

Yearbook  
2010/2011





## A year to be proud of

2010 was a great year for Higgs & Sons. It was also my 31st year with the firm, certainly the most successful and memorable of my professional career.

We marked our 135th year by creating the largest legal office in the Black Country, with some of the very best office facilities in the region. Our team increased with the addition of 14 new lawyers and nine support staff and we achieved record financial results.

We now have premises at 3 Waterfront Business Park that reflect who we are, providing a top quality working environment. The move was one of the most significant property deals to take place in the Midlands in 2010.

Our achievements were recognised by our peers when we were short-listed finalists in the Birmingham Law Society Legal Awards for Law Firm of the Year and the Birmingham Post's Legal and Business Advisory Award.

Those successes were closely followed by us winning the Black Country Chamber of Commerce Professional Services Firm of the Year Award.

We have great lawyers offering a broad range of business and private legal services, taking a pride in the quality of their work whilst at the same time developing lasting relationships with clients and professional contacts – and having fun.

The partners of Higgs & Sons are all very proud of what the Higgs team has achieved in 2010. We are the viable alternative to city law firms.

We have created something special and we continue to grow from strength to strength.

**Ian Shovlin**  
Senior Partner

A photograph of three men in business suits standing in a factory. They are looking at each other and talking. In the background, there is a large orange robotic arm (KUKA) and other industrial machinery. The scene is brightly lit.

“The Higgs team is embedded within our organisation.”

Alan Shilton, Managing Director,  
Thompson Friction Welding

## Business solutions

Award-winning Thompson Friction Welding, based in Halesowen, is an example of successful and innovative engineering.

The British manufacturer of rotary and linear friction welding machines holds a Queen's Award for Enterprise: International Trade as well as a silver Boeing Performance Excellence Award.

Employing near on 100 staff and with a turnover of £20 million, the firm is a true leader in its field across the world, with over 2,000 robots in operation in the UK and over 100,000 globally.

Specialists from across our team work with the company, providing day to day support to the business from property

matters to corporate support and complex documents for international trade.

Alan Shilton, managing director of Thompson, believes that the company's relationship with Higgs is successful on two levels: “The fact that the Higgs team is local is a huge benefit for us. To have this amount of knowledge and expertise on our doorstep helps us move quickly, knowing we have the very best advice. Secondly, it's true to say, often the Higgs team knows what we need before we do! This understanding of our business and how we operate saves us time and money.”

# Growing team

As we continued to develop our specialist skills, 2010 saw the firm expand further, with several key additions.

Our dispute resolution team saw the biggest growth during the year with partner Tom Read joining us, together with Associate Carole Maddock and Laura Westwood, one of our trainees, qualifying.

Partner Damian Kelly moved to Higgs to join our employment team and our private client team, one of the largest in the region, was strengthened by two new solicitors, Victoria Knight and newly-qualified Sarah Darby, who trained with the firm. Oliver Ward-Jones was also retained upon qualification, joining our insolvency team.

The commercial property team continued to see improved levels of activity and appointed solicitors Philip Gray and Lisa Craddock. Responding to another busy year, our respected personal injury department has seen three new recruits – legal executive Laura Dyke, Jyoti Chohan and Mark Hammond.

At the turn of the year partner John Heaton joined our corporate team, which has continued to grow during the downturn and advises on many of the region's high profile deals.

Supporting our commitment to our people, we welcomed a new HR director, Joanna Parker who was The Lawyer Magazine's HR director of the year 2010.

“We want our firm to be known for its people – motivated and dedicated to the very best client service.”



Damian Kelly



Sarah Darby, Laura Dyke, Victoria Knight, Oliver Ward-Jones, Lisa Craddock, Tom Read, Carole Maddock and Laura Westwood



Joanna Parker



Our corporate team celebrates the Ashes victory which coincided with the arrival of John Heaton



“The team provides the very best technical support we could have.”

Melanie Chambers,  
Retail Employee Relations Manager,  
Marston's Inns and Taverns

## The right pedigree

Our relationship with Marston's Inns and Taverns stretches back over three decades, with our employment team, led by Tim Jones, working alongside Marston's own employee relations team on anything from contracts and policies, to day to day support and tribunals.

“We have circa 11,000 employees, so life can be very varied with managers requiring quick responses,” explains retail employee relations manager Melanie Chambers.

“We work with Higgs because Tim and his team are always there for us, no matter what time of day it is. Sometimes we just want clarification on an issue, or to get things straight in our own minds,

at other times we need some real solid technical advice. It's fair to say that Tim and the team understand the nature and culture of our business, which for us, makes life much simpler and provides a good working relationship.”

HR Officer, Emma Jones says that Marston's Inns & Taverns owns and operates over 500 directly managed retail pubs covering an extensive trading area throughout England and Wales.

“We look after the employment issues for a diverse range of businesses from country pubs to pubs with hotel accommodation as well as our 'new build programme' to name a few! Tim and his team provide exceptional advice and assistance on a daily basis.”

# New beginnings



What a difference 12 months makes! It almost seems like we have been in our new building for a decade, and not just one year.

The new facilities have enabled us to extend the range of our events and activities for clients and professional contacts. We have doubled our programme of seminars and training workshops and hosted events for organisations such as the Law Society, R3, the Association of Business Recovery Professionals, RICS and ACCA.

Our intention was to create a fully integrated service and an improved experience for our clients, and our front of house team, led by Helen Hill, has been extremely busy this year.

The adoption of cutting-edge technology was an integral part of the move and our new facilities boast a future-proof IT infrastructure. Our communications system enables us to interact more effectively with clients through improved call handling and enhanced voicemail services.

