



BUSINESSWORKS

Issue 4 June 2023 North East

JOINING THE DOTS...

Jeni Smith on why she's taking an academic approach to networking

SAFETY FIRST

How Steven Mclean and Dr Charlotte Knight can help your business get health and safety compliant

SONIC YOUTH

One young man's journey from paintballer to property entrepreneur, with Nathan Berry

THE GLOVES ARE OFF

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WELCOME

It's nice to have the sun streaming through the home office window finally. There's been a lot of change the past few months. The King had his coronation, and I've eaten more than my fair share of scones. Regionally, we've also had a new Middlesbrough Mayor crowned as Chris Cooke narrowly beat previous incumbent Andy Preston in the local elections.

Meanwhile, it's good to see the ICAEW reporting a positive change in business confidence in the North East. It increased in the first quarter of 2023 after nosediving all of last year. Moreover, the index shows the North East reading is the second highest across the UK, behind Yorkshire and Humberside. Let's hope this upward trajectory continues.

In this issue, we present a collection of inspirational interviews with very different North East-based entrepreneurs who all have one thing in common – they've bravely changed their careers and started their own ventures.

Networking and health and safety training may bring dismay to some, but we hear from those transforming thinking in both areas. Find out how Jeni Smith of NetKno is taking an academic approach to finding the perfect networking solution for everyone, while Steven Mclean and Dr Charlotte Knight of Advanced Safety Group talk about life on the road as they work with companies and organisations across the UK to transform their respiratory testing and first aid, mental health and health and safety training.

Matthew Williams reveals how he's transformed his own negative experience of ill health and turned it into Knock Out Depression – a business that helps people manage their mental health using boxing as a powerful metaphor. And 23-year-old Nathan Berry shows us why you're never too young to start a business as he shares ambitions for his lettings agency Aston Beaumont, which has already enjoyed a meteoric rise since it's inception a year ago.

I hope these stories inspire you to make that change you've been thinking about.

Alison Cowie,
BW Editor



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Forfusion, a company of IT experts based in Tyneside, has achieved something unique in the North East - the Cisco Gold Partner accolade

Cisco Gold Partner first for Forfusion



The attainment of the Cisco Gold Partner status is a remarkable achievement, and Forfusion is the first company headquartered in the North East to accomplish this feat.

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JOINING THE DOTS

Networking can secure new business, build relationships and foster collaboration. But the thought of entering a room of strangers fills many people with dread, and most are happy to leave it to the more extroverted among us.

But **Jeni Smith**, who has spent her career attending, hosting and researching networking, is keen to show that by taking a more strategic approach, it can be an effective tool for everyone, as she tells *Alison Cowie*

It was the local shop in her home village of Wetheral that proved the catalyst for Jeni Smith to study business and finance at university.

"I used to spend my 50p pocket money at the pick 'n' mix section," she recalls. "I dreamt of one day having a shop just like it.

"It was the reason that I decided to do business at uni - what better reason than sweets!"

Jeni was an industrious child who played classical guitar from the age of six, loved fashion and - following the death of her dad when she was just 10 years old - took up competitive swimming where weekends were spent travelling to galas. ►

Before university, she took a year off to travel and spent six months living with nuns in Fuji while volunteering at a deaf school.

Jeni attended Liverpool John Moores University and the girl from a small Cumbrian village found the cosmopolitan mix of art and food in the then European City for Culture intoxicating.

In her second year, Jeni began work experience at local CGI, animation and games company Milky Tea Studio. It was the company's co-founder, Jonathan Holmes, who took the young student to her first networking event.

"Jonathan told me to say I worked in business development but I didn't really understand what Milky Tea did. The idea of trying to talk to people about it scared the life out of me and I spent most of the evening hiding in the toilet."

Despite the nervy start, Jeni was intrigued by networking and its potential benefits.

"It seemed like an amazing way to meet people from different worlds and backgrounds, and learn all about them," she reflects.

Jeni went to her second networking event a few weeks later. It was focussed on the creative sector and a more informal affair than her first. She plucked up the courage to speak to a fellow attendee.

"I talked to a guy called Livingstone who made furniture. He was more nervous than I was and was so glad I'd spoken to him. We ended up chatting all night.

"From a networking perspective that obviously wasn't great as I only met one person. But it built my confidence and it was then that I fell in love with networking."

Jeni started going as many networking events as she could and the more she attended, the more engrossed she became.

"It was like this under-the-surface world and once you took your first step into it, it just opened up.

"I wasn't very strategic about it at the start. I mainly chose events that had free food! But the more I networked, the more events I got to know about.

"I soon found that I was naturally able to join the dots between people. I'd meet someone and go 'oh, you need to speak to this person or you need to speak to that person.'

"In the academic world, it's called 'social capital' and it increases your perceived value to others."

After graduating, Jeni established her own networking business, May Fifteen, as a way to monetise her natural flare for connecting people.

"It was a job that I essentially invented," she explains. "I had two options. One was to take commissions for introductions, but I didn't want to do that as it was really hard to monitor and I felt I could easily slip into a trap of only making introduction that paid the best.

"The second option, which I did, was where multiple organisations paid me a monthly fee to network on their behalf. I would attend events, meet and speak to people and, if I identified a beneficial connections, I put them in touch with each other."

Jeni would attend up to six networking events a day across Liverpool and Manchester, with the monthly fees she

charged covering costs such as travel and membership fees.

Her dedication meant she was soon being invited to exclusive, invite-only networking building her social capital further.

"I was out Mondays to Fridays, from first thing in the morning to last at night. By the weekend I didn't want to speak to anyone. It was hard going, but I absolutely loved it."

After five hectic years in Liverpool, Jeni moved back home to spend more time with her family. She immediately started looking for networking events in the nearby city of Carlisle but was surprised to find little or no options available.

"I was used to having the choice of so many events but there was only one networking event happening a month."

Jeni saw an opportunity to pivot her business from attending events to hosting her own.



She launched a programme of regular networking with a monthly membership fee, but admits her new venture got off to a slow start.

"Culturally, everyone in Carlisle felt they knew each other but that meant they didn't go to events to facilitate new connections. I had to do a lot of work to get people on board and it was difficult for the first year or so.

"Then a couple of larger businesses - Lloyds Motor Group and Armstrong Watson - signed up. That was like a stamp of approval from the locals. From then on, more people joined."

Jeni has her considerable networking experience gained in the North West to create four disparate monthly events that appealed to the widest demographic.

A Coffee Club was an informal drop-in event held in the middle of the day, whereas an evening social event allowed people to chat out of work hours over drinks.

The Carlisle Curry Club placed attendees in tables of four and between the starter and the main course, Jeni would move their seats so that they could network with different people.

Finally, a Ladies at Lunch event provided more knowledge transfer with a speaker

invited to share their story or discuss a business-related topic.

Jeni went above and beyond to make her delegates feel as comfortable as possible.

"Consistency was key because that helps make people feel safe," she explains.

"Walking into a networking event, you can feel like the kid at school no one wants to play with. You think everyone here knows each other and you're the odd one out. It's a vulnerable position to be in.

"I was all about the little things that made people feel welcome," Jeni continues. "I made sure that I was there early to welcome people and be the face of the event so that people could ask questions if they needed to.

"I also made sure there was a clearly visible banner at the door so people knew they were in the right place and were comfortable navigating round the space."

After three years running events in Carlisle, Jeni moved to the North East of England and it wasn't long before she was back in the world of networking after a chance encounter with the founder of The Mussle Club.

