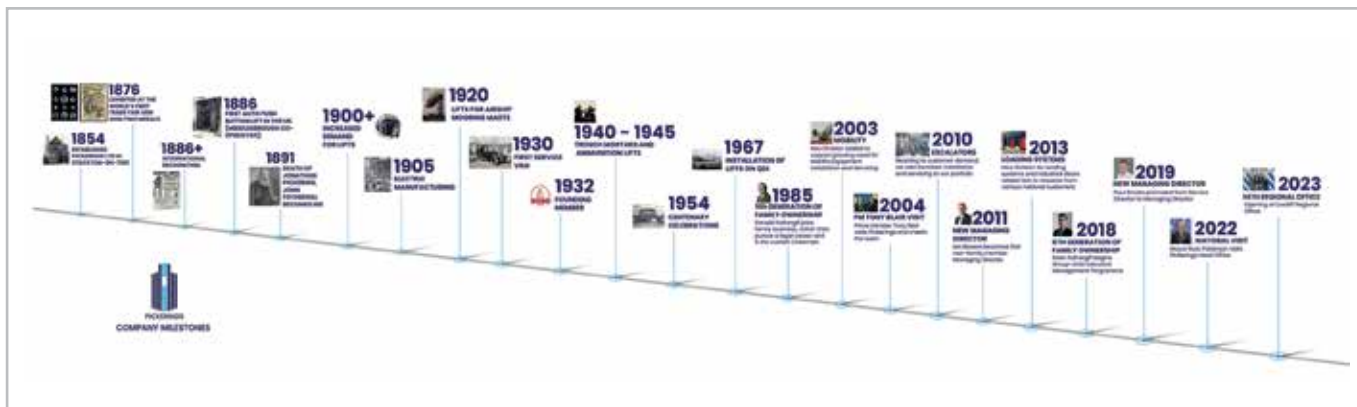




THE INTERVIEW



With 170 years of experience behind them, Pickerings Limited is one of the oldest lift engineering firms in the UK. Family owned since inception, they were a founding member of LEIA in 1932. More recently, January 2023 saw them open their 14th regional office, in Cardiff. We chatted with Rachel Swales, HR Manager, about Pickerings' incredible history and how they are investing in the future.

Pickerings is a stalwart of the lift industry, but there may be new faces who need a little introduction! Could you briefly explain what Pickerings does?

We've been around a long time, it's our 170th anniversary this year and we're in the sixth generation of family ownership. We're a leading independent lift service provider, we install and maintain different types of passenger and goods lifts for a variety of environments, together with mobility lifts, loading systems products and escalators. Since 1854, when the company was founded, we've evolved, reacting to what the marketplace needs and I think that's why we've flourished for so long.

What sets Pickerings apart within the lift industry?

We're a big company, but we tailor our service to each and every customer with the most up to date equipment and highly skilled staff. Because we've been around so long, we offer our customers longevity and sustainability, whether a large commercial customer or an individual. Our customers on the mobility side we provide much needed services to our most vulnerable customers. Our mobility engineers will go into their homes and fix a stairlift, and we understand this can make a huge difference to their everyday lives. With our commercial customers, some of our engineers will maintain the same lifts year after year, building relationships with our customers, which provides a level of mutual understanding and a sense of trust.



Exceeding customers' expectations is part of Pickerings' mission, but what does this look like in reality?

We benefit from the continuity of service from our engineers, which means that our customers also benefit from that. Each engineer will know the intricacies of the lifts they service, going back to the same ones regularly. With this being the case, some of our customers will request a specific engineer who they've developed a good working relationship with as they know that they have a valuable insight, making fault finding and diagnosing issues much quicker. We can provide that personal service because we have a staff base of dedicated engineers that know and understand our customers and their unique needs so well.

With a recognised skills gap in the industry, so many organisations are looking to inspire the next generation. How is Pickerings doing that?

I have a great enthusiasm for apprentices and I think it's so important to share with young people the potential career opportunities that a lift apprenticeship can lead to.