We have taken over 85,000 calls into our reception and welcomed almost 8,000 visitors to the Waterfront. We have held over 5,000 meetings and used over 15,000 teabags and 60 kilograms of coffee in those meetings.

Our front of house team has also adopted new technology, with the installation of our own onsite bottling plant which provides still and sparkling water. In 2010 we produced 7,735 litres for our visitors.



## Long-standing relationships

“We value the continuity of service. Higgs is a one-stop shop for our family and our business.”

David Nock, Managing Director, Deepdale Engineering

Looking after our clients and developing long-term relationships runs through the core of every team at Higgs & Sons.

Our objective is to work with our clients for the long term, providing the very best service for their changing personal and business requirements.

One such long-standing client is David Nock and his family, who run Deepdale Engineering in Dudley, for whom we have been providing legal support for thirty years.

Peter Gosling, head of our private client department,

has worked with the Nock family for many years, providing ongoing advice for succeeding generations of the whole family.

David Nock said of the relationship with Higgs: “As a family-run business, we appreciate working with like-minded people who are, as we are, also very people-focused. We know that Peter is only a phone call away. He and his team provide practical advice to the family and the company and can always be relied upon to support us, whatever our concern.”

# Sharing expertise

Several members of our team were recognised by their peers during 2010. Philip Barnsley, our head of family, was elected as the new chairman of the West Midlands group of Resolution, the body which promotes a non-confrontational and constructive approach to resolving family disputes.

Philip has been actively involved with Resolution, which represents almost 250 family lawyers in the West Midlands, since 2008.

"Resolution plays a central role both locally and nationally in promoting the benefits of taking a positive approach to resolving family disputes, as well as campaigning for improvements to family law," said Philip.

Clare Langford, an associate in the firm and one of the region's leading clinical negligence specialist solicitors, was appointed to the Law Society's Clinical Negligence Panel.

Clare is only one of a small number of clinical negligence lawyers to obtain panel status. Her appointment recognises her achievements within clinical negligence law which includes dealing with claims involving injuries of maximum severity and fatal cases.

Speaking of her achievement, Clare said: "The appointment means that I can now take on the role of clinical negligence supervisor, enabling Higgs & Sons to offer clients public funding through the Legal Services Commission in appropriate cases."

Lawyers from our highly regarded private client team are also celebrating following their success in recent examinations to join a global professional organisation.

Associate Sarah Cairns and solicitor Nick Bennett have both passed their final examinations to become full members of The Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners (STEP).

STEP is the professional body for the trust and estate profession across the world, providing members with a local, national and international learning and business network. Twenty of our team are now full members of STEP, demonstrating our commitment to the highest levels of technical ability.

"Higgs has a proud history of supporting professional organisations like Resolution."

Philip Barnsley, Partner and Chairman of the West Midlands group of Resolution



A photograph of three people in a jewelry store. On the left, a man in a dark pinstriped suit and purple tie stands with his hands on his hips, looking towards the center. In the middle, a woman with long red hair, wearing a black blazer, is laughing and looking towards the man on the left. On the right, a woman with blonde hair, wearing a dark suit and a light blue striped shirt, is looking towards the woman in the middle. They are standing in front of a glass display case containing jewelry. In the background, there is a wall with the 'Thomas Sabo' logo and several gold jewelry pieces hanging from the ceiling, including a large robot pendant and several shark-shaped pendants. A sign for 'PANDORA' is visible on the left wall.

“We are impressed by the level of expertise available to us in so many areas.”

Alan Higgs, Chairman,  
TH Baker

## Sparkling performance

When one of our longest standing clients approached us in 2010, a very modern solution was called upon from our dispute resolution team. TH Baker has been a Higgs client for decades. Founded by Thomas Henry Baker in 1888, TH Baker is still owned by the same family today, with 16 retail shops and two online stores – The Watch Hut and The Jewel Hut. In the last year, TH Baker has continued to grow significantly, with our commercial property team assisting in the expansion of its operation in the Midlands. We have also been able to provide specialist franchising advice to assist the development of the business.

Julia Lowe, head of our dispute resolution team explains why the company turned to her team for support: “TH Baker were having problems with their website constantly slowing down and crashing. Each time the users had to be removed from the site and the server

rebooted. This was resulting in severely reduced sales. “After checking activity on the site our client identified an automated program which was crawling the site extracting information. Whilst this is not in itself illegal the damage to our client’s business potentially was.”

We used the Computer Misuse Act to issue a claim to stop the activity and were successful in obtaining an interim injunction. This is a ground breaking case on an issue not previously reported in the English courts. The case is due to progress to a final hearing.

Alan Higgs is the chairman of TH Baker. He said of the case: “We have worked with Higgs for as long as anyone can remember. This was a very new technology problem, which the firm has tackled on our behalf, ensuring we can continue to successfully trade both traditionally and online.”

# Giving wings

Our chosen charity for 2010 was WINGS – Wombourne Special Needs Support Group. We are very proud of all our staff and their families for helping us raise over £10,000 for this very special cause.

WINGS provides social opportunities for disabled children and their families, running a wide range of evening, weekend and holiday activities.

During our year, we held several fund raising events including a quiz and a bike ride (on exercise bikes) from Brierley Hill to Paris, with our staff taking on partners.

The race had a classic photo-finish, with our staff just crossing the finish line before partners.

Rita Tonks, spokesperson for WINGS, said: "We're absolutely delighted with the donation, and I would like to thank Higgs & Sons for all their hard work in raising this money.

"We provide those with special needs with a social group through activities based around drama, music, art and physical exercise – so these funds are vital to allow us to sustain our range of schemes and activities."



"We take the responsibility of supporting our local community very seriously."

Ian Shovlin, Senior Partner



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