

THEWeek

The Potteries

ROADS were jammed and cars were parked bumper to bumper around residential streets as thousands flocked to the Stoke-on-Trent show. Some visitors claimed they queued for up to an hour-and-a-half before abandoning their journey to the event at Trentham Leisure. The two-day show organised by Signal Radio drew crowds from across North Staffordshire despite the unpredictable weather.

DUPED pensioner Cyril Steele says his “faith in human kindness” has been restored after workmen started re-paving his drive for free. The 75-year-old was left penniless after rogue tradesmen tricked him into handing over his life savings of nearly £8,000. He was even bullied into taking out a £1,500 bank loan to cover the spiralling costs. Now paving specialist Paul Rezin, who runs Vision Paving in Trentham, has started work to fix Mr Steele's driveway and he is not charging the pensioner a penny.

Newcastle

TRADERS fear plans to relocate their market could lead to shoppers staying away from parts of a town centre. The proposal to move part of the 800-year-old market in Newcastle was first suggested last year when ambitious multi-million pound plans to revamp the town centre were unveiled. Under the facelift, proposed by urban design consultants Taylor Young, Hassell Street could become fully pedestrianised allowing the stalls from High Street south to fill the area leading from High Street to Castle Walk.

A SCHEME aimed at giving disabled people better access to town centres has been earmarked for Newcastle. The idea for a Shopmobility scheme, which would allow elderly and disabled shoppers to borrow scooters to enable them to get around the town, was aired following a critical report into the state of the town's bus station. A transport working party of borough councillors listed a catalogue of improvements which were needed at the station, including better cleaning, more timetable and transport information, and more shelter for waiting passengers.

The Moorlands

NEW life has been breathed into a stretch of river that was devastated by a slurry leak last year. Environment Agency officials have transferred thousands of fish, mainly bream and roach, from an overcrowded pool at Longton Park in Longton to the River Churnet at Consall Forge. Last July, thousands of fish were killed after farm slurry entered the river from its tributary Coombes Brook, following a suspected grudge attack at a Bradnop farm.

A GRANDMOTHER, arrested after protesting over plans to turn the house next door into a care home for troubled youngsters, has had the charges against her dropped. Former Werrington parish councillor Sheila Hill faced an harassment charge and had been bailed to appear before Stoke-on-Trent Magistrates. But she has been told there is no case to answer and the 58-year-old office worker has lodged a formal complaint about her arrest.

Mid Staffs

SWEDISH garage-rockers The Hives are one of five new acts confirmed for Staffordshire's biggest music festival. The five-piece — known for their trademark black and white suits, since releasing the hit album Your New Favourite Band in 2001 — will be playing the V Festival at Weston Park, near Stafford, on August 20 and 21. Headlining the festival bill are Oasis, the Chemical Brothers and Franz Ferdinand.

AMBULANCE officials in Staffordshire are facing a £1.6 million cash shortfall because of a dramatic increase in the number of patients treated at home instead of being taken to hospital. An annual report to trust bosses revealed that 16,038 more responses had been made to the service in the past year, with many being patients needing treatment on the spot or in their homes. With the ambulance service having to pay for such cases themselves rather than the local primary care trust the trust has been forced to increase its levels of activity to cope with the high levels of demand.

South Cheshire

A MOTHER has hit out at a councillor who covertly filmed her sons quad biking from behind a bush. Dawn Gater was dumbfounded when her eldest son Callum spotted a man secretly filming at the edge of a quad biking track in Nantwich. The mother-of-seven, from Newcastle, demanded he hand over the footage. The cameraman turned out to be David Brickhill — a member of Crewe and Nantwich Borough Council and Cheshire County Council. He told her that he believed the Quads Inn quad biking centre was operating illegally and that he was collecting evidence.

A PLANNED new £25 million sports complex has been selected as the venue for an international cricket tournament. Businesses and hotels will be hoping to see a major boost in trade when the Indoor Cricket World Cup comes to Middleswich. The British Indoor Cricket Association has announced plans to hold the Indoor Cricket World Cup in the town after learning of plans for the state-of-the-art £25 million sporting arena.

By David Alcock

A FARMER has taken flying the flag to new heights in honour of those who gave their lives for freedom.

Matthew Eardley scaled a 63ft sycamore tree at his family farm to fly the Union Jack to mark today's 60th anniversary of VE Day.

The 23-year-old, who lives near Norton-in-Hales, got the idea after climbing the tree to put a traffic cone on the top branches as a prank last year.

