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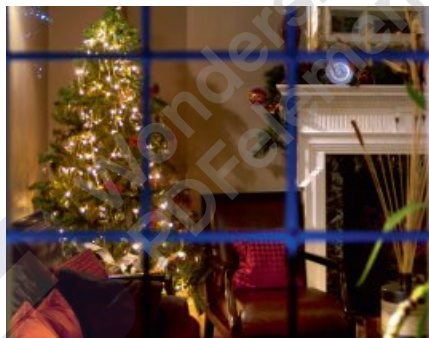
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JESMOND DENE HOUSE

NEWCASTLE – UPON – TYNE

This year, more than ever, we can't help but feel even more excitement towards the festive season after so many cancelled plans last year. In true Jesmond Dene House style we will be planning a Christmas to remember from cosy getaways in our boutique bedrooms, to Festive Afternoon Tea's in the Great Hall in front of the log fireplace, or a 7 course NYE Tasting Menu.



EAT, MEET, DRINK & CELEBRATE AT FERN WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS OR COLLEAGUES OVER THE FESTIVE PERIOD.

Fern Dining Room & Bar will be open seven days a week serving afternoon tea and dinner throughout December including serving our famous traditional roasts on Boxing Day & New Year's Day. We also have private dining rooms available for those looking to make the celebrations a little more special with lunch and dinner packages including festive cocktails on arrival, Christmas crackers, coffee & mince pies.



fern

DINING ROOM & BAR

FESTIVE EVENTS

Jesmond Dene House Christmas Market

Join us in The Great Hall on Sunday 5th December for our very own Christmas shopping market with stalls ranging from food and drink to local craft companies and boutique stores. Tickets are £4 per person to include a glass of mulled wine.

Festive Afternoon Tea

In The Great Hall on Sunday 12th & 19th December. Tickets are £38 per person to include a glass of fizz and live festive music.

New Year

Beat the crowds of the city centre and celebrate the arrival of the New Year at our house with a relaxed 7 course Tasting Menu in Fern Dining Room & Bar. £75 per person with Champagne & Canapes on arrival.

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E: info@jesmonddenehouse.co.uk

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THE LAST WORD FROM BARRY SPEKER...



Barry Speker

HERE'S TO CHRISTMAS AND THE NEW YEAR

The choice of at least one Christmas present has become easier for many. The release of Adele's first album for six years - '30' - has been impossible to avoid, with the number 30 appearing on the wall of Edinburgh Castle, the Louvre and the Empire State Building as well as a British Vogue cover story, an ITV Audience with Adele and a Meghan style confessional with Oprah Winfrey.

The national treasure's voice is undiminished as is her ability to charm and move with songs created from her emotional struggles with divorce, motherhood and loneliness.

Her drawing power has successfully persuaded



Spotify to hide the shuffle option on album pages so that the 170 million subscribers must listen to the tracks in the order devised by the artist. The album tells a story which and 'should be listened to as we intended'.

This is something of a return to LPs and cassettes where selection of individual tracks was a challenge, and is reminiscent of The Beatles' Sgt Pepper which must end with *A Day in the Life*.

The vast government spending during the pandemic on the NHS, the furlough scheme and test and trace have put immense strain on the economy, but millions of livelihoods have been protected. That projects such as HS2, albeit in limited form, are still proceeding is a sign that ambition and optimism prevail in the UK. This may be connected with how attractive the country is as a trading partner.

It is noted that the number of Chinese billionaires streaming into Britain has increased to 650 in the past year showing that London is the destination of choice for Asia's wealthiest. A report by Boodle Hatfield found that the top reasons for this were London's reputation as Europe's leading hub for innovation and technology start-ups; also our stable political environment, respect for the rule of law and a track record of 'protecting investors from state seizures of assets'.

It is estimated that Chinese investments in Britain have an accumulated value of £135 billion.

Having immense wealth can be still a problem if like MacKenzie Scott you want to give it away. The former wife of Jeff Bezos has vowed to donate her £45 billion to good causes. In the last 12 months she has given away £8.6 billion to 786 organisations.

The problem is that the rising value of her 4% share in Amazon is adding to her net worth faster than she is able to give it away.

She and Bill Gates may be influenced by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie who pronounced that "He who dies rich, dies disgraced". I wish MacKenzie well in avoiding an ignominious end.

It will be Christmas behind bars for at least nine Insulate Britain protesters. Lady Justice Sharp told them: "In a society which recognises the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, protests causing some degree of inconvenience are to be expected and up to a point, tolerated".

The words 'up to a point' are important. The point was passed some time ago, when activists glueing themselves to the M25 prevented people getting to work, taking their children to school or ambulances conveying the sick to hospital. One protester stated 'In a democracy steeped in lies and corruption, good people have a duty to disobey bad laws'.

The protest group's most melodramatic and hyperbolic announcement suggested that failure to support it would make you 'complicit in genocide'.



Such catastrophist rhetoric infects views on the pandemic, racism and almost everything the government and politicians do, or don't do. There are certainly problems but the dynamics of the media and particularly social media inflame rather than explain.

Who ever went viral by starting a sentence with 'On the one hand' or 'Actually it's a bit more complicated'?

There is a worrying tendency to polarise and denounce; to describe crimes and catastrophes rather than errors and problems. The more people convince themselves to believe in the worst outcome, the more likely they are to make it happen.

It was reassuring that the return to reasonably normal life enabled the holding of remembrance events this year, after having been cancelled last year. I was pleased to be at memorials in North Tyneside and at Trinity House in Newcastle. It is essential that these occasions continue in order to honour the sacrifice made by so many. Congratulations to the excellent veterans' organisation Forward Assist on being awarded a QAVS - Queen's Award for Voluntary Service (well done Tony and Paula) - and to my friend John Thompson Snr (the Paterfamilias of Thompson's of Prudhoe) on receiving his MBE at Windsor Castle. What next? The Freedom of Prudhoe?

What great news that the HMRC is to set up a new base in Newcastle City Centre. The new development - the largest letting ever in the city - will have 9000 employees in the nine-storey block in Pilgrim's Quarter on the former Odeon cinema site. Have they asked about the car parking?

Make sure you all avoid the Black Friday season scams and remember the same goods are likely to be available cheaper before the break.

Happy Christmas to you all!

barryspeker@hotmail.com





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