

► REAL ◀ ROCHDALE



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ISSUE 29



Greg Couzens

Real Rochdale

Address

St Clement's Vicarage
Willbutts Lane
Rochdale
OL11 5BE

Advertising

advertising@realrochdale.co.uk

Website

www.realrochdale.co.uk

Printing

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A warm welcome to Real Rochdale magazine

This summer edition is packed with interest and inspiration.

Rochdale Football Club gained promotion to the English Football League via a thrilling Wembley win. Along with the cover photo we have a six page Dale special feature. Plus a review of Rochdale AFC Women's season.

Julie Waller was named the Woman of Rochdale in recognition of her work leading Uniform For All, a volunteer run organisation she founded.

We have an interview with Dave Brereton, co-founder of IT support company MysonPages.

Did you know Rochdale has a person dedicated to helping production companies film in Rochdale? Louise Read at the Rochdale Film Office acts as a one-stop shop for production companies.

How many people work for one company for decades? Well here in Rochdale Joyce Smith has - 50 years at Marks & Spencer.

Also marking a 50 year anniversary are Marilyn and Michael who have been fostering since 1976.

Hayley Garner painted her largest Rochdale town centre mural yet on the side of the Regal Moon. Turn to pages 26 & 27 to see a photo of her incredible artistic skill.

Greg

JULIE WALLER WOMAN OF ROCHDALE

5



ROCHDALE AFC BACK IN THE EFL

20



- 06. DAVE BRERETON - MYSONPAGES
- 08. LOUISE READ
- 11. JANET EMSLEY SCULPTURE
- 12. ROCHDALE TOWN HALL - RIBA AWARDS
- 15. TOURCOING TWINNING ANNIVERSARY
- 16. THE CEDAR TREE
- 19. ROCHDALE AFC WOMEN
- 22. JIMMY MCNULTY - ROCHDALE AFC
- 24. ROCHDALE AFC CIVIC RECEPTION

- 26. MURAL BY AYLO
- 28. MUSIC STORIES CONCERT
- 32. HY CONVEYANCING
- 34. 50 YEARS OF FOSTERING
- 37. M&S BEST STORE AWARD
- 39. JOYCE SMITH - 50 YEARS AT M&S
- 40. ROCHDALE ROTARY CENTENARY
- 44. COUNCIL ACE STAFF AWARDS

FAB YOUTH ARTS FESTIVAL

30



ROCHDALE CULTURE AWARDS

42



COVER PHOTO

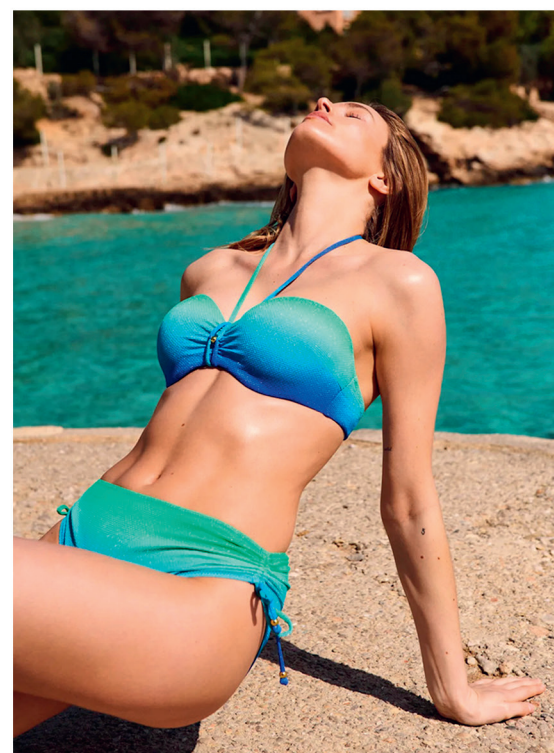


Ian Henderson and Ethan Ebanks-Landell lift the National League Promotion Final Trophy.

Photographer: Tony Lees

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JULIE WALLER - WOMAN OF ROCHDALE 2026

Julie received the Woman of Rochdale award in recognition of her work leading Uniform For All, a volunteer run organisation she founded during the Covid lockdown.

The initiative provides recycled school uniforms to families in the borough at no cost. Over the past year, more than 15,000 items have been distributed, supporting over 2,000 families and saving an estimated £225,000. The project has also prevented more than 3.3 tonnes of clothing from going to landfill.

Julie gives around 50 hours each week to the service, which now handles around 30 requests a day. Each item is washed, ironed and prepared before being passed on to families. She works closely with schools, health visitors, social workers and housing providers to ensure support is delivered discreetly.

Reflecting on the scale of demand, she said: "We helped over two thousand families in the last year. We know there is more. We know we can achieve more."

Julie also explained the environmental impact of the project, saying: "They are all recycled. We have saved over 3.3 tonnes of textile waste just in one year going to landfill. It is all free."

She encouraged others to get involved, adding: "If anyone would like to join us, you are most welcome."

The Woman of Rochdale award forms part of an annual fundraising event celebrating local women while raising money for Springhill Hospice.



Myson Pages.

DAVE BRERETON

**Dave Brereton is the co-founder and managing director
of Rochdale-based IT company MysonPages**

Born in Rochdale and brought up in Shawclough, Dave enjoyed maths and physics at school and went on to graduate from Newcastle University in 1991 with a degree in electrical engineering.

Having realised early he did not want a career as an engineer, he focused on emerging software and computing.

Three years later he had a radical change of direction and left his software career to run summer activity camps for kids in and around London.

It was during three years of running activity camps that he saw how to run and grow a business.

In 1997 he returned north working as an IT contractor and realised whilst working on a project that he could do so much better with his own company.

