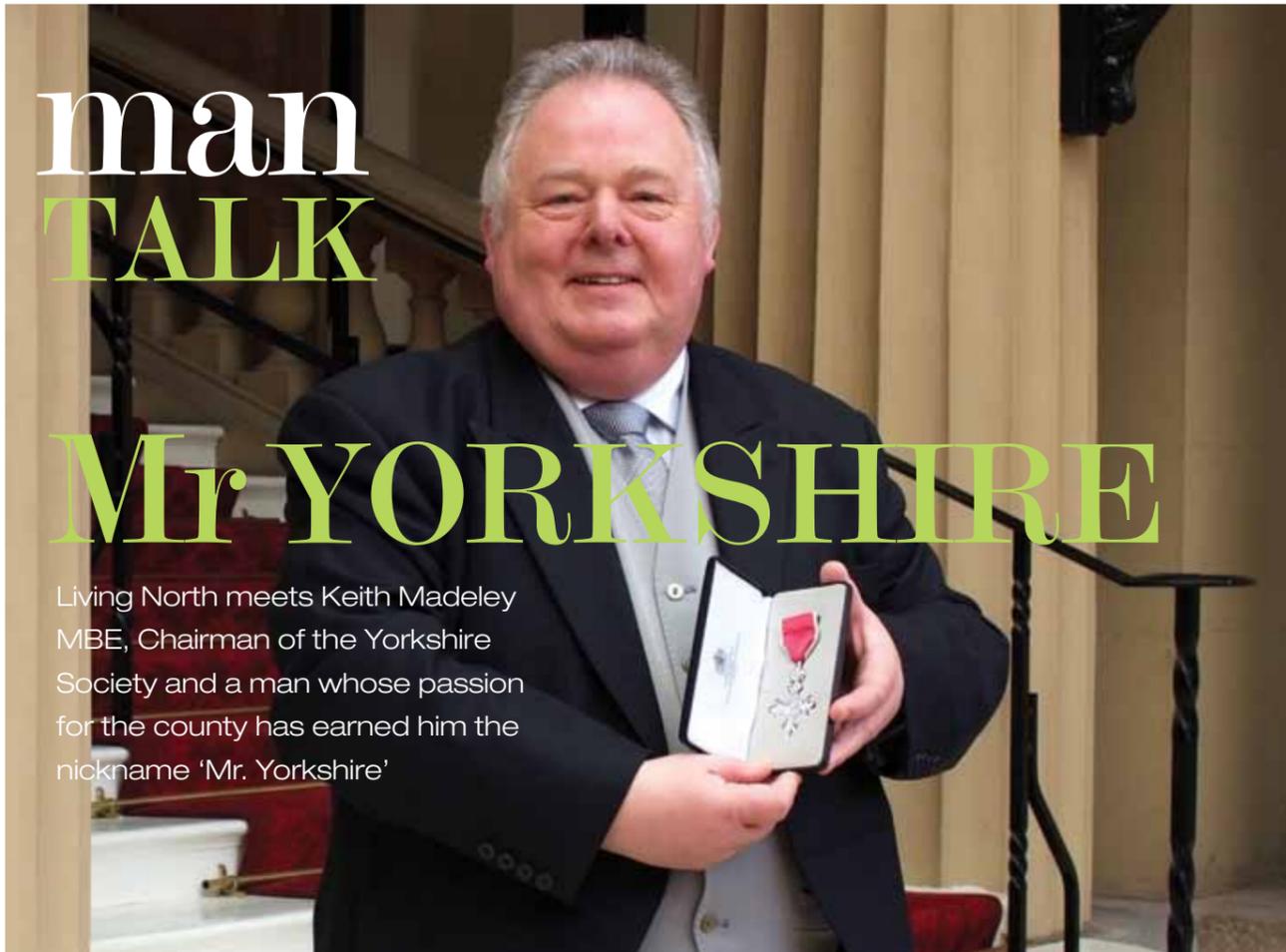


# man TALK

## Mr YORKSHIRE

Living North meets Keith Madeley MBE, Chairman of the Yorkshire Society and a man whose passion for the county has earned him the nickname 'Mr. Yorkshire'