"I tried a 'regular job' for a bit but it wasn't for me. Then I met David Cook, who had founded a business networking group years previous. I literally said to him,

'I can look after this for you. Please give me a shot'."

As managing director of The Mussel Club, Jeni revived the long-standing business network by expanding the number of events over a wider area. She also grew the types of events, launching evening ticketed events at Newcastle's newest event space, The Biscuit Rooms.

"Historically, The Mussel Club had always been about free breakfast events - which were great and we added additional locations for those - but we did ticketed evening events too that changed the dynamic. We had some amazing speakers come and share their stories and they proved really popular."

After three enjoyable years at The Mussel Club, the hefty demands and long hours meant Jeni started looking for her next role. She saw an vacancy at Sunderland Software City as a business support specialist.

After successfully applying, Jeni working closely with a range of entrepreneurs, startups and SMEs.

"I'd always loved working with smaller businesses. It was a real learning curve but I got to know all about the world of tech." One day, the CEO of Sunderland Software City, David Dunn, saw a rough diagram ►

““I was out Mondays to Fridays, from first thing in the morning to last at night. By the weekend I didn't want to speak to anyone. It was hard going, but I absolutely loved it.”**”**



Jeni had drawn for a company she worked with detailing the different networking events and how personal characteristics suited which ones.

"David saw the doddle I'd done and said, 'you've got a hypothesis there, you need to get it researched'."

Jeni followed her boss's advice and got in touch with Durham University. She was ecstatic when the Business School wanted to use it as a research project for its MDA students.

As a result of the students' research, Jeni wrote a white paper on how a more strategic approach to networking could yield far better results.

Her experience with Durham University Business School reignited a passion in Jeni and while she was on maternity leave with her daughter she took the dramatic decision to leave Sunderland Software City and start her own networking consultancy.

She documented her journey in a regular vlog to help inform people who were thinking of starting their own enterprises. In it, she was able to show how the business and person can quickly become entwined, and along with revealing her business highs, she also shared the devastating news that she had suffered a miscarriage.

"Running your own business seeps into your whole life. They're not separate and I wanted to show that.


"I was overwhelmed by how many people got in touch after sharing the news that we'd lost our baby. Working on your own business can be isolating but the support that I got from people was wonderful. It showed the importance of having that network."

For NetKno, Jeni wanted to build on the academic research she had commissioned, breaking down her services into three distinct areas.

NetKno-Why offers consultancy services where Jeni works with companies to find out why they're going networking and what they want to achieve. She then creates a strategy based on these objectives and using the local networking ecosystem available.

"For example, a lot of new businesses go to free events but they tend to attract other startups, which may not be the target market you're looking for," Jeni explains. "It might be, your networking activity is better focused at events with membership fees, where more established businesses will be.





"It's all about looking in detail at the type of the event. Even things like who is hosting and the speaker will give an indication if it's right for you."

For NetKno-How Jeni provides networking training and workshops to help empower people with practical networking skills.

She works with individuals, academics and companies but has recently started working more in schools to help 16 to 18 year olds, who are used to communicating through their phones, build more interpersonal skills.

Finally, Jeni is working on a new SaaS platform, known as NetKno-Where, which details networking event happening in the region.

"There's a freemium option where people can look at what's happening. Or, for a fee, people will get their own bespoke dashboard where they can be more strategic about the events that will benefit them the most."

Jeni sees the benefits of virtual networking as a cost effective way to reach a wider network in wider locations, but she maintains it won't replace face-to-face networking, and a blended approach will be more beneficial to most individuals and organisations.

Last year, Jeni also decided to take her academic research in the anatomy of networking to the next level by enrolling at Durham University Business School to complete a part-time PhD in networking while running NetKno.

Her aim with the PhD - which she will complete in 2026 - is to delve even further into the science of networking that will ultimately inform the work she delivers through her consultancy, training and SaaS platform.

"In my PhD research, I'm looking at the anatomy of networking events and how all those little things - such as the time of day, location, speakers, etc - come together and impact who attends an event and who doesn't.

"I want to create new knowledge around how those events can be better designed to be more inclusive and more accessible."

Jeni has come a long way from hiding in the toilets to become a virtuoso networking strategist. ●

For more information visit www.netkno.co.uk

DELIVERING THE SKILLS TO SUPPORT THE REGION'S ECONOMIC GROWTH

How the responsiveness of Sunderland Engineering Training Association (SETA) in identifying key areas of economic potential is supporting the development of key sectors

For over 50 years, SETA has been a key name in delivering high quality, industry-recognised training.

Supporting multi-national businesses like Nissan, Rolls Royce and Liebherr, through to small businesses keen to acquire the skills to expand, SETA has gained an enviable reputation for its work in the engineering, manufacturing, process, service and related industries.

Through its commitment to the up-skilling and cross-skilling of workers, and its long track record in the delivery of apprenticeships, not-for-profit venture SETA is helping businesses to meet both the impending and current skills gaps in crucial areas of industry.

And its scope to do so has only increased through its involvement in the ESF North East Workforce Skills Programme, working in collaboration with other training providers to deliver fully-funded training to businesses across Northumberland and Tyne and Wear.

The programme - which is coming to an end in the coming months, although is still currently accepting new participants - has seen businesses benefit from the intervention and support of SETA's highly skilled staff, which

has been so crucial in the development of the region's workforce for over five decades.

Building relationships with businesses that span many years, through to short-term interventions to answer immediate training needs, SETA has the expertise to deliver the solutions businesses need - and with its ongoing growth, and workforce of more than 30 people, it has the capacity to scale its services to meet ongoing demand.

In addition to the range of courses and programmes it routinely offers, SETA also caters for bespoke requirements around commercial training, skills and health and safety compliance.

Robin Lockwood, CEO of SETA, believes the ongoing demand for SETA's services lies in the quality of its training and its ability to recognise and respond to the needs of business.

"As an organisation we want to be the best we can be, and it's very important that we respond to regional needs," he says.

"One of the big growth areas at the moment is offshore wind, and we have helped to support GE Energy, who are building and running wind turbines in the North Sea, with creating their workforce.

"We want to be responsive to employer requirements. It's important we are meeting the needs of businesses to enable them to grow."

The ability of businesses to respond to skills needs within their organisation is something that SETA is keen to work alongside them to achieve.

"We work across the broad spectrum of engineering training and work very closely with employers to meet their skills needs. We're delivering up-skilling and cross-skilling training, as well as apprenticeship programmes to meet their upcoming skills needs," says Robin.

"We also deliver training to ensure people comply with regulations, which gives them the freedom to operate. We offer a number of NVQs to give formal qualifications for workforce skills. We're also supporting with health and safety, first

aid at work - employers are happy they can get this breadth of training from one supplier.

"While getting young people into the manufacturing infrastructure from a young age is great, if you're a business and you're short staffed now, you need a solution now. This is where up-skilling and cross-skilling comes in.

"We can deliver courses to enable an unskilled person to become fully qualified in a relatively short period of time."

SETA is also supporting the agenda of the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), the latest version of which identifies advanced manufacturing as a key area of potential and development.

To ensure it continues to offer the highest standards of training to such fast-growing sectors, SETA is investing significantly in its own operation, recently adding two new CNC milling machines and some CNC simulators to its portfolio of equipment.

"We have a long history of supporting skills needs, and we will always try to fill as many gaps as possible in the skills an employer can offer," says Robin.

"Our training is of the highest quality and delivers the skills needed for the long term. Two of our board members at SETA, who hold senior roles within their own organisations, began their careers as SETA apprentices. Some of our instructors are also ex-SETA apprentices.