But he soon realised its potential as a local landmark which can be seen far and wide and decided to use it to fly flags.

He said: "I used to climb that tree when I was a lot younger and I just decided to play a joke and put the traffic cone up there.

"I then wanted to put up a flag of St George, so I used a metal shaft tied to a branch, so the flag could rest in it. The flag went ragged in the wind, so I just replaced it.

"Although it's quite high and gets very windy at the top of the tree, so it sways, it doesn't bother me much."

The St George flag was put up to mark the start of the Six Nations Rugby tournament in February.

Over Christmas Matthew put up a star at the top of the tree, wrapped in tin foil — which he discovered startled many motorists when it reflected the sun and dazzled them.

He replaced the St George's flag with the Union Jack yesterday morning.

It only takes him about four minutes to climb the tree, helped by his friend, Jack Tavernor.

The flag is the talk of the town and has become a landmark for villagers who want to direct visitors to their homes.

One passing motorist said: "I just tell people to look for the flag at the top of the tree and you're nearly there."

Matthew added: "My mum takes my 10-year-old sister, Sadie, to Edenhurst School, near Newcastle. While she was in the playground she got to talking about where we came from. People knew where we lived because they had seen the flag."



● Social climber: Matthew Eardley with the landmark sycamore tree from which he flies his flags

Picture by Alex Severn

Enough of change and closures, asset disposal and restructuring, let this pottery giant go-it-alone says former chairman

Freedom is the way forward for Wedgwood's prosperity

A HIGHLY respected former chairman of Wedgwood claims the pottery giant must be given more freedom to control its own destiny if its latest restructuring plans are to succeed.

Sir Arthur Bryan said the Barlaston operation had suffered as a result of frequent management changes and the sale and closure of factories to raise cash to support parent group Waterford Wedgwood.

Sir Arthur spent 40 years at the company and during his time as managing director and chairman saw the pottery giant grow from sales of just £3 million to £225 million and profits of £26 million.

His comments come after Waterford Wedgwood unveiled its latest £60 million structuring plan which will see more than 1,800 jobs cut, though Wedgwood's Barlaston operation has emerged largely unscathed.

Sir Arthur, who had remained an adviser to the senior management at Wedgwood until December 2003, said: "Since the Waterford takeover or merger in 1986, in which I was very much personally involved, I have seen four chairmen of Waterford Wedgwood and seven managing directors or chief executives of Wedgwood.

"I have seen innumerable overseas heads of respective companies and I've heard it all before. In non-financial language, it is always jam tomorrow."

The changes at the company, announced on Wednesday, are the latest in a series of restructuring exercises since 1997 which have cost £200 million and seen the loss of more than 2,000 jobs.

By Deputy Business Editor David Elks

Despite the investment and restructuring in recent years, sales of Wedgwood's ceramic products have continued to fall.

The latest available accounts for Josiah Wedgwood & Sons, which oversees manufacturing of goods sold in the UK, show it saw sales in the year to March 2004 fall by 11 per cent to £93 million — 20 per cent below turnover in the year 2000.

Sentinel Sunday reported last year how the company in 2002 had managed to whittle back overall stock levels to £28 million.

However, the slump in turnover has seen stocks now jump back to £40 million — the equivalent of five months' sales.

Sir Arthur added: "In addition to substantial and frequent changes in management, the workforce has been reduced from 10,000 down to 2,000, innumerable factories have been closed and sold with the resulting cash utilised in the business — but to no avail.

"In the period since the founding of Waterford Wedgwood I would estimate £110 million of Wedgwood assets have been disposed of."

In contrast, the Wedgwood business had previously thrived through two decades of acquisition prior to its takeover in 1986.

Sir Arthur took over the helm in 1963 and pushed sales from £3 million to £23 million a decade later.

By 1984, sales were up to £137.8 million and grew year-on-year in 1985 by seven



● Jam tomorrow: Sir Arthur Bryan

per cent, and four per cent in 1986 to £152 million — the year Waterford pushed through with its takeover of the firm.

Sir Arthur said: "The share price when I left was 120 pence. Now it's around five pence."

The former chairman would not be drawn on specific changes required to return the company and group back to profitability, but pointed to a new management structure introduced after Wedgwood's merger with Royal Doulton earlier this year.

David Sculley was appointed to take over as chairman, with Tony O'Reilly junior, the son of Waterford Wedgwood's Irish chairman Sir Anthony O'Reilly, to remain as chief executive.