**L**istening to the enthusiasm with which Keith Madeley talks about Yorkshire, it's ironic to think that his first love actually took him away from the county during the early part of his career. A self-confessed trainspotter, Keith was organising trips to engine sheds around Britain from the age of 14 after becoming President of his school's Rail Society. He was clearly destined to join the railway when he left school and did just that, passing his exams for entry into British Rail and beginning working life as a Clerk at Bradford Forster Square station. Two years on, however, ambition got the better of him. 'I was somewhat impatient and realised that the only way to get promotion on the railways in those days was to go to London.' Keith's dedication and work ethic saw him advance his qualifications and secure a move away from Yorkshire at 18 to work as a Clerk in a marshaling yard in the south east. 'A year later I was transferred to a place called Bricklayers' Arms, a massive goods depot in south east London, just off the Old Kent Road. In Bradford I'd have been lucky to secure an equivalent role by the time I was 40 so I was obviously enjoying the success of the southern region.'

It was here Keith decided he wanted to become a Station Manager and, having already passed the relevant exams in Yorkshire, now needed to get some experience under his belt. His chance came aged just 20 when Head Office offered him the opportunity to spend some time shadowing a Senior Officer who put Keith through his paces and signed him off as capable of running a station of his own. 'All my contemporaries in those days said to me, "You'll have to be patient now, you'll be lucky to get a manager's job before you're 25."' Undeterred, Keith

began applying for vacant Station Manager roles and on the second interview he was amazed to discover that the Chairman of the interview panel was a Mr Rodgers, the same Mr Rodgers who'd interviewed him when he first moved down to London from Yorkshire. 'Usually they'd give you a decision in writing within seven days but at the end of the interview Mr Rodgers said to me, "Keith, we're going to make history here, we're going to appoint you to this job, you'll be the youngest Station Manager ever, and you won't let me down, will you?"'