We encourage and facilitate work experience as a pre-cursor to an apprenticeship here. This is a great opportunity for someone considering a lift apprenticeship to have a taste and see what a day in the life of an apprentice is like. Often our apprentices join us straight from school or college, so a work experience placement gives a great insight to the world of work. The Apprenticeship Standard is flexible and training can be tailored to the individual. For example, if someone's come in straight

Many organisations will say that it's 'the people who make the organisation'. How does Pickerings empower their staff?

We have colleagues who spend their entire career with us, from their apprenticeship right through to retirement. Some staff have been here for 25 or 40 years, and it's important to us to celebrate these people. In fact, we had so many colleagues hitting these milestones last year that we held three celebratory lunches. We make sure that we recognise these moments, as we understand that continuity of service is vital, not just for our customers, but for our team members as well. Retaining experience means that our apprentices have a strong and knowledgeable workforce to learn from - it's invaluable. The experienced engineers not only pass on all the mandatory training, but offer insights on behaviour as well, which goes hand in hand with the practical skills.

Our apprentices aren't just picking up technical skills for the job, but a combination of knowledge, skills and behaviours; how to interact with customers as well as internal departments. It's not just isolated learning on how to fix a lift, there's so much more.

Training and progression is embedded into the culture of our company; not just professional training, but personal development as well. We invest in training, which brings with it confidence, and we understand that if our people are confident, they feel empowered to perform well and then take on responsibilities they might never have done otherwise. We also like to promote from within, offering a strong career progression alongside those personal development opportunities.

from school, we'll start them off differently to someone who's come in with a BTech or from an allied trade, there's plenty of scope to be able to do that.

At each of our 14 regional offices we have a network of engineers, a management and administration team, and we have various apprentices across all of those teams, including at our Head Office. It's our ethos to take on apprentices to train and retain them – it always has been – and we see many of our apprentices grow through the business to management. Our long serving, experienced team members are a critical part of our success and add great value to the positive impact on our apprentices' learning.

It's been a career highlight of mine to have contributed to the Trailblazer group for lift apprenticeships and the development of an industry standard apprenticeship, but also to have seen first hand the progression of our wonderful apprentices on their journeys.

You can see a feature of one of our apprentices, Reece, who has recently completed his apprenticeship, on page 39. His manager, Rob, followed the same path, starting here as an apprentice and working up to management, which I think is so valuable for them both, to have that common thread and mutual understanding. Rob knows exactly the path that Reece is walking, and Reece can see that Rob's been through it all ahead of him which is a great support.

What else could the lift industry be doing to attract talent?

Promoting the lift industry as a rewarding and fulfilling career, especially to young people studying a STEM course, would definitely raise the profile of our industry. I think we have to work hard for the lift industry to be considered as a popular first career choice. The more we can connect with schools and colleges, and open our doors to young people, the better insight they will have. We've found this to be a good pathway that leads into apprenticeships. It also helps the school or college with finding work placements for students, offering valuable real life work experiences. Then once we are seen as a rewarding career choice, it raises the profile of the lift industry for the following year groups.

Why is it important to you to be a member of LEIA?

We are a founding member of LEIA, and it's important for us to maintain this membership for the reassurance of our customers and to keep our well-earned credibility in the industry. We recognise that we have a greater responsibility beyond our own company and it's vital that we support and interact with our peers for the greater good of the industry.

Can you pick out some highlights from the past 170 years?

I think one of our earliest achievements was designing the first auto push button lift in the UK. People were enthralled at simply being able to call a lift at the push of a button! I love our involvement in social history through time, and that we also played our part in the war effort, building

trench mortars and ammunition lifts. Later on, in 1967 we were privileged to install the lifts on the QEII ship and most recently, we're proud to have opened our 15th regional office this month in St.Ives, Cambridgeshire.

What are your priorities for 2024?

Our Managing Director, Paul Brooks is probably best placed to answer this one!



He said, "In 2024 we will be setting our ambition to become carbon net zero by 2050. This year will also see us opening our 15th regional office to cover the East Anglia region and we're continuing to create new opportunities to attract some of the industry's best talent. Our people are what excites me the most. With some of the best talent within the industry today, we continue to concentrate on the development of our team members."

"We want to be the 'go to' specialist in the sectors we already supply our services to. The business has grown over 50% in the last five-years, and we want to see the same type of growth again over the next five years."