"We will continue to invest in our own operation so we can continue to deliver these skills and support businesses in their growth, and offer a range of off the shelf and bespoke options to ensure we can meet the exact needs of their current and future workforce." ●



This is the last chance for businesses to get involved in the ESF programme. For further information on the programme, or SETA's services in general, call 0191 416 2860, email enquiries@seta.co.uk or visit www.seta.co.uk



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Since the start of the year, the R&D Tax Credits industry has been shaken by an ultra-aggressive stance taken by HMRC when it comes to tax enquiries into R&D Claims

Are you worried about your R&D tax credits claim?



This seems to be a knee jerk reaction to the criticism levelled against them during the House of Lords debate on the 2022 Finance Bill.

In earlier years HMRC had a network of regional areas of expertise in their R&D Units. HMRC have recruited around 200 new "Case Workers". They have had 12 – 18 months of training on the R&D Tax Relief Rule book, the Corporate Intangibles and Research and Development (CIRD) Guidelines. They came from a variety of backgrounds, however from first-hand experience it doesn't seem to be Industrial, Mechanical or Technological.

This is not new, for years the Inspectors from the R&D Units had "specialized" in a particular industry, but weren't technically competent professionals. The difference is they had a number of years of training and experience, so they had a reasonably sound understanding of some of the more technical elements of their area of specialty and a sound knowledge of the CIRD guidelines.

The approach to enquiries also appears to have changed significantly. In the past it has always felt as though enquiries were a collaborative approach to ensure that the tax payer understood the eligibility criteria,

discussing the projects with the claimant's competent professionals; the financial elements; and challenging percentages and costs to determine they met the eligibility criteria. It was all rather softly, softly.

Today's approach seems to be a blanket "it's not eligible". It is also a lot more combative and it's not because HMRC are coming from a position of strength. They are often relying on a company fearing penalties to close an enquiry. It feels like they are using this fear to prove that there is extensive fraud and error in the SME scheme and use this evidence as the driving reason to harmonise the two schemes into the RDEC scheme.

If you do get an enquiry, don't panic! Answer the questions honestly and openly and if you really are worried consult a professional advisor, they might be able to help you. ●

If you would like to have a conversation about an enquiry or your R&D claim before you submit it, you can book some time to discuss your R&D projects with me by booking a free, no obligation discovery session at <https://calendly.com/cooden/bus-works>



THE GLOVES ARE OFF

Having experienced depression three times, **Matthew Williams** knows how difficult it is to think clearly when each day feels like you're in a 12-round bout with Tyson Fury, getting pummelled mercilessly around the head. But this passionate boxing fan has turned such an analogy into mental health programmes that provide practical support while fighting stigma. Here, he talks to *Alison Cowie* about Knock Out Depression

Matthew Williams was always drawn to sport and he spent his youth running competitively for his local athletics club. But it was the dynamic world of boxing that most appealed to the youngster from Middlesbrough.

"Boxing has been my passion since I watched Rocky II one Christmas," Matthew reveals. "I was about ten years old and I became obsessed. It wasn't about doing boxing. I was a runner, not a scrapper. But I was attracted to the people and the characters. I read everything I could about it and am a life-long follower."

Matthew's sporting passion influenced his career and he was a sports development officer for London Borough of Barnet Council before moving to North Yorkshire to work at a local county sports partnership.

In 2006, as a newly married man, Matthew was set to start a new chapter in his life. But at that moment depression put this go-getter on the

proverbial canvas for months.

"I couldn't smile, laugh or feel happy," he recalls. "I had no idea what was happening to me. I had physical symptoms too, and they got worse and worse. It was horrific."

"I remember Frank Bruno in the press for his mental health struggles and Marcus Trescothick talking about breaking down at an airport on the way to a cricket tour. But I didn't know anyone in real life going through what I was."

"I was in the grip of something I didn't understand and didn't know how to get out of."

Matthew's depression forced him to take an extended sickness absence from work and he was afraid he'd never be able to return. He was too scared to take medication and felt he needed to beat the illness on his own.

The heavy punches of depression, however, continued to rain down daily until Matthew knew he needed to seek meaningful help. ►

"I eventually paid to see a psychologist. It was a major step because, at the time I felt I needed to keep as much money as I could because I'd never work again. I was worried I'd end up homeless."

Despite initial scepticism, Matthew describes working with the psychologist as a turning point and he was able to take his first steps to recovery. He returned to his career and took a position at England Boxing, where he could indulge his sporting obsession by working in club and coach development.

Matthew's daughter was born in 2006 and his son in 2011 but sadly his marriage did not last and eventually broke down in 2014. He feared his crippling depression

might return during such a turbulent time, but it didn't.

"One of the misconceptions people have about depression is that people can't manage difficult things. But I didn't go through depression during my divorce, which is one of the most stressful life events you can go through.

"This idea that people who have suffered from depression can't cope is rubbish."

A year after his divorce, Matthew began writing a blog to help him manage the complex emotions he was feeling.

"I just had a compulsion to start writing," he reflects. "I got a blogging

app and within a couple of hours I put my first 700-word post out. It just poured out of me.

"I found it helped me process what I was going through and enabled me to find positives and lessons."

The blog soon garnered a dedicated fanbase which led to a book – *Something Changed: Stumbling Through Divorce, Dating and Depression* – being published by Sixth Element.

"Because depression is such an alien thing, it can be so difficult to articulate. So finding that I could write about it, in a way that people could relate to, was very powerful," the published author adds.



Matthew has suffered two subsequent bouts of depression in 2013 and 2019, but each time he has felt better prepared for the fight.

"I've learnt about myself and what works for me," he explains. "I've been able to recognise some of the roots of what I believe triggers me."

Despite his experience, Matthew does not prescribe to the idea that he lives with depression.

"I've had it three times in the same way that I could have had flu three times. It's a period of illness; it's not who I am," he maintains.

"A lot of people think depression is a fault within them. They think it's a life sentence but that's not the case.

"Looking after your mental health is something that we all have to do in the same way as our physical health."

While at England Boxing, Matthew

helped establish a mental health awareness workshop. He found boxing the perfect metaphor for managing mental health.

"People misunderstand boxing is about violence and aggression," he explains. "But it's more an intense physical and mental competition, one on one.

"That will to win and overcome adversity is a very human thing and ▶



that's why I use it as a way to help people understand mental health while challenging some of the negative stereotypes."

In March 2022, after working for a mental health charity, Matthew decided to leave full-time employment to develop and deliver his own mental health support programme with boxing at its heart. He named his new venture, Knock Out Depression.

Matthew developed a six-week programme that combined mental health education with boxing training.

He set up a website and on the first day received more than 70 enquiries.

Matthew teamed up with Billingham Boxing Academy to deliver his sessions, which comprise an hour of boxing training followed by a discussion on ways to manage mental health.

"In boxing, it's all about finding the right combination to beat your opponent. In mental health, it's the same. You need to find the right combination that works for you."

Matthew has now set his sights on

working with businesses to deliver practical workplace sessions to help educate employers and employees on how to manage mental health and support those struggling.

Initially, he is targeting traditionally male-dominated industries such as manufacturing, engineering and construction.

"A big problem is that men don't think depression will happen to them until it does," Matthew explains. "If they've never been there and you come into their workplace and start talking to them about mental health, it goes over their heads. But if I get them in boxing gloves and moving around, I can then use boxing by saying it's not about punching, it's all about getting your balance right. It's the same in life. You've got to balance your mental health. That's when they make that connection."

Matthew also sees boxing superstar Tyson Fury being open about his mental health struggles as an important factor in helping combat stigma around depression.