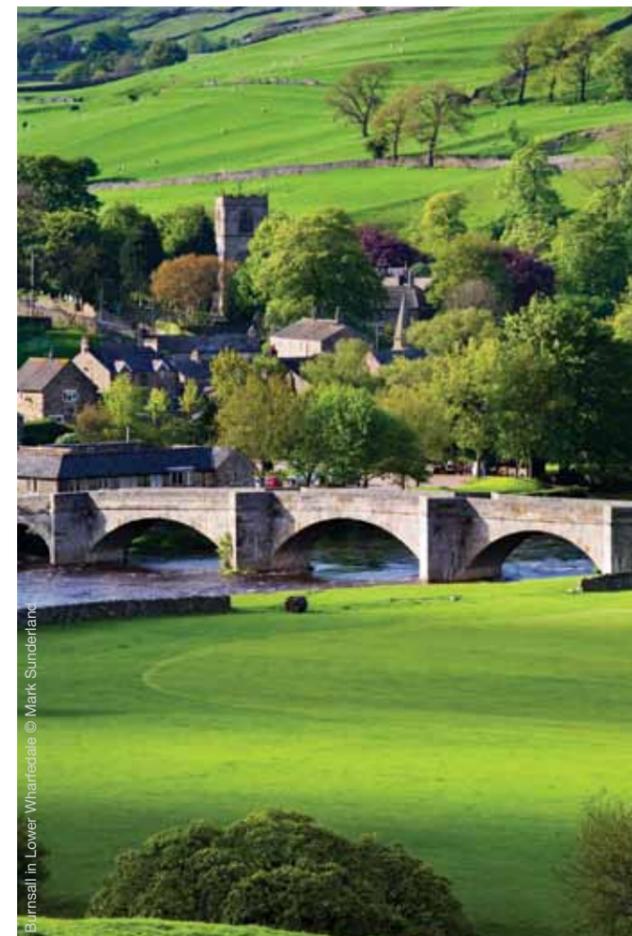
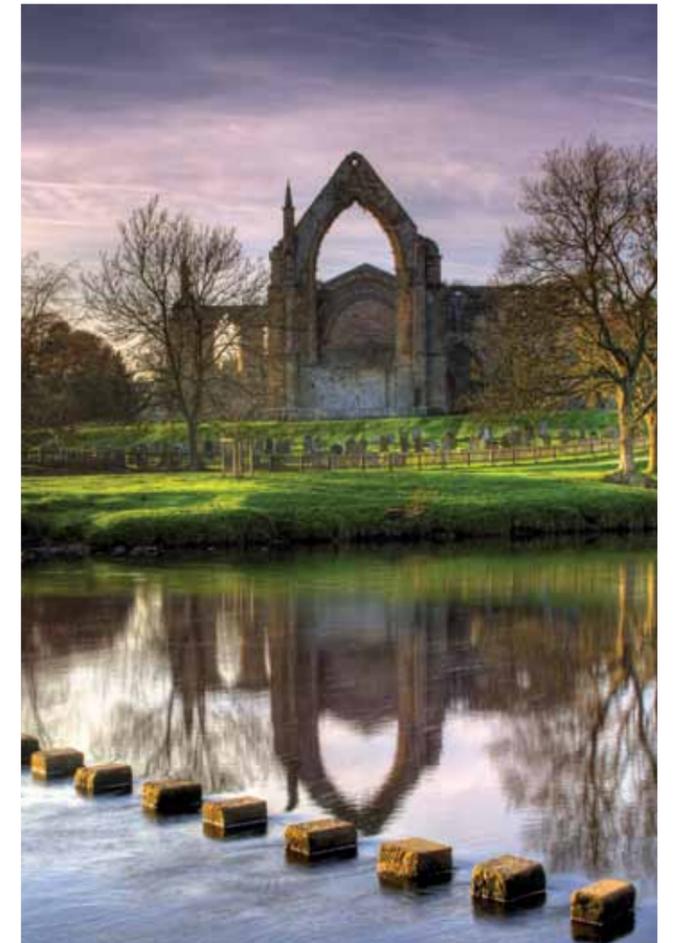
At just 21 Keith was appointed to run three stations in South East London, which he did for two years before developing itchy feet yet again. Applying for two or three roles, he secured another promotion to Assistant Station Manager at Orpington, Kent, a massive commuter junction with 26 trains heading into the city between 7am and 9am. A trainspotter's dream you'd think, but not for Keith who, despite making rapid progress up the British Rail ladder, had become disillusioned with the industry due to the militant attitude of the engine drivers' union during of the 70s. 'They would cancel trains at the drop of a hat and as a passionate railwayman, I was sickened that passengers were being delayed and there wasn't a lot you could do about it. I just thought "Do I want to do this for another 40 years? No, I don't." So I decided to leave the railway and move back to Bradford, hoping what I'd achieved in nine years on the railway would stand me in good stead.'

By now Keith had a young family and was acutely aware he was taking a big risk, but returned to Yorkshire with a promise from his manager in London that he was only a phonecall away from a return to work on the railway. 'That was a really good insurance policy but one - touch wood - I didn't ever need to take up.' Luckily Keith was offered a number of positions in Yorkshire but the one he settled on was a big departure from his previous job at British Rail; Public Relations Manager with

a fast growing software company in Bradford. Software was a relatively unknown commodity amongst most people in the 70s, Keith included, but that didn't stop him progressing in a manner similar to the rise he enjoyed at British Rail. 'I didn't know anything about computer software but what I did know about was dealing with people.' In three years he'd become General Manager of the company and added a servicing garage and construction company to the business's portfolio, but his nomadic career was set for another stop-off.

'I learnt a lot from the Chairman and the Managing Director while I was there but in the meantime had met a friend of the family who had just set up as an insurance broker. The company became a client of ours and two years into that relationship I just said to him "How do you feel about the two of us going into business and setting up a financial services company?" He was absolutely delighted - he had been wondering whether he could ask me the same thing.' Keith jointly set up Manor Financial Management Ltd in 1976 and sold it to Yorkshire Investment Group in 2004. He found that his PR background paid dividends while establishing Manor Financial Management, 'businesses in the financial services sector in those days were quite reluctant to engage with the media but I was quite happy to do that on the basis that if the media get to know you well, they will take notice. We were very fortunate, we got lots of positive PR coverage for various things we did and became known as innovators in that sense.'

