

# newsletter

Issue 4

Summer 2008

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## An uncertain outlook?

As we return from our summer breaks, many will be wondering what the autumn, 2009 and beyond will hold. It's common to hear people say 'we'll talk our way into recession if we aren't careful'. Yet the impact of the credit crunch for construction and housing is very real to many – from the first time house buyer to the big house builders who are swamped with debt. At N&T we are glad to have chosen not to put all our eggs in one basket and we continue to work in specific markets that require key skills. We have the flexibility to take on a varied selection of projects as demonstrated in our article on current contracts (see below).

Nearly all the projects we undertake demand high levels of flexibility, commitment and skill. We continue to keep up to date with new legislation such as the new waste management regulations and focus our training not just on our own key areas but related areas which have a high safety risk such as scaffolding.

We are glad to be working on a number of projects where we were brought in early and have been able to make a real contribution at the planning stage. This ensures that the projects are well set-up and a number of issues have been thought through in advance that might otherwise have become expensive to resolve or delayed the project. Experience has taught us the value of careful planning and not starting projects ill-prepared! We try to take our own advice and have planned for a bumpy economic outlook which as well as challenges will bring its own opportunities. [It is interesting, for example, to see how Tesco have chosen to make a bold move into personal banking when the banks themselves are under intense pressure.]

Clients and professionals alike will be looking to contractors with strong balance sheets and a sound long-term track record in these uncertain days. It is at times like these that we are glad that our bankers bank with us and not vice versa!

Patrick Foster  
Managing Director



## Current Contracts

We are fortunate to have a really diverse and interesting range of projects at present. These range from the very upmarket new build in Buckhurst Hill, through to the prestigious heritage project which we have commenced at Westminster Abbey. We are nearing completion on the oak timber framed new house in Chigwell and the refurbishment of a large house for one of our most regular clients, Savills. Another fascinating job again involving historic buildings is the initial phase of the works at High House in Purfleet, to provide new rehearsal facilities for the Royal Opera, who have had to move from their existing facilities in East London to make way for the Olympics.

These projects show our specialisms in niche markets where many other contractors do not possess staff with the skills and expertise to be able to undertake such work.



## Complex M&E

We are nearing completion of the construction of a luxury high-specification mini-mansion. The services for which have to be equally state-of-the-art, sophisticated, and therefore complex.

The mechanical services include:

- Air conditioning
- Rainwater harvesting system including grey water distribution circuits
- Combined underfloor heating and cooling system, utilising heat pumps
- Specialist shower and bath fittings
- Inbuilt vacuum cleaning system
- Tracer heating system (to keep the hot water consistently hot)
- Proposed pool house with hydraulic rise/fall pool floor

The underfloor heating system is a new design, allowing cooled water to flow around the ground and first floors via specially installed heat pumps. All hot water and heating is electric-heated.

The electrical services are equally sophisticated, consisting of:

- A home automation system controlling lighting, heating/cooling, audio-visual system, security/entry, main gates, garage doors, fire detection, motorised blinds etc.
- Lighting control panels and touch screens in most rooms
- Over 130m of lighting circuits and 6000m of cabling respectively
- Numerous in-built floor and wall lights
- Significant external lighting
- Embedded wall-mounted TVs in most rooms
- Industrial cable channelling systems hidden above suspended (MF) plaster ceilings
- Fibre-optic containment for future use
- Lightning protection system

These are in addition to the standard power, heating and lighting requirements. The equipment installed is more of a commercial specification because of the size of house and its complexity. The complexity of the M&E together with design revisions has been a major challenge to the whole team but well within the scope of N&T.



## Health & safety training - scaffolding

Our rolling training programme highlights specific areas of in-depth training on a rotational basis. Our current focus is scaffolding and ten members of the firm attended a high quality scaffolding awareness training event in July. This gave experienced staff greater insight into scaffolding issues and began to train younger staff into the key areas of scaffold safety.

Particular areas of interest and relevance for us were learning how to audit scaffold designs and ensure that scaffolds comply with the revised TG20 [which ensures compliance with the European Directive BS EN 12811-1]. The course included plenty of opportunity to inspect scaffolds which had been intentionally constructed with mistakes for us to find. We were reminded how scaffold collapses usually have multiple rather than one single cause.

The training has given our staff both increased technical knowledge and also the skills to talk with some confidence to scaffolders who are often both literally and metaphorically above contradiction! The training was especially timely as we have now begun the stone cleaning at the Corn Exchange, Ipswich where the whole building is scaffolded with busy pedestrian access around the building needing to be maintained.



