

HAPPY NEW YEAR

## Foreword by Patrick Foster, Managing Director

A new year is always a good opportunity to reflect on the previous year and think about the year ahead. Many of us like to make a new year resolution or two and I am no exception. I have learned though that effective resolutions have to be SMART [specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timed] - all the more so if they involve exercise [in my case tennis] on cold winter days!

As we go into 2008 at Noble & Taylor our resolution is to provide an even better service to our clients and their advisers. But we have to turn easy words into action which is why during the Christmas break each year the Directors take some time out [when the phone doesn't ring as much] to update our company plan and find SMART ways of serving our clients better.

We all know that successful organisations learn to adapt to the changing world. In our industry the welcome focus on strengthening safety standards, the importance of developing the talent and skill of staff, the need to reduce the carbon footprint of buildings and the changing economic outlook we face — all impact upon us. I hope you will find the articles in this edition of interest. They reflect a range of subjects and show just how encompassing we all need to be in our industry today.

At Noble & Taylor we are wanting to adapt, to drive up standards and by using 'SMART' thinking and working, serve our clients even better in 2008.

Happy new year!

## Sponsorship of SSAFA



We received very warm thanks from SSAFA [Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen Families Association] for our joint sponsorship that we and Savills gave for the recent concert at The Queens Theatre, Hornchurch. We are very pleased to be able to show some practical support and appreciation to our Armed Forces, especially at this time when many of them are facing danger in Iraq and Afghanistan.



This year we have not sent Christmas Cards, but instead have made a donation to Essex Air Ambulance, in memory of Robert Stock, our Site Foreman, who many of you will remember, and who sadly died in October (see page 2). Essex Air Ambulance was a charity close to the heart of Bob and his family.

Have you visited our website at [www.nobleandtaylor.co.uk](http://www.nobleandtaylor.co.uk)?

We always welcome constructive feedback and would be interested to know what you think.

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## Bob Stock



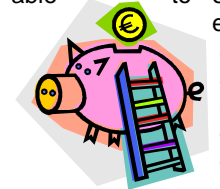
Many of our clients will remember Bob Stock, one of the longest serving members of the company, who recently sadly died unexpectedly. Bob was a working foreman but his skills were much greater than this title might belie. His technical ability, professionalism and willingness to always 'go the extra mile' to meet clients' aspirations were well known.

Bob's funeral was so well supported that many had to stand. Patrick gave the tribute and he quoted the landlord of Bob's local public house in Ongar who said of Bob "In all my years of knowing him, I have never known anyone speak ill of Bob and what's more in all those years I never heard Bob speak ill of anyone else"

We are grateful to Bob for all that he has brought to the company and we are glad that he has been a wise and able mentor to some of our younger tradesmen. In his memory we are establishing the Bob Stock Plate to be presented annually to the member of staff who has most advanced or widened their skills in the year.

## Budgets

We are always glad of feedback in order that we might provide a better service to our clients and their professionals. From time to time we are asked if we, in return, can provide constructive comments to our clients and their advisers. One issue that a number of contractors encounter is the use of budgets which can occasionally be unrealistic or the suggested contract period provided can sometimes prove to have been the client's suggestion rather than a considered judgement based on the expertise of the design team. Costs inevitably rise over time and it is easy for budgets to be prepared using out of date cost data. We are sometimes able to offer our long-standing clients our



experience in setting initial budgets and timeframes. Realistic budgets and time frames can help reduce the chances of the client being disappointed and contributes to the overall professionalism of the project.

## Latest Contracts

We have recently won three new projects due to commence in early 2008. We will be pleased to be working again with Savills on the refurbishment of a substantial country house near Colchester and also with Purcell Miller & Tritton on a project on the Narthex of a church in Southend. We have also been appointed to carry out structural timber repairs in hardwoods including elm and oak to the cupola of St Margaret's, Westminster.

## N&T Team Seminar

Our annual team training day for all our staff took place at Hunters Meet, Hatfield Heath in November.



Whilst 'sustainability' is very topical, not many of us really understand what it means in practice for our buildings to be 'sustainable'. Robert Diamond from Ingleton Wood kindly came and gave us a fascinating talk explaining time-lines for the depletion of key fuels [fossil, gas, oil] and the need for alternative energy sources [eg turbines and solar power], as well as the need to reduce both energy consumption and the carbon footprint of our buildings.