To find out more about the company, visit their website - <https://www.pickeringslifts.co.uk/>

News from SAFed



A look back and a look forward

2023 was a busy year for SAFed, and we caught up with Chief Executive, Caroline Hamilton MBE, to hear the highlights and plans for 2024.

SAFed's year in review

In April last year we attended the Health and Safety Event at the NEC. This three day event allowed us to meet with members and their clients and help them understand why being part of a trade association such as SAFed is so important. We were there to talk to health and safety managers, facilities managers and engineering managers, explaining why it matters and how it works.

We also developed our training offering for our Technical Committee members to support them, not only to be more effective in their committee activities, but also in their day-to-day roles.

The courses offered were:

- Chairing effective meetings
- Technical report writing
- Purposeful Participation - how to get the most out of a meeting.



Our courses were available via a mixture of virtual and in-person delivery at two points during the year. This training was designed to support our busy Technical Committees who are reviewing several of our guidance documents. This has kept our new Technical Manager, Rachel Culpan, very busy since she joined us in February.

Through 2023, SAFed continued to work with HM Government on the UK's exit from the EU, specifically regarding CE marking and the indefinite extension of the marking, which has a significant impact on our sector. This work will continue into 2024. We may well see changes to the way suppliers and manufacturers work, dependent on available materials, and so we've had a lot of interaction with government departments and UKAS.

Finally, we represent the UK on two ISO review committees which are directly relevant to our members. They work to ISO 17020 and 17024, both of which I am the UK expert representative for.

A successful conference

Our annual member conference took place in Manchester during November, with the theme of 'Competence'. We welcomed almost 100 attendees with a full and motivating agenda. The morning session consisted of presentations from five speakers including Dominic Dawson, Chair of Bureau of Engineer Surveyors, who spoke about 'Competence and Professional Registration' and Katy Turf from the Engineering Council who looked at 'Competence and Professionalism: an Engineering Perspective'.



After lunch, Gary Banford, who served over two decades in the UK MOD, 16 of which were in the Special Forces, and Professor Martin Jones from Duratas, guided us through two more elements of competence, with a thought-provoking focus on what we could do to help ourselves become more effective; for example, are we getting enough sleep to fulfil our roles? Their sessions on 'Competence in High Performing Teams' and 'Competence and Leadership' were very well received.

Our evening speaker was Chris Cook, a double Olympic swimmer, who inspired us with his 'Two Lengths of the Pool' philosophy. This approach provides laser-sharp focus and simplifies the way in which we view our goals. We've had some incredible feedback from our delegates, and have already started planning for next year.



The evening also saw us raise £850 from our charity raffle. The money raised will be gratefully received by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Air Ambulance and Fight All Cancers Together (FACT). Thank you to all who attended the conference and donated so generously.

Inspiring the next generation

SAFed worked with the Institute for Apprentices and Technical Education to create a level four apprenticeship standard and we've worked hard over the past few years to deliver the standard which relates specifically to the engineer surveyor role. This role looks at the requirements of legislation for thorough examination, inspection and testing for a variety of equipment such as lifting equipment, pressure equipment, LEV systems and machinery. This year we've seen our third cohort come onboard, and we now have around 40 apprentices working through the standard, in partnership with Fareham College. We liaise directly with the college, supporting them by finding expert resource in the industry to deliver the course material, and also help train the trainers.

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Looking ahead

Our focus for 2024 is to encourage more of our members and associates, specifically smaller companies, to access and use this apprenticeship. I'd love to see it delivered in more locations around the country. It's great to see the energy and momentum it has gained, and we've seen the interest other companies are starting to have in it.

We'll also be back at the Health and Safety Event at the NEC. It's so important to continue to raise awareness of trade associations with clients, users and duty holders, and highlight the crucial role we play. Our annual member conference, scheduled again for November, will be a big part of our 2024 plans, and we look forward to welcoming our members again.

Our Technical Committees will continue to be busy throughout the year as we support our members and close out some of the major projects we've been working on. EU exit will remain a significant focus for us as the date for conformity to the UKCE mark still stands as December 2024. Having written to the Secretary of State, we're waiting for a meeting to provide direction, clarity and focus for our sector.

SAFed website

<https://www.safed.co.uk/>