Dave co-founded MysonPages in 1999 and originally worked for big business as consultants, but soon their focus switched to SMEs.

Initially located on Drake Street, Rochdale, after a spell out of the borough the business relocated to Zen Internet's offices in Sandbrook House in 2021.

Dave said: "Covid was a time where the business community in Rochdale really came together and we took that as a time to move our helpdesk back to Rochdale from hiding over the hill in Saddleworth."

"Now based at Zen's HQ, our partner for connectivity, hosting, and telephony, we've made Rochdale our focus. So much so in Box Park at Wembley before the football club's visit [for the National League promotion final in May] it felt like a convention for our customers!"

Having focused on growth by concentration rather than expanding geographically, growth has been significant, turnover now exceeds £2.5million and MysonPages looks after around 200 companies as their IT partner.

Away from his business, Dave is a keen musician and also enjoys photography. He is a supporter of the foodbank, the Soup Kitchen and Springhill Hospice, all great organisations supporting Rochdale itself. In July, Dave and colleagues from MysonPages will be raising much needed funds for the hospice by walking the Rochdale Way. He is also passionate about supporting young people and developing future talent and is a governor of Hopwood Hall College.



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PUTTING ROCHDALE IN THE FRAME

LOUISE READ & THE RISE OF THE ROCHDALE FILM OFFICE

by Nikki Staley

When people in Rochdale spot a film crew setting up on a familiar street or see a recognisable building appear on screen, there's a growing sense that something exciting is happening in the borough. At the heart of that momentum is Louise Read, Film Office Manager at Rochdale Film Office, whose mission is simple: put Rochdale firmly on the map as a filming destination, and make sure local people benefit from it.

With more than 30 years' experience in the film and television industry, Louise brings serious credentials. Her work spans global blockbusters like the Harry Potter and James Bond franchises, as well as acclaimed TV series including Peaky Blinders, It's a Sin, and Coronation Street, but despite her international experience, her focus now is firmly local.

She said: "I wanted to be part of something that builds opportunity. Rochdale has so much character - historic buildings, landscapes, and communities - and the Film Office is about opening that up to the industry."

Louise's journey into film began in photography, working in London in fashion, music and media. That early career shaped her eye for detail and her ability to understand a director's vision - skills that now help her match productions with the perfect Rochdale location, whether that's a heritage mill, open moorland near the Pennines, or the grandeur of Rochdale Town Hall.

At the Rochdale Film Office, Louise acts as a one-stop shop for production companies. From sourcing locations and securing permits to managing logistics and liaising with residents, businesses, and organisations like TfGM and the police, she ensures filming runs smoothly from start to finish.

The impact goes far beyond the screen because the Film Office is embedded within the council and regeneration partners, it operates on a not-for-profit basis. That means fees generated from filming are re-invested back into Rochdale, supporting skills development, arts and culture, and wider economic growth.

For local people, that brings real opportunities. Residents can register their homes or businesses as potential filming locations, opening up new income streams. Young people can access pathways into the creative industries, gaining experience on real productions, something that can often feel out of reach.

"It's about breaking down barriers," Louise explained. "The industry can seem closed off, but it doesn't have to be. We want people in Rochdale to see it as something they can be part of."

There's also a growing sense of pride. Seeing Rochdale on screen, sometimes standing in for places across the world, shines a spotlight on the borough's unique identity. It challenges perceptions and helps tell new stories about the area.

For Louise, the role is more than professional, it's personal. Her mum worked in Rochdale for over 20 years as a nurse and community leader, and those memories have stayed with her.

"There's something special about Rochdale," she said. "People, community, character. Being able to contribute to that, and to bring something positive, means a lot."

As the cameras continue to roll, Rochdale is stepping confidently into the spotlight, not just as a backdrop, but as a place where creativity, opportunity and community come together.



Find out more at: rochdalefilloffice.co.uk

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JANET EMSLEY SCULPTURE

A bronze bust of Janet Emsley, which is on permanent display at Rochdale Town Hall, was created by artist Kara Lyons during Janet's year as Rochdale mayor

Janet was a teacher and director of performing arts at Wardle High School until her retirement in 2015. As a councillor she represented Littleborough Lakeside from May 2014 to May 2026, and was the mayor between May 2025 and May 2026. Janet was also a longstanding member of Arts Council England's North Area Council.

Kara, who is based at Ebor Studio in Littleborough, said: "Janet taught all three of my children, we go back a long way, so there was added pressure on this one to get it right!"

"She has worked tirelessly to support the arts and I hope this is a fitting tribute to her year as mayor too.

"I don't think we celebrate female civic leadership enough, and I'd like to see women represented in public spaces as much as men are. It's important that young women see female role models."

The sculpture was commissioned as part of the town's year as Greater Manchester Town of Culture and funded by Arts Council England.

Kara Lyons with Janet Emsley at the unveiling of the bust in March

ROCHDALE TOWN HALL WINS FOUR RIBA AWARDS



Rochdale Town Hall's once-in-a-generation restoration has achieved outstanding national and international recognition, securing a landmark series of awards that underline both the architectural excellence of the project and its transformative impact on the borough's regeneration ambitions.

At the RIBA North West Awards 2026 held in Manchester in May, Rochdale Town Hall achieved four awards, including:

- RIBA North West Award 2026
- RIBA North West Project Architect of the Year 2026
- RIBA North West Client of the Year 2026
- RIBA North West Conservation Award 2026

This clean sweep places Rochdale Town Hall among the most celebrated heritage-led regeneration projects in the UK.

Beyond RIBA, the restoration has been recognised in the built environment, heritage, planning and project management sectors. Major additional awards include:

- RICS Awards 2025 – Best Heritage Project in the UK.
- Civic Trust Awards 2026, including the Michael Middleton Special Award for Excellence in Conservation and a Civic Trust Conservation Award.
- Association for Project Management (APM) Awards 2025 – Social Project of the Year.
- RTPi Awards for Planning Excellence 2025 – North West Commendation for Heritage and Culture.
- European Heritage Awards / Europa Nostra Award 2026 .