"It immediately challenges any notion of depression being a weakness because you've got a six-foot, nine-inch heavyweight champion of the world saying it brought him to his knees.

"Tyson Fury's made his share of controversial comments but on mental health, he speaks so well and we need voices like his."

Matthew continues to work in the community, delivering his six-week programmes at Billingham Boxing Academy and Redcar Boxing Club, where he's worked with men and women of all ages. He has also developed an online version so that people can join virtually.

Matthew recognises the herculean effort it can take for someone struggling with their mental health to seek help, and so offers a free guide on his website introducing people to his approach. He's also developed an online quiz to help people take their first step.

"I've had almost 400 responses to the quiz," he reveals. "They're anonymous but they help me understand what people are experiencing so I can use those to tailor the support Knock Out Depression offers."

To help develop his Community Interest Company (CIC), Matthew has taken part in two accelerator programmes in association with Teesside University, providing him with funding, mentorship, business support and a place to base his business.

His plan is to recruit trainers to deliver his programmes to a wider audience. But this won't happen until he is confident others can effectively translate his support.

Matthew concludes: "The main takeaway of Knock Out Depression is that I genuinely believe there are messages in boxing that can help anybody. You don't have to be interested in the sport.

"There's something deeply human about struggling with our mental health and boxing taps into a lot of what it takes to be human – that vulnerability and courage.

"It hits the mark in so many ways." ●



For more information visit
www.knockoutdepression.co.uk



Sweet treats at the Teahouse

Newcastle's newest tea and coffee house has given a new breath of life to the ex-loved Quilliam Brothers' site by Newcastle University, evolving into the stylish Claremont Teahouse

The Teahouse boasts a menu of over 50 unique and flavourful specialist tea blends which have been curated by local tea expert Melanie at Love Leaf Tea. Sweet treats can be paired with teas, coffees, hot chocolates and more with a full counter of goodies supplied by artisan bakery Kennedy & Rhind.

For those looking for a heavier bite, Claremont Teahouse offers a breakfast menu with both sweet and savoury dishes available until 11:30am, followed by a brunch menu which features a Posh Fish Finger Sandwich as well as Piri Piri Chicken

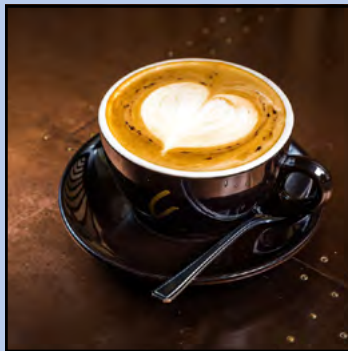
Pancakes. Diners can also enjoy well-known favourites from Dot Bagels available all day at the Teahouse, which is the only city centre location to be offering their iconic New York inspired bagels with unique and exotic flavours.

Their menu offerings include gluten free, vegetarian and vegan dishes. Customers can speak to a member of staff on site to find out more about accommodating to requirements.

Claremont Teahouse holds a secret lower ground area with a unique micro-cinema which will be open and available for hire

with seating & exhibition space in the future following renovation. This will offer an exciting new environment to those looking for something a little more unconventional and memorable for private parties and presentations. ●

For more information visit:
www.northernbarmanagement.com



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HOW CYBER-RESILIENT IS YOUR BUSINESS?

Cyber attacks can strike fear into businesses, big or small, but Net Defence's approach is not to terrify its customers into buying its bespoke IT, telephony and cyber security solutions. Instead, it is focused on demystifying and simplifying threats and allowing its wide-ranging client base to make informed decisions to become more cyber resilient. Here, Net Defence managing director **Debra Cairns** explains more...



What does Net Defence do, and for whom?

We provide IT (MSP), telephony, cyber security and resilience services to our customers from all sectors across the UK, with a focus on providing an outstanding service. Our practical and bespoke solutions bring immediate value to organisations by providing cost savings, strengthening security and reducing risk. Our customers spread from single owners to large corporates and NHS Trusts.

When was the company established and how has it developed in this time?

We began our journey as a telecommunications company through an acquisition in 1994. We were originally a division of Ogilvie Management Services,

providing telecommunication installation and support to Ogilvie Construction and Ogilvie Fleet. Net Defence was established in 2015 to incorporate telephony and IT. In 2019, we introduced cyber services to address the emergence of cyber security risk. We continue to be part of the £250m Ogilvie Group, a third-generation Scottish family business, which supports numerous industries from construction and home-building to the fleet industry and surveying.

You joined Net Defence in March 2018. What attracted you to the company and what was your career up until that point?

I started my career with Procter & Gamble (P&G), the world's largest consumer products company with sales of more than \$65 billion. During my 19 years there I worked as an accountant, an auditor, and an IT security specialist. When I left P&G, I was looking for a role that would allow me to use my knowledge and continue to develop, but was at a company that had similar values and ethics. It was unusual to find a technical company that was family owned.

You became managing director in 2020. What were your aims when you took the top job and have these changed in the intervening three years?

I was appointed acting MD in January 2020 before becoming the permanent MD in June 2020. My initial aims were focused on maintaining and developing the quality of service and bringing together our three service lines (IT, comms and cyber), underpinned with security while putting the customer at our core. But as the pandemic took hold, my priorities quickly changed to support our customers and our parent company through some extremely tough times. Remote working and technology became critical to organisations so they could continue to operate. Our cyber resilience approach was established during this period too. It brings together business continuity, information, communication systems, security and organisational resilience. It's all about ensuring you can operate if you suffer a cyber event from a digital attack or a natural disaster.

How do you describe the ethos behind the company?

Our ethos is best represented through our purpose and values. Our purpose is to protect, support, and help to keep organisations secure and resilient while our values include trust, operating with integrity, transparency, being open and candid in all we do and ownership, managing our customers business as if it were our own. Everything we do has our customers' needs and requirements at its core.

What makes Net Defence stand out from its competitors?

We do not sell based on fear. It has become common in the cyber sector to terrify customers into purchasing technology and services to prevent cyber attacks. Our approach is about building awareness and providing training and support to allow customers and potential customers to make informed decisions. We listen to our customers' issues, concerns and needs and provide bespoke solutions to address these.

Cyber security can be overwhelming for businesses, particularly smaller, owner-managed ones. Where's the best place to start?

Becoming cyber resilient is not as complex or expensive as you might think. We split it into two key areas: preparation and prevention. Prevention is best addressed through the IASME Cyber Essentials and Cyber Assurance certifications, which assures you have the technical defences in place to prevent the most common threats, and the right policies and procedures to reduce your overall risk. Preparation is focused on business continuity and disaster recovery should the worst happen.

Cyber crime seems such a fast-paced and ever-evolving threat. How best can a business manage constant changes?

It is true that cyber criminals are investing a lot more time and money to develop new attack methods, but ultimately, they still need vulnerability and an easy target. If you have assessed your organisation through IASME Cyber Essentials and Cyber Assurance, and you continue to adopt the best practices these certifications expect, you are no longer an easy target. Also, after technical controls, your employees are the weakest link in your organisation. Invest in their training and awareness and they can be your best allies in the fight against cyber crime.

Are there new or growing threats that companies should be aware of?

Email-based attacks continue to be the greatest threat to all businesses and organisations across the UK. Phishing simulation and cyber training after technical controls are your best form of defence. An emerging risk could be your supply chain. If you have taken steps to protect your organisation from cyber criminals, they can use your supply chain as a stepping-stone to attack your business. Ensure you take time to complete due diligence on your supply chain, ensuring they have invested in their cyber security.