In the late 70s the top rate of tax in the UK had reached 98 percent so Keith launched an innovative product that allowed people to invest their money and keep it protected from these astronomical tax rates. This was in 1978 and was the first ever building society investment bond - a brand new product for



the industry at the time.' Other moves that earned the company its label as 'innovators' included a link they established in Luxembourg during the early 90s which enabled companies or individuals in any European state to invest in another country within the union, if the tax position was better. By 2004, with Keith's business partner looking to retire, both agreed it was a good time to sell the business they'd spent almost 30 years building. This move signaled a new chapter for Keith and he found a whole host of new opportunities opened up for him to promote his beloved Yorkshire.

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Keith was by now chairman of the Yorkshire Society, an organisation established in 1980 with the aim of simply promoting the county and all that's good about it. The society sponsor Yorkshire Day on 1st August each year and one of the first initiatives Keith introduced, when he took over as Chairman in 2002, was to get behind traditional Yorkshire industries. He went as far as commissioning the design of a special fabric featuring the word 'Yorkshire' subtly interwoven into the pinstripe so people could wear the name with pride. Keith has had several 'Yorkshire' suits made from this unique material and reveals during our interview that, quite by chance ahead of a dinner he is speaking at that evening, he's actually wearing one while he chats with Living North about his career and

passion for Yorkshire. 'Both my mother and father were employed in the textile industry while I grew up so I'm used to the noise and the smell of the wool – it's in my blood. I must admit my wife initially said "Oh, for goodness sake, you'll look like a stick of rock wearing that!" But when she saw it, she said "Oh, it looks absolutely beautiful". We might be somewhere like the theatre and if I'm wearing it I normally get a tap on the back, and I'll turn round and someone says "I've just read your suit!"' Another person who has invested in this patriotic fabric is Rosie Winterton MP for Doncaster Central, and Keith takes delight in spotting her on television wearing the suit in the House of Commons. I say to her, "That's one thing you can do that I can't, Rosie. You can take that suit right into the heart of the British Parliament!"

**'I've said this for quite a while; to me Yorkshire is a country in a county. Within Yorkshire people are very determined, hardheaded and straight'**

Since selling Manor Financial Management Ltd, Keith has been focused on helping publicise Yorkshire and does so in many different ways. Listening to him describe the different initiatives, projects, organisations, boards and committees that he is involved with – many on a voluntary basis – brings home just how committed he is to promoting the area and helping others. Keith's roles include chairing Yorkshire Business in the Arts, an organisation linking businesses with arts and culture charities. Keith works tirelessly in what he calls the not for profit 'third sector' and his list of achievements include bringing together what was once known as Excellence Yorkshire in 2007 to form North of England Excellence. 'Each region had their own excellence organisation which strived to enhance businesses by adhering to strict standards. Excellence Yorkshire was struggling so I helped merge it with the North West and North East in 2008 to form North of England Excellence which has continued to grow from that point – I sit on the board there.' The Prince's Trust is another organisation that has benefited from Keith's expertise and commitment; he was Regional Chairman for three years before stepping down this summer to concentrate on the endless list of other people and organisations he helps.

Away from business Keith chairs an Academy sponsored by the Church of England, a role the then Archdeacon of Leeds approached him to take up four years ago. 'My initial comment was "Well, I've not really done a lot in education," but the Archdeacon said "We don't want educationalists, we've got plenty of those on the board; we want someone with business experience to make sure this runs properly."' Keith tells me that the Academy, which is based in an area of Leeds that struggles with poverty, has raised its GCSE pass rate of five A-Cs from 30 percent to 90 percent in just five years. 'We've had young people leaving and going on to university which was almost unheard of in that area, so we're very pleased. Now we're looking at applying the principles we use to other schools in the area.'