A DEFINING MOMENT FOR THE BOROUGH'S REGENERATION

Together, these accolades confirm the restoration as one of the UK and Europe's leading examples of heritage-led regeneration, conservation excellence and inclusive placemaking.

The project is a cornerstone of Rochdale's wider town centre regeneration, reconnecting a Grade I-listed civic landmark with everyday public life while unlocking economic, cultural and social value.

The town hall now sits at the heart of a revitalised town centre, supporting cultural programming, tourism, business, skills development and civic pride.

The restoration was project managed by Rochdale Development Agency (RDA) on behalf of Rochdale Borough Council, guiding the complex £20m programme from inception to completion, coordinating partners, funding bodies and stakeholders to deliver the project on time and on budget.

Mark Robinson, Director of Economy, Rochdale Borough Council, said: "This exceptional level of recognition is a powerful endorsement of Rochdale's ambition and belief in the long-term value of regeneration led by heritage, culture and quality.

"Managing the restoration of Rochdale Town Hall on behalf of the council was a complex and demanding task, but one driven by a clear vision to return this extraordinary building to the people of Rochdale and use it as a catalyst for wider renewal.

"These awards show that Rochdale can deliver projects of national and international significance, and they reinforce the town hall's role as a symbol of confidence, pride and opportunity for the borough."

The success of Rochdale Town Hall demonstrates how strategic public-sector leadership, combined with expert conservation and community engagement, can drive meaningful regeneration setting a benchmark for towns and cities across the UK.

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GAMES, LAUGHTER AND LASTING FRIENDSHIPS ROCHDALE CELEBRATES 70 YEARS TWINNING WITH TOURCOING



There was plenty of friendly rivalry, laughter and celebration in Rochdale recently as the Friends of Tourcoing hosted 25 visitors from France to mark 70 years of twinning between the two towns.

The week got off to a fantastic start, and it was the much-anticipated 'Games Day' that really captured the spirit of the visit. French and English teams went head-to-head in a series of light-hearted competitions.

Mini golf at Puttstars proved a close contest, ending in a well-fought draw, with both sides showing impressive (and sometimes surprising) skill. In the boules competition, the English team beat the French at their own game of pétanque - a victory that was celebrated with plenty of cheers, good humour, and a little disbelief.

Guests enjoyed relaxed social time, a warm welcome at the Mayor's Parlour, and a guided tour of the town hall, with plenty of opportunities to catch up with old friends and make new ones.

The final night was a civic reception, an evening of food, music, and celebration. A display of memorabilia reminded everyone just how much history sits behind the twinning.

Beyond the activities and events, it was the atmosphere that made the visit so special - the laughter over meals, the conversations in two languages, and the genuine warmth between hosts and guests.



Rochdale's twinning with Tourcoing began 70 years ago in the aftermath of war, with the aim of building understanding and friendship between communities.

Nearly 60 years ago, local twinning associations were established to strengthen these ties, and thanks to the dedication of members on both sides, those connections remain as strong as ever.

This latest visit was a joyful reminder that twinning is not just about official links, but about people - opening homes, sharing cultures, and forming friendships that stand the test of time. Seventy years on, Rochdale and Tourcoing continue to prove that while competition can be fun, friendship is the real victory.

THE CEDAR TREE - 25 YEAR ANNIVERSARY



Tucked away in a beautiful hamlet in Newhey, Rochdale, The Cedar Tree is a true hidden gem that has quietly built a reputation for warm hospitality and outstanding food.

This year marks a milestone for owners Rachel and Andrew Garner, who are celebrating 25 years of running the popular bar and grill. A quarter of a century on, The Cedar Tree continues to thrive, thanks to the dedication of a team that clearly loves what they do.

Rachel said: "We genuinely have a wonderful, loyal customer base and I love my job."

Visitors are greeted by a warm and cosy setting that combines relaxed dining with traditional charm.

The menu includes freshly made favourites such as hearty homemade pies, gourmet burgers and steaks. There is also a range of vegetarian, vegan and gluten free options, ensuring everyone is catered for.

The Cedar Tree has also become a favourite destination for dog owners, with its outdoor 'drinking den' providing the ideal spot to relax on a sunny afternoon with friends, family and four-legged companions.

The venue has received Tripadvisor's Certificate of Excellence three times, reflecting the consistently positive experiences enjoyed by customers over the years.

The Cedar Tree is also a popular venue for celebrations and social occasions. Whole or part of the bar and grill can be hired for private parties, while regular live entertainment helps create a lively atmosphere throughout the year.

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ROCHDALE AFC WOMEN



The women's season in the North West Regional League (Division One Central) ended with Dale fifth in the table having accumulated 31 points from 18 games (10W), (1D) and (7L) as Lee Atkinson guided the team in his third year as manager.

At the start of the summer recruitment process, Atkinson brought in players from Radcliffe; Sophie Coates, Katie King, Erin Whyte, Hollie Burke, Phoebe Duckworth and Nicole Malpus.

Former player Ellie Jones returned to the club after a short spell at Oldham with Daisy Mason arriving from Chorley.

Leah Jackson added to the goalkeeping depth from Mancunian Unity and right-back Ellie Southworth came back to England from a spell in America to join Dale.

Dale opened the season with back-to-back games against Radcliffe, winning both.

A six-goal haul against Pilkington saw Dale reach top spot, but they were beaten the following midweek at Salford City.

The Crown Oil Arena hosted the first women's fixture in late August, with Sophie Coates already reaching ten goals scored for the season.