Former Royal Doulton chief executive Wayne Nutbeen and finance director Geoff Martin have also been appointed to oversee the management of the acquired brands — Royal Doulton, Minton and Royal Albert.

Sir Anthony said: "I wait with interest the management changes to enable Wedgwood to reach the promised land highlighted in the most recent handouts.

"I await with interest who is going to do it? The man to do it should be in complete sympathy with the organisation and someone who wants to get hands on running the business."

Sir Arthur, who now no longer has a stake in Waterford Wedgwood, also supported the view that Wedgwood might now thrive if it was sold out of the larger group and left to forge its own future.

The possibility was explained by Bill Murray, incumbent president of the

West Midlands branch of the Institute of Management Accountants, who said the prospect of Wedgwood going it alone could now be "inevitable".

The former business lecturer at Staffordshire University drew a parallel with electronics giant Racal and its subsidiary Vodafone.

Racal set up Vodafone in 1983, which became a stand-alone operation and subsequently the third biggest company in the UK.

"It may be that Waterford Wedgwood is so desperate that it has to raise cash by selling assets and could sell Wedgwood as a separate company," said Mr Murray.

"In some ways there are similarities to the situation with Racal and Vodafone in that both companies had worked well together but no longer fitted. They split but have remained the best of friends. The same situation could work for Wedgwood."

He explained that a sale might only need to be a short or medium-term solution while the group's component parts were restructured, allowing both businesses more autonomous financial control.

Wedgwood management declined to comment on Sir Arthur's views. However, the firm's chief executive Mr O'Reilly dismissed Mr Murray's claims that Wedgwood could demerge from its parent group.

He said: "No, there is no intention at all. We are integral part of Waterford Wedgwood and form part of its past and its future."

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Better late than never as Bishop unveils his winning team

THE Bishop of Lichfield is pointing to a raft of community appointments as proof that the Anglican Church is working hard in the West Midlands.

The 2005 edition of the Lichfield Diocesan Directory is the first to be published for four years.

The Rt Revd Jonathan Gledhill, who appears in it for the first time, having been appointed Bishop of Lichfield in 2003, describes it as "a snapshot of a vibrant and active community of believers faithfully engaged in God's mission in this part of the Midlands".

In his preface, he says: "It's been a long time coming, but here

it is, the 2005 Lichfield Diocesan Directory.

"Inevitably, there are some changes from the previous edition. Some are cosmetic and affect only the design of the directory, but other changes are more significant.

"Firstly, there will be absentees. Names familiar throughout several decades of the directory will be missing as loyal and faithful clergy have either retired or died.

"But there will also be a significant number of new names. Some of these represent the next generation, taking on the roles that those before us have

developed and built up. But a comparison between the roles within this directory and the previous edition will show a change in the composition of our church leaders.

"As this directory will show, parishes throughout our diocese are benefiting from the care and support of growing numbers of non-stipendiary ministers, ordained local ministers, pastoral care ministers, prayer guides, parish trainers, outreach leaders and, of course, readers whose role is increasing in importance.

"Some parish names have changed as benefices are merged or combined; team ministries

have been formed and some clergy find themselves serving an increasing number of parishes.

"But there are also a number of new initiatives and new congregations. These include a new Urdu language congregation which is an integral part of St Matthew's Church in Walsall; a new complementary congregation reaching out to young adults in Stoke and Newcastle; and a community chaplain who is building a bridge between prisoners in HMP Shrewsbury and the local communities of north Staffordshire from where they came and to where they will return.

"We may be going through chal-

lenging times, but we are also going through hopeful times.

"Throughout my first year as bishop of this diocese I have been impressed by the quality and calibre of those involved in leading our churches; we have a good team here, and this directory is our team-sheet.

"This directory is more than a list of names and telephone numbers. It is a snapshot of a vibrant and active community of believers faithfully engaged in God's mission in this part of the Midlands.

"By all means use this directory to find contact information; but also use it to aid your prayer for

the people and ministers across the diocese. "

The 2005 Lichfield Diocesan Directory has more than 400 pages containing A-Z contact details for all clergy and licensed local ministers; contact details for all churches together with details of deanery, diocesan and general synod representatives, surrogates for marriage, rural deans, chaplains and sector ministers and a yellow pages of useful services to parishes.

It costs £9.00 and is available from The Methodist Bookshop, Gitana Street, Hanley, and Gateway Bookshop, St Mary's Mews in Stafford.