What are the short- and long-term plans for Net Defence?

Like most businesses, we have growth plans but our mission remains to simplify cyber security and resilience, IT support and telephony services, making them affordable, attainable and available to everyone. We want to continue to protect, support and keep organisations secure and resilient, now and into the future. ●



For more information on Net Defence, visit www.net-defence.com





SAFETY FIRST

Partners in life and business, **Steven Mclean** and **Dr Charlotte Knight** combine their expertise to deliver a range of respiratory testing and health and safety, first aid, mental health first aid, safeguarding and fire safety training to businesses across the UK. Here, they discuss the inception of Advanced Safety Group, and why companies and organisations must keep up-to-date with rules and regulations

Tell us about your backgrounds and how they led you to establish Advanced Safety Group in 2020.

Steven: I have been in sales since I was 18 selling personal protective equipment (PPE). For the past 15+ years, I specialised in providing chemical protective clothing to industrial clients, I then decided to focus on respiratory products which also included training. I was made redundant during the pandemic and decided it was the right time to set up on my own. I established Advanced Safety Group, offering face mask testing and training and won a contract with a key supply partner for the NHS. When Charlotte joined the company, we began expanding into more areas.

Charlotte: I come from a different background. I got my doctorate in biomedical research and worked in research labs where I became interested in the health and safety side. After graduating, I moved back to my family home in Lincolnshire and I fell into a sales role while I worked out what avenue I wanted to pursue. I ended up doing quite well in sales and soon got promoted. I met Steven when he came to train us on respiratory protective equipment. When COVID hit, everyone was put on furlough. Steven started the business and attracted clients quickly because of the good relationships he'd built

during his career. It was not the intention for me to join the business so soon, but Steven was so busy with months of forward bookings that one night we just said, 'Let's go for it'.

How did Charlotte joining the business help expand the services you offered?

Steven: I'd always talked about not just relying on respiratory testing and training, and so because of Charlotte's educational training background, she decided to get fully accredited in health and safety training and instructorship. Now, all our health and safety courses are regulated by Ofqual. It took a lot of time and money to get qualified but we knew if we wanted to go down this route, we wanted to do it properly.

There are a lot of training companies out there. How do you make Advanced Safety Group stand out?

Charlotte: Being accredited is a big part. We're audited regularly and our standards are high. This means every learner gets the same experience and a nationally recognised qualification, which isn't the case with a lot of training providers. ►

Steven: There is a lot of competition out there – there are people who offer first aid, people who offer mental health and people doing respiratory testing. But not many do everything we do. We offer services including first aid, mental health first aid, safeguarding, health and safety, fire safety, manual handling and emergency evacuation training, as well as our respiratory face fit testing and training.

Who delivers your training and over what geography?

Charlotte: We occasionally use accredited contractors but Steven and I deliver a lot of the training ourselves. We're always on the road.

Steven: We operate nationally so we do a lot of work in Scotland with the NHS but we go all over the UK for private clients. We're just back from London where we were working with an industrial painting company for three days.

You're based at Gateshead near the MetroCentre. Do you deliver training there?

Charlotte: We can and do hold training there, it's also a base for our staff members who put the training and learning packs

together. We deliver a lot of training at our clients' sites.

Steven: Longer term, we'd like a dedicated training facility, and Team Valley would be good as it's so close to the A1. But with our clients being based all over the country, we tend to go to them.

Do you offer distance learning?

Steven: Yes. It's essential to have a variety of different training techniques – distance learning, online, in-house and blended. Prior to COVID, learning was mostly face-to-face but the pandemic changed the dynamics of a lot of training. That said, not all of our courses can be offered via distance learning due to their regulations. First aid, for instance, can't be solely delivered remotely as you have to physically demonstrate techniques. The mental health first aid, safeguarding and the health and safety ones can be run remotely.

Charlotte: All distant learners who join up get learning packs delivered well in advance of the courses. They'll sign in on Zoom and do the training as a group. Then we'll do a private one-on-one professional discussion with each participant at the end of the course to award them their qualification.

Employees have to undergo so much training these days that they often groan when another one comes up. How do you make sure your training is engaging?

Charlotte: We use a lot of different media and learning styles. We vary the training and have activities that get people up and out of their seats. We'll make sure there are good breaks during the day and encourage people to go for a walk. We also have a laugh – no one wants to be on a course where you feel you can't have a chuckle.

Steven: We also incorporate a lot of real-world examples into the training to make it more relatable and relevant to the learners we are teaching.

What's the risk to businesses for failing to keep up-to-date with health and safety training?

Charlotte: An HSE [Health and Safety Executive] inspector has more power than a police officer because they don't need a warrant to come into your premises. They can make spot checks and demand to see all of your documentation on any aspect of health and safety. They'll take videos and pictures as evidence and they don't need your permission. Getting an HSE inspector on site is quite scary and they could walk into your workplace tomorrow. Organisations that aren't health and safety compliant can be given improvement notices, fines and in serious cases prohibition notices which are essentially immediate cease and desist orders. Fines can vary depending on the type and extent of breach and also on the revenue of a company. We are aware of companies being issued six-figure fines or more.

Steven: The HSE is very hot on the respiratory side at the moment. We've had a lot of emergency phone calls from companies needing our help because they've got the wrong PPE equipment, they're not wearing it properly, or it's not been through a testing programme so they don't have the right documentation.

Charlotte: The HSE don't just target big national companies; they're going to smaller companies as well. Last summer, inspectors visited wood joinery companies because of the wood dust exposure, and we had numerous of calls from people needing advice and support. ►

“We incorporate a lot of real-world examples into the training to make it more relatable and relevant to the learners we are teaching.”





Which of your courses do you deliver the most?

Steven: Respiratory is still the majority of our business but we're really growing in other areas, particularly mental health first aid courses.

Charlotte: Unlike first aid, it's not a legal requirement to have people trained in mental health but the HSE has recently released a statement saying that employers are responsible for the mental well-being of their staff and any stress issues that may come about because of their work. This has increased the importance of having a policy in place. It's reported that absenteeism at work due to stress and anxiety costs the UK economy more than £12 billion a year, so companies are starting to recognise that if they have a better mental health policy, they could be a more profitable business. Within the next couple of years mental health first aid will be a legal requirement for businesses just as standard first aid is.

How do you keep up with all the regulation changes?

Charlotte: As part of the courses we offer, we get updates on anything that's changed on the spec associated with those courses. So if the Resuscitation Council changes any rules on how they want first aid to be taught, we will get an update from the awarding body stating a syllabus change. We also get updates from HSE with any regulation changes to health and safety practices and from various other channels such as BSIF (British Safety Industry Federation). As a company, trying to do it yourself can be a nightmare and seem almost impossible, but I would always recommend businesses to sign up to some health and safety newsletters as these will keep you updated on any changes or new regulations coming in. I also recommend companies sign up to industry specific bodies as they help you keep up-to-date with specific aspects relevant to your individual business.

If a company recruits you, what happens first?

Charlotte: We will have a chat with them and after that discussion, we'll let them know what they need and how we can help them. We'll never oversell our services. We inform them what needs to be in place in their business environment - whether they use our services or not.

Steven: We also send a lot of information in PDF format about what companies need and why - whether it's a legal requirement or recommended. That means they can make their own informed decisions.

What are your plans for Advanced Safety Group this year?

Steven: To keep growing our client base. We've just won a couple of new contracts so we want to bring in a couple of members of staff to build our capacity.

Charlotte: It's a big step taking on extra trainers because that's the face of our business. We'll only be taking on people who are accredited and are the right fit.