The FA Cup saw Dale overcome MSB Woolton but lose out to Accrington in the second qualifying round.

Defeat at St Helens spurred the team on to a 9-2 win over Wigan.

Progression in two separate cup competitions saw the league form stall, albeit a 6-0 win over MSB Woolton pushed them to three unbeaten.

Hannah Chloddek's nine goals, after arriving to offer support up front, helped Dale to end the season well, in fifth.

Player and Manager's Player of the Season Sophie Coates scored 37 goals in the season.

ROCHDALE AFC

PROMOTION FINAL WINNERS

Rochdale's triumph in the National League Promotion Final at Wembley Stadium, and hence winning promotion back into the English Football League, was the finale of an incredible, record-breaking, season.

Dale missed out on winning the league title and automatic promotion in a dramatic last game of the league season against York City at the Crown Oil Arena - York City scoring in the last minute to gain the point needed to win the title and promotion.

Dale therefore went into the play-offs and Scunthorpe beating Southend in an eliminator meant Dale played Scunthorpe in the semi-final. Dale won that game 2-1, and Boreham Wood beat Carlisle by the same score in the other semi-final, to set up Dale versus Boreham Wood in the final.

Boreham Wood scored the only goal of the first half before doubling their lead midway through the second half.

Two down, Dale had a mountain to climb but, with the same indomitable grit and determination the team had shown all season, climb that mountain they did.

Tyler Smith coming on as a substitute pulled a goal back before Dale top scorer Mani Dieseruvwe scored a late, late equaliser to take the game into extra time.

Neither team could find a goal in extra time and so to the drama of penalties, and 18-year-old Dale goalkeeper Ollie Whatmuff played a starring role.

Whatmuff superbly saved Boreham Wood's first and third penalties to put Dale in a commanding position as Sam Beckwith, Ed Francis and Callum Perry all scored for Dale.

Boreham Wood's Cameron Coxe needed to score to keep Boreham Wood in the shoot out but he hit the bar, and the Dale players and supporters went wild - Dale had won promotion back to the EFL after three years in the National League.



Ian Henderson holds the trophy aloft amidst the Dale player's celebrations

Ollie Whatmuff with the first of his two penalty saves



- - - BACK IN THE EFL - - -

JIMMY McNULTY - ROCHDALE AFC HEAD COACH

“THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS TEAM’S ACHIEVEMENTS IS IMMENSE”

Rochdale AFC head coach Jimmy McNulty has written himself into the club’s history by taking Dale back into the English Football League (EFL) after just three seasons in football management.

Jimmy joined Dale as a player from Bury in the summer of 2015 and went on to make 237 appearances in his playing days with the club.

He had two spells as Rochdale’s interim head coach before he was appointed head coach on a two-year contract in May 2023.

He led Dale to a top half finish in the National League in his first season and was rewarded with a new three-year contract in July 2024.

In his second season, Jimmy led Dale to the promotion play-offs but they were defeated by Southend in a play-off eliminator.

That defeat clearly served only to strengthen his resolve and during the summer closed season of 2025 he recruited new players and two new coaches in Jason Taylor and Matt Done.

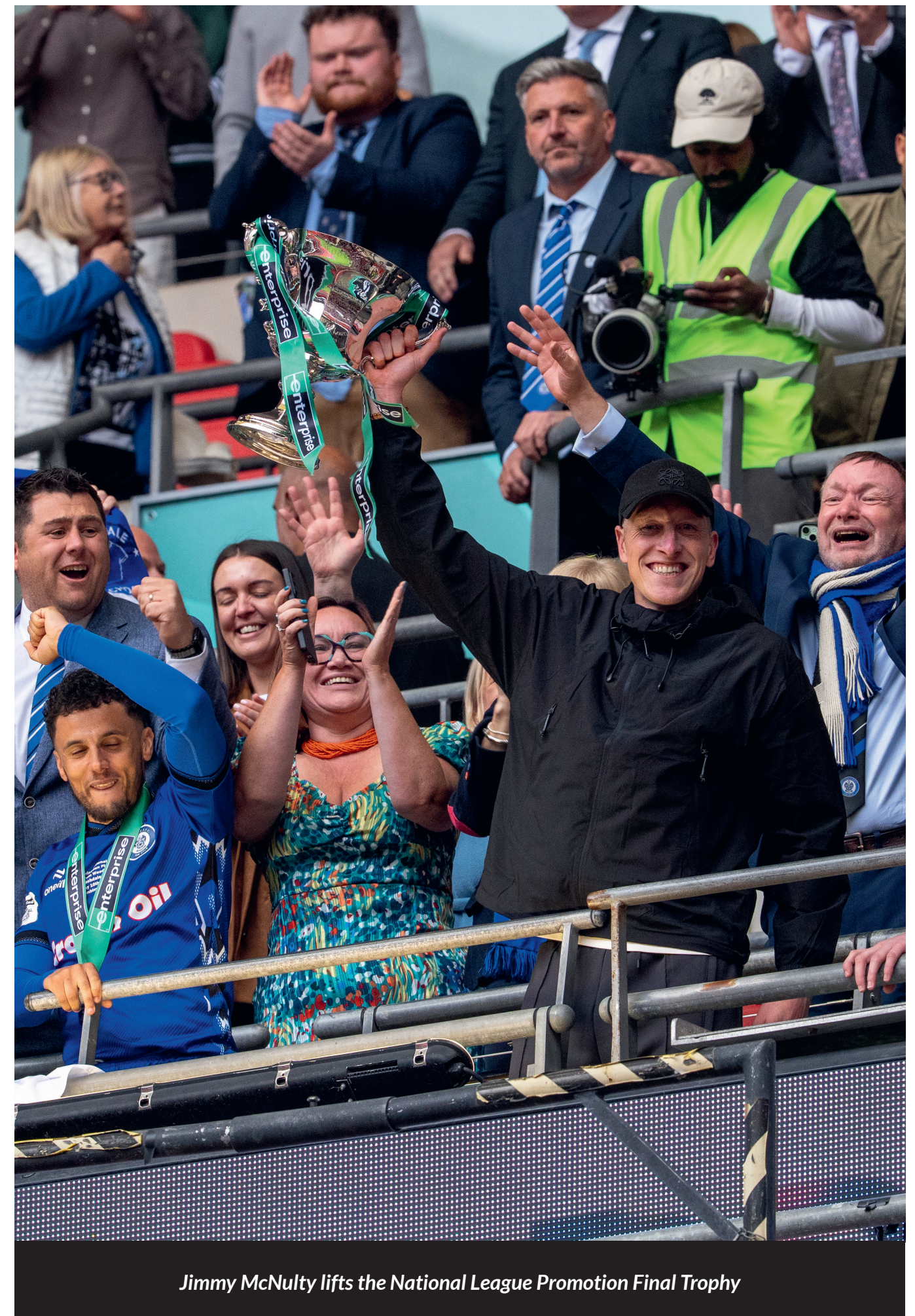
Dale enjoyed an incredible third season with Jimmy in charge as they won 33 games and amassed 106 points only to be pipped to the league title and automatic promotion at the very last by York City.

