

# SPOTLIGHT

ON TONY ELLIS



Angela Wilkins shines a light on our very own Shawston squad via the Spotlight series, a series of informal chats with key members of staff talking candidly about their roles within the Shawston group and how they have developed. It's simple really, aim the light and watch them shine.

It's a mammoth day today. A day to remember. The first Covid-19 vaccination was given at 6.30am this morning providing a real ray of light over the global pandemic that has affected all of our lives so greatly over the past year. Inspired by this morning's events I am feeling uplifted and raring to go to speak to one of our longest standing employees, Tony Ellis. Having worked at Shawston for 40 years I'm excited to speak to our expert fabricator and one of the original members of Shawston from its

inception back in the 1970's I bet he's got a story or two.

## Background

Longstanding, amenable, experienced, expert, a shareholder, these are just a few words to describe Tony. Starting at Shawston when he was just 17 years old the place has changed quite a lot since Tony and 5 others started their Shawston journey back in the 70's, little did he know that 40 years down the line

Tony made  
and supplied  
products  
for The  
Grimethorpe  
Colliery in  
Yorkshire.

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his expertise would be a true asset in Shawston's armoury and his contribution and involvement in the business would add to the continuing success and development of Shawston over the years to come.

### Tony on Shawston

I started at Shawston when I was 17 years old, just after I'd left school. It was my 2nd job (my 1st job only lasted a couple of weeks) and at that point there were just 6 of us in a small workshop in the fabrication department. Out of those 6 people myself and my colleague [Andy Kendrick] are still here, we've had 3 different bosses, with Rob being our final and present boss, and wow we've witnessed so much change over the last 40 years.

My initial role was as a general fabricator but to be honest I've done a bit of everything over the years. When it was originally just the 6 of us it was all hands to the pump, we were delivering goods to customers, answering the phone, helping out in the warehouse as well as doing our day jobs. We all mucked in and did what we could to make the business function efficiently. But despite all of that I was and still am at my happiest when I'm fabricating. In the beginning we, in the fab shop, made everything from cleats to filbows, you name it, if it could be made then we made it, we bought very little back then.

As I gained more experience, I began to work on the bigger jobs that arrived in the fab shop. That's the great thing about Shawston, they trust you to do the job and you do, you crack on and do it to the best of your ability. Shawston have been very supportive to me over the last 40 years, and I've always enjoyed working here, I've always got on well with the people I have worked with and worked for. That's the point really, the grass isn't always greener on the other

side. I've had other job offers and opportunities elsewhere but if you're happy and you know the job why change? Yes, money is a factor but to be honest money isn't a big motivator for me. I mean it's nice to have a few quid don't get me wrong, but the culture around you is more important than money for me.

### Tony on Share Ownership

For me, my day-to-day job is the same, it's not been a massive change. I've always come in and got on with my job, that's how it's always been, so personally I don't feel any different. But I would say that being a shareholder focuses your mind a bit more on the job you're doing and what you're aiming for, I definitely feel more involved in the business than before I owned shares. Most people are aiming to go the extra mile to make the business more successful and that's certainly nice to see.

### Tony on Mentorship

Quite a few people have influenced me over my time. I started out as an apprentice, at that time you looked to the master to hone your skills, it's been good to reflect and realise that I have trained quite a few people over the last 40 years, you don't realise it at the time, but I have now become the master. That's a pretty good feeling.

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There is one person in particular that I find myself looking towards for help as and when I need it and that's Ray Clarke. We're a similar age and he's always willing to lend a hand if I need it. Ray is definitely the go to man in my eyes!

## Greatest Achievement

Doing 40 years! It's amazing when I think about it, the longevity of it, it only feels like yesterday when I first started. It's hard to pick one thing over 40 years, I've just been doing my job. Although it's always great to look at a job when you've finished and think to yourself "I've made that", I often say to my wife when we're out, say at B&Q, look up in the air, I made that. I think she's a bit sick of looking up in the air now when we go out!

One of the most memorable jobs I worked on was making and supplying products into The Grimethorpe Colliery in Yorkshire, they shut the site in 1992 and demolished it in 1994 but I will always remember that job. Plus, they made a film about The

Grimethorpe Colliery Band and its fight for survival after they closed the mine, it was called *Brassed Off*. Great film. It's great to think that I played a part in the mining process at that particular colliery when the mine was very much alive back in the late 80's early 90's.

## No Barriers

I manage my own workload. I'm left to my own devices to produce them and get them out. The jobs come into the fab shop from the office and me and the team prioritise them, well we try to, it can be difficult sometimes because you can have 2-3 people shouting for their jobs all at the same time. We tend to get them all out on time, it's a bit of a juggling act but we do.



More often than not, the 3 of us, we crack on and do the job, which is great, Shawston are very good at letting us manage it through. To be honest that's why I've been in the job for as long as I have because you can do the jobs that are needed when you want to do them. You've not got anyone breathing down your neck all the time. I think you work better like that. If someone is breathing down your neck all the time, trying to rush you then it's counter productive. Shawston trust you to do it and get on with it, we operate in a culture of trust and that's a massive bonus to working here.

### Tony on the future

Well, to be honest after 40 years' service my future plans are mainly based around my retirement, I'd like

to think I'll be able to retire in 3 years' time, but we'll see, situations change, don't they? Ideally in 3 years I hope to be touring around Europe in my caravan with my wife Karen. Now wouldn't that be something? ♦



Shawston has so many more amazing examples of meritocracy – sponsorship of MBA's, graduate development schemes, and a strong record for internal promotion to name just a few. And the common theme is that all these people made a choice – the choice to improve, to be better, to progress, and to shine. And that's the essence of Employee Ownership. We encourage a freedom of expression rarely seen in business, we push people to be better versions of themselves, and we give them the space to make choices.

So, if you're interested in a career with Shawston, make the choice to email us your cv and a covering letter to [hr@shawston.co.uk](mailto:hr@shawston.co.uk) or [visit our website](#) to read more about choosing to hop on board to a new career.