Robert explained the different pay-back measurements that can be used, and the need to account for the carbon footprint of the construction of the alternative source [eg the wind turbine]. One of the dangers is that a whole 'sustainable' industry could grow up around the grants that governments make available—the free market tends to follow cash more than principle! Nevertheless, the building industry owes it to our descendants to do what

we can to promote sustainability. The industry will undoubtedly see many changes in the years to come. [The climate change conference in Bali in mid-December showed again the deep divisions in approach to climate change taken by the EU who want compulsory reductions in emissions on the one side and the US and its allies who want a voluntary agreement on the other.]

Some of our younger members of staff made presentations on various projects, on training events they had attended or qualifications attained. They also chaired table discussions on a safety quiz based on the HSE report into the accident in 'Vampire' by Richard Hammond from the BBC, which analysed the failings in risk assessments that contributed to the accident.



Vampire

David Eaton gave an introductory presentation on personal risk assessment using the 'ABC' [Achieving Behavioural Change] system designed jointly by the HSE and the Dept of Work and Pensions — one of the key elements of which is an acknowledgement and assessment of so-called 'near miss' accidents to reduce still further the risk of an actual accident occurring. The system uses a 'TASK' card [*Think First, Act Safe, Stop if Hazardous and Keep Safe.*]

## Improving our Skills

We are always looking to improve our skills and we do this through a combination of individual training plans which includes courses and specific work experience, and company-wide training to develop the values and ethos of the firm. We are constantly seeking to develop our staff and mentoring is a key aspect of this where staff can learn new skills, gain confidence and enhance the quality of their work. Bob Stock [see the appreciation above] has been a significant influence in the training and development of several of our younger tradesmen. We owe Bob a big debt of gratitude for all he has given to enhance the professionalism and reputation of the firm. He will be missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing him.

## Site Security

A couple of our sites have recently provided our clients and ourselves with significant security issues where break-ins have been a potential threat to the building, the ongoing works, any staff on site and the intruders themselves.



Contrary to some perceived wisdom, it is possible to mitigate the risk of litigation against a client or contractor if an intruder has an accident as long as the relevant risk assessment has been carefully carried out. If necessary, precautions can include barbed wire and guard dogs if used properly ie warning notices must be clearly in place and guard dogs must not be left to roam off the lead.



The relevant Police Crime Reduction Officer usually has very helpful advice both in terms of risk arising from the location of the project and the known pattern of vandalism, and also with practical security arrangements that are likely to be effective. The Police are usually happy to give advice to help ensure that the reporting of any crime to them is done in such a way that it receives an appropriate response from them. Inadequate Police response is often caused when the Police do not receive accurate details of an incident and the immediate risk to life and/or property. Where a site suffers a high risk of crime it is likely that other agencies/organisations may also be affected and a partnership approach can strengthen the fight against crime.

Our experience has shown us the importance of constantly updating the risk profile because it will change as a project progresses, with school holidays and weather/darkness conditions.

## Contract Feature

### Germain's Farmhouse — 16th Century Grade II Listed

The benefits of teamwork really came to the fore on this project. Restoring a 16th Century Farmhouse to its former glory, requires many skills and qualities. Perhaps the most important are a spirit of trust and co-operation and a common desire to solve the problems which inevitably arise on such a project. We were fortunate on Germain's Farm to have such a team. Working with the design team from Savills, the Structural Engineers, JP Chick & Partners, Essex County Council's Conservation Officer and Sarah Chenevix-Trench, the interior designer, we were able to produce a job of which to be proud. A key aspect of the success of the project was the effective partnership of the whole team involved. This extended not only to the design team and ourselves, but also to our tried and trusted sub-contractors and our own craftsmen and operatives on site.

*David Mott, site manager reports...*

Our task was to turn a rather sorry looking damp building into a desirable family home. The full extent of the problems didn't become clear until the roof tiles were removed and the sand/cement render hacked off. Parts of the original oak structure had been replaced with softwood timbers and a lot of the remaining oak members had decayed beyond repair. The Structural Engineer, Conservation Officer and site manager had a lengthy meeting to assess and establish the extent of repairs required. It was decided that all softwood be removed and as much as possible of the original oak structure be retained. Green oak was shipped in from France, six carpenters spent the best part of three months cutting traditional joints and splicing existing 17<sup>th</sup> century oak members to make the building structurally sound.