Beating Scunthorpe in a play-off semi-final led to a Wembley date against Boreham Wood in the final, which Dale won via a dramatic penalty shootout.

Asked how he feels about the Wembley win and of Dale getting back into the EFL, Jimmy said: “It was so special. I have pure pride to be part of this team that has returned the football club we love to the EFL, after what I must say is quite a short stay in the National League. Three years feels like three years too long, but to turn our fortunes around the way that this team has is amazing.

“The culmination of getting promoted, in our style, with the character this team has shown repeatedly to dig deep, is incredible. What we’ve done will live forever. To get out of the hardest league to get out of, with what we’ve done this season, it felt like some sort of footballing justice was done.

“The significance of this team’s achievements is immense, and I’ll be grateful for it forever.”



Jimmy McNulty lifts the National League Promotion Final Trophy

CIVIC RECEPTION

The Rochdale AFC promotion-winning team were honoured with a civic reception at Rochdale Town Hall



Ian Henderson & Ethan Ebanks-Landell at the civic reception



PUBLIC CELEBRATION

Thousands gathered in Rochdale Town Hall Square to celebrate with Rochdale AFC's promotion-winning team



Supporters at the celebration in Town Hall Square



Sam Beckwith, Harvey Gilmour, Dan Moss, Casey Pettit & Ryan East with the National League Promotion Final Trophy



Kyron Gordon lifts the National League Promotion Final Trophy



ROCHDALE MUSIC STORIES

SPECIAL ALBUM LAUNCH CONCERT



PoolEra



Micah Stalgic



Blvckout

As part of the Rochdale Music Stories project, 14 local artists reimagined classic tracks that were recorded at both Cargo and Suite 16 studios in Rochdale, for a new album on a limited-edition vinyl: 'Rochdale Music Stories presents: Kenion Street'.

K-Estate, Micah Stalgic, Desyfer & Emma Konnanov, From The Ground Up, PoolEra, Medley, P*Starr, Blvckout, The Velvet Shadow, and Leo HC; each performed their unique take on a recorded classic for a special one-off live show at Heywood Civic.

The event was compered by Inspiral Carpets legend Clint Boon, with appearances from Peter Hook (Joy Division, New Order), Vox (The Chameleons) and Martin Moscrop (A Certain Ratio).



Mural created on Yorkshire Street, with young artists mentored by Aylo and delivered by The Butterfly Effect



Carnival parade led by local performers from Global Grooves and the Nigeria Community Association

YOUNG TALENT SHINES AT ROCHDALE'S FAB YOUTH ARTS FESTIVAL

Rochdale's new youth arts festival took to the streets and venues across the town during the closing weekend for Rochdale's year as Greater Manchester Town of Culture 2025-26.

Created with young people for young people, FAB (which stands for freedom, art and belonging) attracted over 1,500 visitors.

There were tours of the town's murals and the unveiling of a new one on the side of the Regal Moon by mural artist Hayley Garner (aka Aylo). This epic creation was inspired by the views and aspirations of over 100 local children.

There was a lively carnival parade through the town centre, which drew big crowds, led by local performers from Global Grooves and the Nigeria Community Association.

M6 Theatre performed a captivating show for younger children called 'The Street Where I Live,' featuring Cyril the cat and his owner Granny Bradshaw.

There was an outdoor art exhibition at the Square Gallery in front of Rochdale Town Hall, featuring stunning work by art students from Hopwood Hall College.

A special edition of the Teenage Market was held inside Rochdale Town Hall.

New murals were created on Yorkshire Street, with young artists mentored by Aylo and delivered by The Butterfly Effect.

Number One Riverside hosted a Poems to Change the World Exhibition as well as poetry workshops hosted by the town's two young poets in residence Alende Amisi and Sasha Mostafa.

Rochdale Music Service played a wonderful mix of solo and group pieces with young musicians showcasing their musical energy and talent. They also hosted workshops, with visitors exploring their own talents, trying out instruments themselves.

There was a 'Good Shout - Youth Voices Across Art Forms' exhibition in the town centre, bringing together young creatives and professional artists from Ebor Studio, working in photography, music and textile art for a new interdisciplinary exhibition.

Films produced by local young people from PINC College and Touchstones Rochdale's Side by Side project were screened at the town's Reel Cinema.