“An HSE inspector has more power than a police officer because they don't need a warrant to come into your premises. They can make spot checks and demand to see all of your documentation on any aspect of health and safety.”



There's increasing importance on businesses, even new ones, to be responsible and sustainable. Is that why you partnered with the National Trust to plant 500 sq m of woodland?

Steven: Because of the type of company we are, we're travelling all over the UK and we can't use electric cars because they don't yet accommodate the miles that we do. We're trying to be as clean and as careful as we can though wherever possible. We're also conscious of where we're based, so we've used local suppliers for our marketing, website and accountancy and we're members of the North East England Chamber of Commerce. If we're staying at hotels, we also opt for smaller independent ones to support the local economies of where we're visiting.

Charlotte: Sustainability isn't just about doing less bad, it's about doing more good too, and that's why we've partnered with the National Trust. So far, we've planted around 250 square metres of trees. Steven developed a sustainability policy very early on, but actually, when tendering for work, we're often asked about it. If other smaller businesses that are just getting started can have a policy, it can be a big opportunity for them. ●

For more information, visit
www.advancedsafetygroup.co.uk





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Perhaps the best way to think of Wentworth Grange is to fuse together the food of your favourite restaurant, the service of a lovely hotel all wrapped up in the comfort of home that also looks after you when you need it.

You can find out more about Wentworth Grange and the outstanding services they offer at **www.wentworthgrange.com** or by contacting them directly on **01434 682 243**



BREWERIES LTD

SOMIC YOUTH

He's still in his early 20s but **Nathan Berry** already presides over more than 160 residential and commercial properties as founder of Aston Beaumont. The result of nepotism or a lucrative trust fund? Nope. Nathan has realised his own entrepreneurial ambitions thanks to a combination of determination, hard work and a supportive mum who knows which merchandise will help her son's business stand out from the crowd. *Alison Cowie* reports ►





Having been diagnosed with dyslexia, Nathan Berry struggled throughout school and found academia challenging.

"School work was hard for me so I applied myself to other things," the 23-year-old reveals. "I was very driven and anything I did, I wanted to make it work,"

Nathan began selling sweets in the yard at break and lunchtimes before his entrepreneurial spirit moved online and he spent hours trawling the likes of eBay and Gumtree looking for bargains he could resell at a profit.

"I once got 20 rolls of free AstroTurf that I sold for £2 each. It doesn't sound much but when you're 14, it's a good bit of pocket money."

Keen to enter the world of work at the earliest opportunity, Nathan started his career at a local paintball centre on the eve of his 16th birthday.

While most see their first job as simply a way of earning spending money, Nathan was inspired by his older colleagues' work ethic and learnt important life skills on how to succeed in a career.

Nathan soon moved to Leeds Building Society, where he worked in the mortgage department. He used the opportunity to absorb everything he could about property and investments.

"It was a real eye-opener for me," he explains. "I wasn't taught anything about credit scores, mortgages, savings or bank

accounts at school, but I could see this was how adult life worked.

"I was always intrigued about the portfolios of properties people had. They might have five, six or even more buy-to-let properties where the rent covered the mortgages and more.

"It seemed the perfect business and so I was always keeping tabs on the areas people were investing in."

Currently, the average age of a person buying their own home in the UK is 33 but Nathan was still in his teens when he took his first step onto the property ladder.

Living with his parents in Whitley Bay at the time, Nathan saved his wages and, at 19 years old, had enough for a deposit on

“*I was always intrigued about the portfolios of properties people had...and so I was always keeping tabs on the areas people were investing in.”*

a house and a couple of 0% credit cards to finance the refurbishment. He made an offer on a modest 'doer upper' close to his family home.

The sale eventually went through in March 2020 but as Nathan explained, he got the keys on the Monday and by the Friday the country had gone into lockdown.

"The place needed loads of work but, because of COVID, I couldn't get any trades in."

Undeterred, Nathan set about tackling the refurbishment work himself with the help of his dad.

Despite his interest in buy-to-let properties, he had always intended to move into his first property.

"I thought I needed my own home before I considered looking at investments," he adds.

But when Nathan's family member was looking for a new property to rent closer to the schools catchment area, he suggested she rent his new property.

"It was a nicer place, in a nicer area, closer to family. It just made sense. I said you can move in and we'd figure it. They said, 'yes, let's do it'.

Nathan had to refinance the property on an investment buy-to-let basis but found the process relatively quick, easy – and surprisingly lucrative.

"Because the value of the property increased, I could take more money out that I'd initially saved up and spent on the renovations. I couldn't believe the money I'd made in just a few months."

At 21, Nathan moved to a new job at Lambert Smith Hampton and was part of a team managing commercial property across the North East, all while he continued to grow his own property portfolio to eight homes.

In 2022, Nathan then took the dramatic decision to leave his secure job and set up his own property management agency.

"I had learnt so much from everyone at Lambert Smith Hampton, and with my own properties, people had started to ask if I would consider managing their properties. I thought, 'why not? Let's give it a go'."

Aston Beaumont launched in August 2022 and was branded as a 'modern and accountable' letting agency.

To realise his dream, Nathan needed instructions and he saw property events as the ideal opportunity to get face-to-face with landlords. ►



To help him, he recruited his biggest supporter - Mum.

"I did my first event on my own and I didn't know what I was doing. I just got a few branded mugs and pens and didn't get much traffic to my stall.

"Then my mum asked if she could come to the second one and she organised little bottles of Champagne and chocolates with our branding on. They worked much better.

"My mum's now my plus one at all the events I do."

Nathan knew his age could work against him and landlords may be reticent to put their investment property into the hands of someone his age.

But he has relied on building strong personal relationships and describes Aston Beaumont as a letting agent 'made by landlords for landlords' to emphasise his own practical experience in investment properties.

"The point i'm trying to make is that being a landlord myself, I understand the difficulties of the property industry with ever changing legislation and constant challenges, but Aston Beaumont is here to help you get the best service level on your assets, whilst being accountable, attentive and pragmatic to challenges".

Nathan's hard work has paid off and Aston Beaumont now manages an impressive portfolio of more than 160 tenancies ranging from single-lets, student, professionals and commercial across the North East, from Teesside to Northumberland.

With just a small team, Nathan has used technology and pragmatism to ensure Aston Beaumont can maintain his promised high-quality customer service.

"Landlords and tenants often become frustrated at the time it takes to deal with issues, which can grow into something more detrimental.

"It was important for us to get systems in place that speeded up those turnaround times."

The young entrepreneur is keen to work with more landlords to increase Aston Beaumont's managed portfolio, alongside building his own personal portfolio.

Nathan recently completed a commercial conversion in North Shields, as he explains.

"The building dates back to 1895 and had been an old wallpaper shop since the late 1950s. I spent last summer renovating the space. I'm happiest when I'm in my 'scruffs' knocking down walls. It now looks amazing with a tenant already moved in."

By breathing new life into dilapidated buildings, Nathan recognises the regeneration it brings to an area and he's keen to do more of this in the future.

"I'm conscious of the local areas and where we live. I don't like to see the high streets fall apart and fail. I live in Whitley Bay and we've got Park View, which is so vibrant with independent businesses and shops. But you can go close by and you'll find similar places that should be just as bustling and amazing, but they're not.

"If I can be a small cog in helping to bring local areas up, I'm all for that."

Nathan also wants to help more young people get onto the property ladder and is happy to share his expertise at every opportunity. He also regularly documents his property journey on social media to help demystify the world of investment properties.

Nathan says he's learning every day and has always understood the power of taking inspiration from others. He's currently looking to expand his growing network both inside and outside of the property industry.