Marrying the needs of building regulations and conservation is always a challenge, but following lengthy discussions between David Caldwell of Savills and Pauline Turner the Conservation Office, as to the appropriateness of insulation to the walls, a solution was found using a natural product as insulation, so lambs wool was used. Then it was time to get the roof tiles back on and the timber laths fixed for the lime render. Fortunately we had some of the best early spring weather for several years which enabled us to proceed with the external lime rendering. Due to the slow drying times, lime rendering is not possible during the colder damp months of the year [*well it is, but if you proceed, it tends to end up on the floor Ed*].

Finally we did the internal fit out, all plumbing and electrics were replaced, central heating added, existing joinery overhauled, all internal walls made good, new kitchen and bathrooms installed, solid oak flooring to the ground floor put in and the property was decorated. Sarah Chenevix-Trench used her interior design skills to add that little bit extra to help achieve the final finish with her choice of wall colours and fittings. The client's representative told us that it was the overall final finishes and colour choice that helped in the marketing of the property and allowed it to be quickly rented out.



## Economic Outlook for 2008

David Eaton, our Director of Finance and Resources gives his thoughts for the year ahead...

The decision by the Bank of England [BoE] to lower base rates on 6 December by 0.25% to 5.5%, despite clear inflationary fears from rising energy costs et al, is indicative of how deep is their concern about a slowdown in the economy. There is confidence that Christmas retail trading will hold up, but concern for retail sales in 2008. This was confirmed at a recent private breakfast that our directors attended through the Essex branch of the Institute of Directors with Rachel Lomax, Deputy Governor of the BoE.



Whilst the banks in the United States are now being properly held to account for disastrous [some would say knowingly reckless] lending decisions in the so called 'sub-prime' market, banks on this side of the Atlantic must bear responsibility for encouraging very high levels of borrowing, and several of our banks have sold mortgages at short-term 'teaser' rates where the borrower was going to be very challenged to meet the long-term repayments at a commercial interest rate, especially if that commercial rate rises - as it now is doing.

The collapse in confidence by the banks in each other means that a reduction in base rate does not necessarily reflect in the full reduction in the actual rates banks charge borrowers. This de-coupling of 'base rate' and 'actual rates' is a cause of anxiety to the BoE, government and of course borrowers. The ability of central banks and governments to intervene now we have global markets is much reduced from even 20 years ago. It is for this reason we saw the unprecedented joint intervention by UK, European, Swiss, US and Canadian banking authorities on 12 December to make cash [up to \$110bn] available at market [instead of punitive] rates in December and January, as banks close their books for the 31 December year-end. Choppy waters lie ahead with all eyes on the housing market and the knock-on consequences.

At times like these, the old adage 'cash is king' is particularly true and confirms our decision at Noble & Taylor to plough our profits over recent years straight back into investment in the firm: in our people, training and facilities and to build up our cash resources. We are grateful to be able to look forward to 2008 with a sound balance sheet and an up to date business plan as the country braces itself for bumpy times ahead. Some commentators say that the Olympics in 2012 and the continued demand for housing could provide a cushion for some elements of the construction industry against any downturn — let's hope they are right!

## Corporate Manslaughter Act

The Corporate Manslaughter Act may herald a new dawn for corporate accountability. Organisations operating in the UK will soon be open to prosecution for a new criminal offence of corporate manslaughter. After years of debate, the scope of the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 has now been finalised and it will come into force on 6 April, 2008. The intention of the Act is to make it easier to hold organisations to account after a fatality has been caused by significant internal failures. The Act is also intended to secure greater public confidence that organisations will be held accountable in these circumstances. The Act will apply to all companies operating in the UK and some government departments.



The Act also applies to other organisations in the UK when they employ staff including partnerships, trade unions and employers' associations.

Under the existing common law, a company can only be convicted of corporate manslaughter if a director or company officer is guilty of manslaughter, and identified as the 'controlling mind' of the company. This test was clarified when a UK ferry company was prosecuted following an incident where 187 people died. The prosecution against the company failed as there was insufficient evidence to convict the seven individual defendants prosecuted.

The UK Law Commission recommended that a special offence of 'corporate killing' be introduced. Twelve years after this proposal, the Act implementing these recommendations will come into force and the current common law offence will be abolished.

It has taken a long time for the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 to be finalised and it should be expected that the Health and Safety Executive will want to ensure that the new law is used wherever necessary to bring organisations to account.

Further details can be found at: [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga\\_20070019\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070019_en.pdf)

Whilst this may not be the cheeriest of subjects, if the new Act enhances safety systems and accountability, it is to be welcomed for the industry.