



John Wells, managing director of A. J. Wells and Sons, left, with British Chamber of Commerce president Bill Midgley. Picture by CHRIS THWAITES.

26th November 2004

## FAMILY FIRM SCOOPS TOP AWARD

By Kate Young

ONE of the most strongly contested awards in years gave judges a headache at this year's IW Chamber of Commerce Business Awards for Excellence competition.

The quality of the competition made it extremely difficult to pick the winner of the Business Of The Year award, the prestigious title eventually going to Dodnor-based A. J. Wells and Sons Ltd, which narrowly beat fashion house Artigiano to the accolade.

The award came in the week the vitreous enamel

manufacturer announced a contract worth £1.5 million - its biggest to date - bringing with it eight new jobs.

The company won the contract to produce signage for the re-branded Southern Railways - its sixth major contract over the past 12 months.

A. J. Wells and Sons is a family business, which was established in 1972 and initially undertook agricultural engineering work and repairs on cars.

Following the Dutch elm disease crisis in the 1970s, staff saw a niche for wood-burning stoves and started to make them on site.

The stoves proved to be extremely popular and today, the company's famous Charnwood stoves are sold right across the UK, as well as at numerous outlets abroad.

In the late 1980s, the company also started its own enamelling business and today it creates enamelled signs for other companies, including many for the London Underground.

This year the company enjoyed a moment in the spotlight when it helped Diarmuid Gavin with his controversial design for the Chelsea Flower Show and the business was featured in the television series following his progress to a silver gilt award.

A. J. Wells and Sons employs around 90 people and has plans for major expansion within the next five years.

John Wells, managing director, said: 'We had absolutely no idea that we had been nominated for such a big award - I was totally taken aback when it was announced that we had won.'

The company was also highly commended in the International Trade Award.