There was also a performance of 'Ward 76' - a play by disabled artist Sam and his mother Shirley, inspired by Sam's own experience growing up in hospital. With humour, a touch of mystery and honest conversations it explored anxiety, disability, loneliness and the pressures of growing up.

Hopwood Hall College hosted a range of events and workshops including a student art exhibition and e-gaming event featuring retro consoles, virtual reality and formula one racing simulators. Budding young creatives were shown how movies are made during a hands-on film workshop and there was also an opportunity for young people to try out arts and crafts.

Skylight Circus Arts Youth Circus showcased their circus and aerial skills before inviting families to try juggling, diabolo and plate spinning.

Amaranthine by Company Chameleon was a striking dance performance staged at Number One Riverside that explored the story of two people in love, and also in conflict. The dancers navigated the push and pull of disagreement and the journey towards acceptance, with powerful moves.

For younger children there was a Heritage Scavenger Hunt around Broadfield Slopes at the back of the town hall.



Bringing a modern, people-first approach to moving home

Buying or selling a home is one of the biggest moments in a person's life – yet for many people, the legal process still feels slow, confusing and impersonal. HY Conveyancing was created to change that.

Built on the foundations of Rochdale-based legal group HY, this new residential conveyancing firm combines modern technology with genuine human support, offering clients a smoother and more transparent moving experience from start to finish.

Based at Sandbrook House on Sandbrook Park in Rochdale, HY Conveyancing is the latest venture from local entrepreneurs David Yazdi and Dean Hulse, and the wider HY Group, which also includes HY Solicitors and the nationally recognised HY Education Solicitors.

After more than a decade building specialist legal services with a strong focus on client experience, the team saw an opportunity to bring the same modern thinking to residential conveyancing.

“We wanted to create the opposite of the typical conveyancing experience” says David Yazdi. “A service that embraces technology and efficiency, but still feels proactive, personal, and supportive.”

Modern conveyancing with a personal touch

At the heart of HY Conveyancing is a simple philosophy: make moving home feel less stressful.

The firm uses modern systems and digital processes to simplify the conveyancing journey. Clients can obtain instant online quotes, complete onboarding digitally and communicate directly with the team via WhatsApp throughout their case. For clients who prefer a digital-first experience, the entire process can be managed from a smartphone.

While technology helps improve efficiency, HY Conveyancing believes great customer service remains just as important. Clients still benefit from direct communication, approachable support and a dedicated team focused on keeping transactions moving smoothly.

The result is a conveyancing service designed to feel clearer, faster and far more personal than the traditional experience.

Built on trusted legal foundations

Although HY Conveyancing is a new brand, it is built on established experience and infrastructure.

HY Solicitors has been authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority for more than 10 years and has developed a strong reputation across the region for its commercial legal work.

The wider HY Group also includes HY Education Solicitors, a specialist education law firm recognised in The Legal 500.

That existing experience has allowed HY Conveyancing to launch with robust systems, experienced legal professionals and a clear vision for the future.

The firm has also secured accreditation under the Law Society's Conveyancing Quality Scheme (CQS), demonstrating its commitment to high standards and best practice.

“We're not a start-up learning on the job,” says David. “We're an established regulated law firm expanding into residential conveyancing with experienced lawyers, modern thinking, and a demonstrable client-first philosophy.”

Proudly Rochdale

While the firm's ambitions are forward-thinking, its roots remain firmly local.

The HY businesses have grown from Rochdale into nationally recognised legal brands, but the team remain passionate about continuing to invest in the town and creating opportunities locally.

“Rochdale is part of our identity,” says David. “There's an incredible entrepreneurial spirit in Rochdale, and we're proud to be building modern businesses from the town alongside many other great local success stories.”

ROCHDALE COUPLE MARK 50 YEARS OF FOSTERING

Three hundred and thirty children and counting, meet the foster couple from Rochdale who have cared for children in the borough for more than half a century.

Seventy-eight year-old Michael and his wife Marilyn (74) from Milnrow have been kindly opening their home to newborn babies and siblings since 1976.

With the local authority calling for foster carers who could care for very young babies, straight away the pair knew another child would fit right into their loving home.

Marilyn vividly recalls the moment they received their first child.

“It was lovely to have another little one about, I loved it,” Marilyn said. “She was about two days old when she came to us, and we had her for two and a half months.

“I can still remember sitting in our living room, the night before she left us at the end of her placement, and crying thinking ‘What am I going to do without this baby?’

“So, it snowballed from there and now we probably care for four or five children a year.”

Michael jokingly recalls the sleepless nights and nighttime feeds but said how it ‘has become a part of their life’, with four hours of sleep fairly common for the retired pair.

In their early years as foster carers, Michael and Marilyn were still growing their own family too, with one child in their care only moving in with their adoptive parents just a month before Marilyn gave birth to their third child.

The pair went on to have five children of their own and are now grandparents to 13. The most children they have cared for at one time in their roles is five, including a number of siblings.

Keeping in touch with many of the children they have cared for over the years, the couple often receive a call out of the blue saying, ‘We’re coming to Rochdale, can we come and see you?’, which they love to hear.

“Some of them just want a cuddle from Marilyn,” said Michael.

“She’s like a mother to them; that’s the sort of stuff that can be missing in their lives.”

Michael mentioned some of the children have also brought their own children to visit too, as time has passed and they’ve started their own families as adults.

“We’ve been to weddings, adoption parties, christenings, eighteenth and twenty first birthday parties,” Marilyn added.

“It’s lovely when you think you started off with them as a baby and now they’ve grown.

“We’ve had letters from adoptive parents saying, ‘They’ve turned out like they have because of you’ which is nice.”

Reflecting on their time as foster carers, Michael added: “We feel privileged and proud.”



