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Armstrong Watson

West Yorkshire steel company chosen as ‘the face of family business’



The managing director of a third generation steel company in Keighley has been selected as one of ten business leaders across the UK to feature in a project celebrating Britain’s flourishing family businesses.

Mark Sugden of structural steel business John W Laycock Ltd, which was incorporated in 1810, will be part of ‘Face Forward’, a collaboration between business and financial advisers Armstrong Watson, and award-winning portrait artist Helen Perkins that will see the ten selected ‘faces of family business’ immortalised on canvas for a forthcoming national exhibition.

Armstrong Watson which is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year and has a long heritage advising family businesses, invited Mark to be part of the project. The firm’s Carlisle-based business development director and strategic business adviser Dave Clarkson explains why.

“Having advised many historic family businesses over several generations, Armstrong Watson really understands what makes them tick and we pride ourselves on having helped to support their ongoing success.

“In our 150th anniversary year, we wanted to not only celebrate the longevity of these often unsung heroes, but also to get under the skin of those running some of these stalwarts of the UK economy. We hope that the portraits, whether of a grandparent, parent or a young family member, will provide a unique way of giving a flavour of the past, present and future of family businesses.”

Once completed, the portraiture exhibition will tour the region as part of Armstrong Watson’s anniversary celebrations.

Mark, who has already had two sittings, described the experience as ‘life changing’. He said: “Sitting for your portrait really gives time for reflection and can change your perspective. Taking a different view on life is very positive, bringing new energy into the business.

“We’ve worked with Armstrong Watson for at least two generations, going back to the 1930s. Not only have they consistently provided us with sound advice, but they also take an innovative approach to supporting family businesses. Whether this is by offering leadership courses to unlock potential, or with something like this portrait project which I believe will be very powerful and will give an insight into what makes some of Britain’s oldest businesses so special.”

Professional painter Helen Perkins, who was mentored by Yorkshire artist Sam Dalby, comments: “My aim is capture on canvas the unique characteristics of these business leaders which underpin their drive to make their businesses succeed.

“Successful business people tend to have faith in their decisions and allow themselves to make mistakes – I hope that these qualities come through in my paintings and connect ten individuals who all share a passion for the continuity of their family businesses.”

John W Laycock is able to trace its roots back to making nails in 1746 and, while the company continues to sell nails, it has expanded to supply a wide range of steel products such as girders and sheet steel, grinding wheels and a wide range of engineering supplies.

The business passed to the Sugden family early in the 20th century when the Laycock line ran out and the current managing director’s grandfather took over. It currently employs 14 staff and its vision is to become the experts in high quality steel supply.

Specialising in supporting, advising and protecting family businesses in the UK, Armstrong Watson's Yorkshire offices are in Leeds, Northallerton and Skipton, helping make it the largest independent accountancy and business advisory firm in the north of England and Scotland.