Ask about his long-term plans and Nathan glibly describes himself sitting on a beach with a margarita in hand. But this scene is surely a long way off as there's still plenty to come from this incredibly driven entrepreneur, whose ambition, dedication and business savvy already go way beyond his 23 years. ●

For more information, visit www.aston-beaumont.co.uk

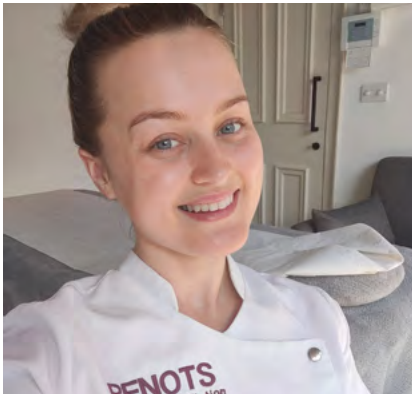




On a mission to help with health and wellbeing in the workplace

Megan Stoner of Renots Injury Rehabilitation Clinic speaks to BusinessWorks

I established Renots Injury Rehabilitation Clinic in 2019 and have been working with a wide range of patients since then, to help with overall health and wellbeing and injury



management. I have found that a lot of my patients suffer from pain caused by bad posture, stress, commuting and awkward work setups. All of these issues seem to fixate around the workplace and lack of workplace wellbeing.

I have worked hard to create a holistic approach to improving these issues, using techniques such as postural assessments, work space assessments, massage, cupping and much more. Although I feel that the workplace needs to become an environment which also welcomes this approach, as it can also benefit the business as well as their employees.

Businesses will find that by having regular wellbeing assessments and treatments available to their employees, they will have

employees that feel appreciated, which boosts productivity, longevity and capability within job roles. By doing this, it also means a decrease in sickness rates due to injury and stress is managed appropriately, whereby it is less likely for employees to take sickness due to their mental health. Therefore not only is workplace wellbeing necessary, it is also critical to business success. ●

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Email renots.clinic@gmail.com

www.renotsinjuryclinic.noterro.com



Drawing out the expert in you

"Journalists want to hear from an expert like you" is a phrase you'll often hear the founder of Kasa Communications saying



Sharon Davis has spent the last 15 years helping businesses to find meaningful ways to stand out in a very noisy media space. She's also keen to break down the stereotypes around PR being an expensive and inaccessible business service.

One of the ways she and her team are doing this is through the Kasa Community, a PR membership for business leaders, freelancers, comms managers, or in her words 'experts'.

As well as having their own media page, which will continually be shared with relevant media professionals, such as journalists, producers and editors, members will have access to Meet the Journalist events.

Sharon shares: "The Kasa Community works for businesses of all sizes. It can be an excellent first step for someone new to media or it could be an ideal next step for

businesses wanting to scale back PR activity while maintaining a media presence.

"We're always looking for innovative ways to help people connect with the media. We launched the community as we come across so many leaders who have brilliant stories, useful data and interesting contributions but don't know how or have the means to do anything with it." ●

Find out more about Kasa Communications and the community over at kasacomms.com or email admin@kasacomms.com





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COCO charity, a North East-based organisation dedicated to promoting sustainable education in poor and marginalised communities, is thrilled to announce its highly anticipated annual fundraising Ball

SPARKLE AND SHINE FOR BRIGHTER FUTURES



The dazzling event is set to take place on Saturday 21st October at The Grand Hotel, Gosforth Park, promising an evening of elegance, entertainment, philanthropy, and plenty of sparkle. Attendees will gather to support COCO's mission of transforming lives through education.

COCO (Comrades of Children Overseas), co-founded by Olympian Steve Cram CBE, is a UK registered charity that works tirelessly to provide quality education to vulnerable children in East Africa. Through partnerships with local organisations, COCO delivers education to rural communities, creating opportunities for children to break the cycle of poverty and dream of a brighter future.

The COCO Ball has become a celebrated tradition, drawing partygoers, influential business leaders, generous supporters, and advocates for educational equality every year. Get ready to bedazzle in your finest attire, adorned with glittering sparkles and radiant diamantes, as guests step into a world of shimmer and sparkle, embracing the theme of 'Shining for Brighter Futures.' This enchanting night will be filled with memorable moments that have the power

to change the lives of thousands of children. The event features a glamorous drinks reception and a delicious three-course meal, complemented by a half bottle of wine per guest. A live auction offers exclusive luxury items and unique experiences, with proceeds supporting COCO's educational initiatives. Live music by local band Storm sets the mood as guests dance the night away.

Throughout the evening, guests will have the opportunity to learn more about the impactful work they are supporting and witness inspirational testimonials from some of the children COCO works with. This sparkle ball is all about the collective effort to ignite lasting change so that every child, everywhere can dream of a brighter future.

Businesses and individuals are invited to show their support for this incredible local charity by purchasing a table at the COCO Ball. Join us in making a difference and empower children through education. Early bird tickets are currently on sale until Thursday 31st August. ●

To find out more about COCO, visit www.coco.org.uk or follow COCO Charity on Social Media.





LS | LIFESTYLE

ISSUE 4

DINING ■ MOTORING

TIMES THEY ARE A-CHANGING AT BLACKFRIARS

Alison Cowie samples the historic Newcastle City Centre restaurant
to see what's new



Blackfriars restaurant in Newcastle is steeped in history dating back to 1239. The main restaurant, with its exposed stonework and stained glass windows, occupies a former friary's refectory and is believed to be the oldest dining room in the UK.

It offers lunch, dinner and afternoon teas overseen by executive head chef Chris Wardale, who has been with Blackfriars for more than 13 years.

The Parlour Bar, thought to be the oldest standing bar in Newcastle, also provides a cosy location for a pre or post-meal drink, while the stunning medieval Banquet Hall – once used by royalty in 1334 – continues to provide a memorable location

for monthly themed dinners, atmospheric medieval banquets and around 40 weddings a year.

Blackfriars – which also has a Tasting Room and a cookery school – has recently taken over the Kings Suite above the Banquet Hall to offer an additional flexible meeting and entertaining space. It also refurbished its medieval-inspired meeting rooms overlooking the Cloister Garden in 2022, which can accommodate up to 25 people.

In May this year, Blackfriars opened an exciting new al fresco dining area in the Cloister Garden, set to host events such as hog roasts this summer.

It also received an AA Rosette last year and a renewed inclusion into the Good Food Guide, confirming Blackfriars' place as one of Newcastle's most prized dining and event spaces.

My friend and I visited one weekday lunchtime and like all my previous visits, the restaurant was already bustling with business clientele, couples and small groups when we arrived.

In light of the new Cloister Garden space opening, the restaurant has decided to slim down its lunch offering to its set menu (the al carte is still available in the evening) but there were still plenty of options that demonstrated deft British ►



cookery. I was also pleased to see North East favourite Pan Haggerty still a feature.

The cost - two courses for £21 or three courses for £25 (or £24/£29.50 with a glass of fizz) - also represents superb value for money.

To start, my friend went for the goats cheese with candied walnut, roast beetroot and honey dressing while I chose the smoked duck ham, red cabbage sauerkraut and mustard sauce. As we waited, we enjoyed beautifully soft homemade bread with creamy seasoned butter while sipping on our glasses of fizz.

Both the starters were beautifully presented and well-proportioned. The classic combination of goats cheese, walnut and beetroot was perfectly balanced and the duck ham was full of flavour.