Marilyn and Michael at their home

Families who have gone on to care for the children they have supported, often share photographs with them too of the children on holiday or at school events such as World Book Day too.

When asked if they ever envisaged a time when they would stop fostering, Marilyn replied “I would really miss it.

“We’re fit and healthy, but you don’t know what is round the corner. I think we’ll know when we get that phone call one day and they say, ‘We’ve got a baby for you’ and we’ll know it’s our time.”

With three children currently in their care Michael added they would most likely begin to reduce the number of children they care for at one time, although they’re not at that stage just yet.

Celebrating their 50-year fostering anniversary, the couple, who have also been married for 55 years, received a mayoral recognition award in honour of their long-standing commitment to fostering and for being some of the UK’s longest serving foster carers.

Councillor Rachel Massey said: “Michael and Marilyn are an extraordinary example of the love, stability and care that foster carers bring into a child’s life.

“Their dedication over the last 50 years has transformed the futures of hundreds of local children and young people and they are living proof that what matters most is kindness, patience and the willingness to open your home and heart to a child who needs it.

“We are incredibly grateful for everything they have done for our borough’s children and for the inspiration they continue to provide to others.”

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ROCHDALE RIVERSIDE BEST STORE AWARDS WINNER 2026

M&S has been voted Best Store at Rochdale Riverside for the second year running.

Lewis Jeffs, store manager at M&S Rochdale Riverside, said: "We're absolutely thrilled to be named Best Store at Rochdale Riverside for the second-year running, and it's truly a testament to our wonderful team of colleagues who go above and beyond every day to give our customers the best possible shopping experience. We are very grateful to everyone who voted for us."

Visitors voted for their favourite stores, recognising the teams who go above and beyond with customer service, friendly faces and support for the local community.

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JOYCE SMITH

50 YEARS AT MARKS & SPENCER

For nearly 50 years, Joyce Smith has been a familiar and much loved face at Marks and Spencer in Rochdale.

Starting as a temporary Christmas worker in 1976, Joyce quickly became part of the fabric of the store and went on to serve as deputy supervisor for the next 25 years.

Now, half a century later, Joyce is still proudly serving customers with the same warmth and dedication that has made her so popular.

She has seen enormous changes in retail over the decades, but one thing, she says, has never changed - the people of Rochdale. "The people here are so lovely and friendly, they are like family," Joyce said with a smile.

Joyce was delighted to see Marks and Spencer open its new store at Riverside, describing the move as an important investment in the town and a sign of continued confidence in Rochdale. She said: "It is so good that the store moved into the Riverside development and stayed open supporting Rochdale."

Outside work, Joyce is a proud mother of two grown up sons and a grandmother to two grandchildren. Although she is now past retirement age, she has no plans to slow down any time soon. She said: "I still enjoy working in the store and being around people."

Colleagues and customers alike describe Joyce as kind, hardworking and endlessly positive, a true example of loyalty, community spirit and dedication.

After 50 remarkable years, she remains one of Rochdale's finest ambassadors for customer service and proof that it is people like Joyce who truly make this town special.



ROTARY ROCHDALE

A CENTURY OF SERVICE 1926 – 2026

Rotary Rochdale celebrates its 100th anniversary in October, marking a century of service to the people and charities of our town. Since 1926, the club has supported local communities while contributing to wider humanitarian work.

Part of a global organisation with over 1.2 million members in more than 200 countries, Rotary's work ranges from helping to eradicate polio and supporting disaster relief to funding local causes such as the Rochdale Children's Moorland Home and Teen Lives Matter.

The club first met at the Flying Horse in 1926 and quickly became active in the community, providing playground materials, footballs for unemployed young people, seaside trips for children and picnics for blind residents.

Today, Rotary Rochdale works alongside clubs in Middleton and Heywood to support the borough. It welcomes anyone who wants to contribute, whether as a member or by helping with events such as the Classic Car Show.



Neil Williams will begin his second term as president in July having previously been president in 2020/21

Over the years, many Rochdaliens have attended Rotary events, including the popular Senior Citizens' Balls at the town hall and a range of fundraising evenings. Events such as Arabian Nights, Carry On Capers and the Get Weaving Ball have raised thousands of pounds for local causes.

Supporting young people remains central to the club's work, from school awards and music competitions to the ongoing Youth Speaks programme.

Internationally, Rotary Rochdale has funded projects such as a sand dam in Kenya, supported ShelterBox disaster relief and contributed to the End Polio Now campaign. More recently, it has backed the Shoebox scheme and donated £12,250 to the Lend with Care initiative.

Centenary celebrations begin in July with the Classic Car Show on 19 July, followed by a Cricket Dinner on 2 October. A Charter Night on 22 October will mark 100 years since the club's original charter was signed.

A century on, Rotary Rochdale continues to bring people together to make a lasting difference at home and beyond.

www.rotaryrochdale.org



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- Because your loved one can enjoy all the same hobbies as usual, from gardening to Gin Rummy with friends.
- Because you can make the most of the time you spend with your family, rather than looking after them all the time.

Your home your life

ROCHDALE CULTURE AWARDS

Rochdale Culture Awards crowned its winners during a ceremony at Rochdale Town Hall, celebrating the individuals, creatives and organisations that make the borough shine.

Seven awards were handed out from 19 finalists at the event, staged during the closing weekend of Rochdale's year as Greater Manchester Town of Culture 2025-26.



*Hayley Garner
Creative of the Year*

The creative of the year award was collected by Hayley Garner (aka AYLO), a multi-disciplinary artist and curator of last year's popular Common Walls International Mural Festival.

Rochdale-born Hayley has brought bold, large-scale murals to Rochdale and Heywood.

Her work explores human connection, emotion and perspective, transforming public spaces through powerful visual storytelling.

Last month she mentored young artists as part of the FAB Youth Arts Festival.