Keith has always enjoyed working with young people, something he puts down to being given so many opportunities himself as a young man, 'I want to pass that on to the younger generation today.' One way in which he does this is via his role as President of the Children's International Summer Villages, 'It's been going for over 40 years in Yorkshire and is a wonderful agenda for young people.' Aimed at young teens, the Children's International Summer Villages encourages international friendships by bringing together children from all four corners of the globe to a summer camp to live for 28 days. 'I think it's fantastic to see young people who sometimes can't even speak each others' languages bonding and forming lifetime friendships.'

Working tirelessly across Yorkshire with fantastic initiatives like the Children's International Summer Villages is what has earned Keith the nickname Mr Yorkshire, though he insists it's not a self-styled moniker. 'It was given to me by a colleague in a web design company I was working with at the time. He mentioned he'd actually got the domain name for me, [www.mryorkshire.com](http://www.mryorkshire.com), and my initial reaction was "Oh dear, that might get a few people's backs up," but we ran with it because it gave me a platform to promote Yorkshire in my own way.' Another title Keith's work has earned him is the MBE he was awarded in 2011, an honour he was quick to acknowledge he could not have achieved on his own. 'These honours, whilst they are allocated to an individual, can only be achieved by working with a team of people. To me, the fact I got the MBE reflected the help I'd received from the organisations I'd represented.'

Keith recalls the whole experience with pride, from receiving the letter confirming the award to being presented with it by the Princess Royal at Buckingham Palace. 'It was an incredible feeling. We'd been away for the weekend with some friends and when we returned my wife handed me the post. "That one looks interesting," she said; I was talking when I opened it and I read the first sentence and realised. "What is it?" my wife asked and I showed her, we were just absolutely gobsmacked. To read the words "The Prime Minister is recommending to Her Majesty the Queen that you be considered for Membership of the British Empire" – wow.' Keith was humbled to meet various people on the big day who, like him, had done some incredible things. 'To actually go down to Buckingham Palace and receive it, you meet some wonderful people, it makes you feel very humble because people do all sorts of things that merit getting this award. The Princess Royal was absolutely amazing, I'd met her before but everybody got about a minute with her which was quite incredible as there were about 90 people receiving various honours that day. She was well briefed and the first thing she said to me was "Now, Mr Madeley, how's things in Yorkshire?" I was most impressed.'

As a proud Yorkshireman Keith was extraordinarily pleased to watch the achievements of British athletes from Yorkshire at the Olympic Games this summer and was even quizzed live on Sky Sports as to why it might be that Yorkshire athletes alone outperformed entire countries. 'I've said this for quite a while; to me Yorkshire is a country in a county. Within Yorkshire people are very determined, hardheaded and straight – we always chuckle but it's right – you know where you are with Yorkshire people, they say what they mean. The Sky Sports interview was done against the backdrop of the Cow and Calf rocks, just outside Ilkley, and when you look at the rugged terrain and beautiful landscape, and think about people like the Brownlee boys, it must be inspirational to train there, surrounded by the scenery, the hills and dales of Yorkshire.' Keith lives with his wife Chris on the edge of Wharfedale, six miles from Leeds, and cites the Bolton Abbey and Burnsall area as two of his favourite places in Yorkshire to walk the dog. 'Recently we went to Hunmanby Gap near Filey, you can walk your dog on the beach there at any time of the year. It's a fantastic coastline, you stand on the beach, look back, look left and look right and there's beautiful, sandy beaches everywhere – I think we're just so blessed in Yorkshire.'

It would probably take up an entire issue of Living North to document all of the work Keith Madeley does to promote the Yorkshire brand, something he is keen to help maintain going forward. 'My concern is, if we fragment and go off as different parts of the county, we lose some of the power of that brand. I think that's been totally proven by what's happened at the Olympics. It's not been "Leeds' athletes the Brownlee brothers, Sheffield's Jessica Ennis", it's been "Yorkshire athletes."' With people like Mr Yorkshire around, the brand is all the stronger.

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