

His particular passions include schools, young people, regeneration and assisting the disadvantaged. “Bringing people together is what it’s all about, and I enjoy doing that and organising things,” says Keith.

“So, when I’m on the boards of companies, I’m looking for where I can make a difference. If I can’t make a difference, I’m not really interested.”

Keith’s organisational flair was evident during childhood in the West Bowling district of Bradford. At primary school, he put on a play and later, at grammar school, he established a railway society. The latter helped him land a job as a clerk at Bradford Forster Square station. Two years later, at eighteen, he bade farewell to Yorkshire for a clerical post at the Hither Green marshalling yard on the Kent side of London. At twenty-one, he became the youngest station manager in British railway history, looking after three stations on the Catford Loop.

“It’s because people trusted in me as a young man that I now want to help other young people achieve their aims and ambitions,” he says. Keith then moved to Orpington, an important junction busy with commuter trains, as assistant station manager, but quit British Rail when he was twenty-five owing to a dislike of the disruptive activities of the railway unions.

Back in Yorkshire, he was made public relations manager of a computer software company and soon became its general manager. After three years of “fantastic experience”, he set up, with a partner, a financial advisory business, which he helped run for nearly thirty years before selling it in 2004.

Impressed by the aims of the Yorkshire Society, he became a corporate member in the late 1980s but was dismayed some years later to find interest waning. An offer to

help led to his election, in 2002, as chairman. Keith describes his decade in the post as a “fascinating journey”.

His initial target – achieved easily – was doubling the membership in the first year. It now stands at 500 individual and 200 corporate, with new members joining all the time. But Keith speaks proudly of two other achievements – increasing the popularity of Yorkshire Day and persuading, in 2004, HRH the Duke of York to become the society’s Royal patron.

He says: “We’ve now got a line-up of towns and cities wanting to host Yorkshire Day, which I’m told is the largest gathering of civic heads meeting in one place on one day (August 1) anywhere in the world. The society has really put it on the agenda, and it’s a sight to behold.

“Yet in the early days me and my colleague were knocking on doors and saying ‘please, Mr Chief Executive, will you host Yorkshire Day?’ Quite often, the reply was ‘what’s that?’

“When I took over, I felt it would be nice to have a Royal patron, but was told the society had been trying for years. Having HRH the Duke of York as our Royal patron gives the society so much credibility. It’s fair to say the society is now seen as a centre of influence within the county, and that is typified by the number of invitations we get to various functions. People want to feel the society is engaged.”

Brand Yorkshire is now handling the society’s membership database and a revamped website makes it easier to join. A concerted push to expand overseas membership has begun and, to that effect, the society’s mission statement has been revised.

“It’s now ‘the society unites through membership individuals and organisations throughout the world who share a passion