For my main course, I chose the beetroot, potato and smoked cheddar Wellington. Meat eaters (of which I am one) may baulk at the notion of swapping succulent beef with beetroot, but the sweet roast vegetable in velvety mash, wrapped in the most delicious golden pastry

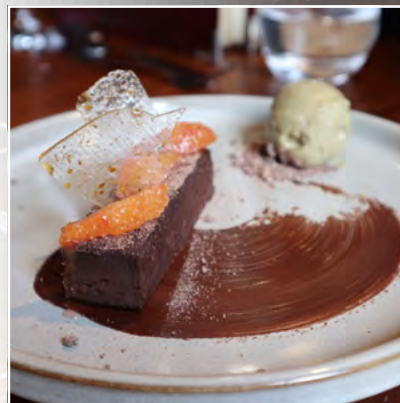
and bathed in a fragrant chervil cream, provided a tasty and hearty lunchtime dish that I would - well - heartily recommend anyone trying.

My friend's less controversial grilled sole was well cooked and came with a plethora of complementary flavours and textures with a poached hen's egg, creamed spinach, smoked bacon lardons, crispy onions and smooth wild garlic poke purée.

Leaving enough room for dessert, we opted for the rich and indulgent dark chocolate and orange délice with pistachio ice cream, and the delightful mini hot cross bun with vanilla cream pâtisserie and rum and raisin ice cream.

Finishing with a coffee to provide us with an injection of energy for the trip home, we left well-fed and intrigued to sample the new Cloister Garden the next time we visit this eatery, which skilfully balances a historic setting with a modern dining experience. ●

For more information and bookings, visit www.blackfriarsrestaurant.co.uk







All hail the new BMW 5 Series Saloon

Featuring a wealth of digital innovations and all-electric drive for the first time, the 8th generation of the world's most successful business saloon is sure to get the attention of motor enthusiasts

The latest iteration of the BMW 5 Series Saloon will be a feature on UK roads this autumn. It offers the advanced technology and elegant and sporting looks that you would expect, while an all-electric drive arrives to the range for the very first time.

The commitment to sustainability also continues with a 20 to 25 per cent reduction in the carbon footprint in the supply chain,

and up to 58 per cent across its life cycle compared to its predecessor.

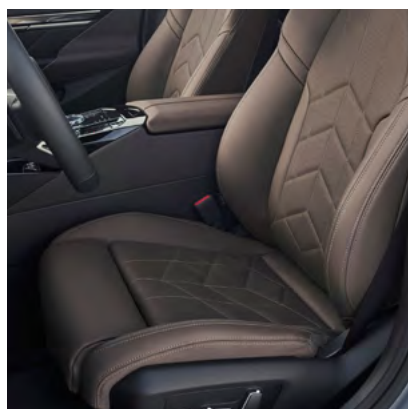
The exterior design of the latest generation reinterprets the sporty elegance of a BMW 5 Series Saloon. Its proportions make the character of the dynamic business saloon instantly recognisable.

As a performance model from BMW M GmbH, the all-electric BMW i5 M60

xDrive comes as standard with specific exterior features that visually underline its outstanding sporting potential.

The road presence of the new BMW 5 Series Saloon is enhanced by its athletic proportions and the larger exterior measurements compared to its predecessor.

The 8th generation vehicle has grown in length by 97mm to 506mm, in width



“The exterior design of the latest generation reinterprets the sporty elegance of a BMW 5 Series Saloon. Its proportions make the character of the dynamic business saloon instantly recognisable.”

by 32mm to 1900mm and in height by 36mm to 1515mm. The wheelbase has been increased by 20mm to 2995mm for improved seating comfort, especially in the rear.

In addition to a pure-electric drivetrain, the latest generation BMW 5 Series debuts several firsts for the iconic saloon. It is the first BMW in the UK to feature Veganza upholstery as standard from launch, encompassing the seats, dashboard and door panels while the striking BMW Interaction Bar first seen in the BMW 7 Series is now incorporated in the new BMW 5 Series.

Furthermore, the saloon is now available with a panoramic roof – the first time in the

model's history – and the digital experience is taken to a new high with cutting-edge additions of AI-driven servicing notifications and the introduction of in-car gaming.

Like all previous model generations, the new BMW 5 Series Saloon is manufactured at the BMW Group Plant Dingolfing. In 1973, the first vehicle manufactured at the plant was a first-generation BMW 5 Series Saloon.

Available in three well specified trim levels in the UK – M Sport, M Sport Pro and the exclusive BMW i5 M60 xDrive – the first customer deliveries are expected in October 2023.

The BMW 5 Series Saloon range will also be expanded in early 2024 with the introduction of the BMW 530e and BMW 550e xDrive plug-in hybrid models, which are expected to offer an electric range of 49-56 miles (WLTP) and 54-62 miles (WLTP) respectively. Also set to join the model family in spring 2024 is the next generation of the BMW 5 Series Touring, which will also be available with all-electric drive for the first time, as well as with plug-in hybrid drive and pure combustion engine drive. ●

The new BMW 5 Series Saloon is available to order now priced from £49,850.

Forward plan with our helpful

EVENTS DIARY



JULY

- 20** NEPIC Cluster Connect, MCE Group, Grenadier House Unit 2, Preston Farm Industrial Estate, TS18 3TB, 9am-11am
www.nepic.co.uk
- 20** FinTech North Newcastle Conference, The Common Room of Great North, Neville Hall, Westgate Road, Newcastle, NE11SE, 8am-5pm
www.fintechnorth.uk
- 20** Stockton MET, Hampton by Hilton, Church Road, Stockton-on-Tees, TS18 1TW, 4pm-5pm
www.stocktonbid.co.uk
- 26** Darlington Business Networking Breakfast, Online event, 9.30am-10.30am
www.networkb2b.co.uk

AUGUST

- 4** Durham Weekly Networking, Chester Le Street Cricket Club, Ropery Lane, Chester-le-Street, DH3 3PF, 7.30am-9am
www.networkb2b.co.uk
- 8** Newcastle Coffee & Coworking, Banyan Bar & Kitchen, 3 Monument Mall, Newcastle, NE1 7AL 10am-1pm
www.womensbusiness.club
- 15** Kraken Networking, Wearside Farm Dining and Carvery, 3 Turbine Way, Sunderland, SR5 3NZ, 9.30-11.30am
www.blueocto.co.uk
- 23** Property Deal Network Newcastle – Property Investor Meet Up, All Bar One Newcastle, 51 Grey Street, Newcastle, NE1 6EE, 7pm-10pm
www.propertydealnetwork.com

SEPTEMBER

- 8** North East England Chamber Lunch & Learn: What you Need to Know About Recruitment for Retention, online, 12.30pm-1.30pm
www.neechamber.co.uk
- 8** Rise and Design – How to Use AI in Your Business, Northern Design Centre, Abbots Way, Gateshead, NE8 3DF, 10am-12.30pm
www.designnetworknorth.org
- 11** Dedicated Small Business Conference, University of Sunderland, Sir Tom Cowie Campus, Sunderland, SR6 0DD, 9am-1pm
www.eventbrite.co.uk
- 19** City Ladies Networking September Meeting, Hilton Newcastle Gateshead NE1 1SE, 4.30pm-6pm
www.cityladiesnetworking.com
- 22** Female Founder UK – Nibbles, Natter and Networking, The Truffled Hogg, 28 College Square, Middlesbrough, TS9 5DN, noon-1.30pm
www.allevents.in

To have your event listed here, please email alison@bw-magazine.co.uk.

Please note, while we make every effort to ensure these listings are correct, we cannot be held responsible for changes or cancellations – always contact the venue beforehand to check.

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