Cultural event of the year was awarded to Darnhill Festival, organised by Cartwheel Arts alongside the Darnhill Festival Association and local partners.

Proudly community-led, this annual festival shines a light on creativity, resilience and humour, bringing families together through the arts.

Last year it attracted over 2,000 visitors and championed many more youth voices through its young producers' programme.

The event was praised for its bold carnival energy and a strong sense of belonging, building pride and tackling isolation.

Skylight Circus Arts collected the health and wellbeing award and the community award.

They provide circus workshops for all in the region, regardless of age, background or ability as well as live shows at events and festivals. Through classes, school sessions and community work they create inclusive spaces where people can build confidence, connect with others and improve their wellbeing.



*Darnhill Festival
Cultural Event of the Year*



*Skylight Circus Arts
Health and Wellbeing Award
& Community Award*



*South Asian Heritage Rochdale
Heritage Award*

Young Creative of The Year went to Rochdale indie-rock band PoolEra.

Known for melodic guitar sound and energetic shows, the band formed whilst at school in Milnrow. When they're not playing or recording, the band also mentor young producers, visit youth groups and have created opportunities for other emerging artists.

The Heritage Award was won by South Asian Heritage Rochdale.

In just two years, the community led platform has grown the South Asian Heritage Festival at Rochdale Town Hall into a large and joyful celebration of history, identity and lived experience, with music, dance, food, fashion and heritage from South Asia.

M6 Theatre Company, who produce and stage wonderfully imaginative shows for children and young people, won the cultural legacy award.

Special thanks were also given during the evening to Hebe Reilly, who recently stepped down as creative director and chief executive of Cartwheel Arts. She was praised for the enormous contribution she has made to the borough, including chairing Rochdale Borough Culture Network over the past four years.



*PoolEra
Young Creative of the Year*



*M6 Theatre Company
Cultural Legacy Award*

ROCHDALE COUNCIL ACE STAFF AWARDS

Outstanding achievement and service to residents by Rochdale Borough Council employees was recognised during the ACE Staff Awards held at Rochdale Town Hall.

Seven awards were presented to individuals and teams after around 200 staff were nominated for excellence, commitment and hard work.

The pioneering for change award, sponsored by A&T Surfacing, was won by the registration team. They were praised for the way they have transformed Rochdale Register Office, significantly improving services for residents.

The trading standards team, who have been tackling organised crime, won the proud to make a difference award, sponsored by Indurent. Their recent work clamping down on illegal ghost car number plates linked to criminal activity has been nationally recognised, and the team seized over 94,000 fake products over the last year as well as tackling illegal dog breeders across the borough.

The Number One Riverside reception team and the financial affairs team won the passionate about excellence award, sponsored by Willmott Dixon. They were praised for their dedication, compassion and resilience, supporting vulnerable residents during very challenging circumstances.



Employee of the Year Sarah Lageard (centre) with Lily Cooney from sponsor Cooney Civil Engineering (left) and interim chief executive of Rochdale Council Julie Murphy (right)



Young Employee of the Year Hateeb Jamil (centre), with Emma Lowe-Hewitt from sponsor Rochdale Training (left) and interim chief executive of Rochdale Council Julie Murphy (right)

Young employee of the year, sponsored by Rochdale Training, was townships support officer Hateeb Jamil. He is undertaking a customer service apprenticeship, having spent seven months in the work and skills team. Now having secured a permanent role Hateeb was described as 'going above and beyond, always eager to help and provide support for residents'.

Rochdale Youth Service won team of the year, sponsored by Metro Moneywise. They were recognised for their compassion, professionalism and commitment to safeguarding the borough's young people, whilst supporting the community and delivering youth work sessions in very challenging circumstances.

Employee of the year, sponsored by Cooney Civil Engineering, was Sarah Lageard. Her work in adult social care has transformed how services are shaped and delivered and she was credited with building inclusive empowering spaces where individuals feel safe to share their experiences and shape the future of care.

The final accolade of the evening was the outstanding contribution award, sponsored by Channel 3 Consulting. It was won by the culture and placemaking team at Rochdale Development Agency and Mark Roberts. The team led an extensive events programme during Rochdale's hugely successful year as Greater Manchester Town of Culture. Working with over 35 organisations, the team delivered over 100 events, attracting tens of thousands of visitors and making a significant economic impact. As lead communications officer for the year in the spotlight, Mark Roberts managed and delivered the year long marketing campaign for the programme of events and activities, amplifying Rochdale's reputation across the North-West as well as helping to attract record audiences.



The Number One Riverside reception team and the financial affairs team, winners of the passionate about excellence award, presented by Jaime Dawson from Willmott Dixon (left) and interim chief executive of Rochdale Council Julie Murphy (right)



The registration team, winners of the pioneering for change award with Luke O'Shaughnessy from A & T Surfacing (left) and interim chief executive of Rochdale Council Julie Murphy (second from left)



The culture and placemaking team with Mark Roberts (second left) winners of the outstanding contribution award, with Richard Heywood from sponsor Channel 3 Consulting (left) and interim chief executive of Rochdale Council Julie Murphy (right)



The youth service, with Ciara Davies from sponsor Metro Moneywise (right) and interim chief executive of Rochdale Council Julie Murphy (left)



The trading standards team with Robert Richardson from sponsor Indurent (third from left) and interim chief executive of Rochdale Council Julie Murphy (third from right)

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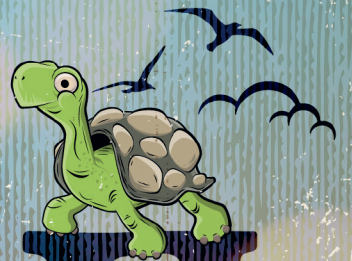
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