## Prince of Wales follows N&T!

The Prince of Wales, recently toured the Adnams new eco-friendly distribution centre near Southwold to see for himself the different elements of sustainability incorporated in the facility. Our clients and professionals CPD day last May included a guided tour round the Adnams facility. We recognised the growing importance and influence of sustainability in buildings of the future—we are glad that the Prince agrees with us!

We are beginning our planning for our next CPD day which will be Spring '09 — further details will be sent out in due course. The days prove popular with our key professionals and give an opportunity for a relaxed day together with a worthwhile topic and a chance to share together matters of common interest over lunch!



## An end to fly tipping?

From 6 April this year new waste management regulations became law. As from 1st July 2008 any new project with a value over £300,000 will need to have a site waste management plan in place. Projects with a value in excess of £500,000 will need a more complex site waste management plan.

These have been brought in, in an effort to reduce the amount of landfill waste on site and also the amount of fly tipping which occurs.

Good things to note are:

- The regulations will only apply to larger sites
- There should not be too much additional paperwork to fill in
- Used correctly, it may actually save a little money

Less good things to note are:

- More bureaucracy! - there is a little bit more paperwork for clients and their professional team, the contracts and site managers
- Will the regulations actually make much difference to fly tipping? – some commentators doubt it.

No doubt the effect of the regulations will become clearer as they are used on site and good practice becomes apparent. At N&T we will be using templates for the Site Waste Management Plans, from the National Federation of Builders to help us meet our new obligations.

See also: <http://www.wrap.org.uk/construction>

## Life gets easier with Excel!

As our projects grow in complexity so technology comes to play an increasing role in the management of our contracts. Working through the specification, bill of quantities and keeping a check on the constant stream of architect's instructions is often difficult. Using some of the less used features of Microsoft Excel we are able to keep on top of and sort, prioritise and process vast quantities of information. This helps us to run projects more efficiently.

## Sponsorship

Noble and Taylor in conjunction with Savills Private Finance are delighted to continue their sponsorship of SSAFA's [Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen Families Association] autumn concerts. This year it is at The Queens Theatre, Hornchurch at 7.30pm on Sunday 28 September. David Eaton as a member of the Territorial Army, knows from experience the tremendous support that SSAFA gives to the service personnel who are injured in Iraq and Afghanistan. Tickets for the concert can be obtained from Maj Paul Burton [Ret'd] on 020 8550 2532.



## The 'credit crunch'

The steep rise in fuel at the pumps and the fall in house prices are both almost universally seen by the public as bad news. This is an apparent contradiction – how can prices move in opposite directions yet both directions be seen as bad? The answer of course depends whether or not one owns an oil field or property. For first time buyers, a fall is welcome as it brings a home within reach [assuming that finance is available] and the rise in oil is good news for the Government which increases its tax-take from it.



Many serious commentators, including the Governor of the Bank of England, have said that the longer that house prices raced ahead the greater would be the correction when it came. Some banks [here and abroad] have a serious case to answer by their reckless offers of mouth-watering finance in terms of the multiple of earnings they were prepared to loan us for our mortgages – the assumption was that prices could only move in one direction. As banks have grown in size so the potential effect of the demise of one [or more] has become ever greater such that the Government would not allow a bank to fail – and knowing that, the banks have taken ever greater risks.

The danger now is that the 'credit crunch' will cause liquidity to dry up such that the economy comes to a juddering halt. Central bankers and politicians can inject funds into the banking system but this is at the risk of stoking inflation. Only time will tell how this will work itself out. The fact that the Bank of England is unsure whether the next move for interest rates ought to be up or down shows how uncertain times have become. In recent years our Government has told us repeatedly that the days of boom and bust were gone for good – those words seem a little optimistic from where most of us [outside the cushioned world of Westminster politics] sit today! From long experience, we at Noble & Taylor know that good times do not last forever, we have intentionally re-invested our profits back into the firm over recent years to strengthen further our financial position to withstand a weakening economy.

## Charity Fundraising

Several staff members/partners have recently been busy taking part in various fundraising activities, Pat Barnard raised over £220 in the 14 mile 'Walk for Life Event' along the River Chelmer from Maldon to Chelmsford in aid of Farleigh Hospice. Pat completed the walk in 4 hours 30 mins.



Pat Barnard

Gilly Foster cycled 49 miles around the villages of north Essex also in aid of Farleigh Hospice and Tracy Slade took part in the 'Race for Life' at Hylands Park, Chelmsford in aid of Cancer Research.





## Heritage at risk in Essex

The heritage of the East of England is at risk according to English Heritage. Called 'Heritage at Risk' this recent study encompasses the Buildings at Risk Register which has transformed the approach to conserving and rescuing Grade I and II\* listed buildings. This year's 'Heritage at Risk' report covers scheduled monuments and listed buildings, along with, for the first time, registered historic parks, gardens and landscapes, battlefields and even protected wreck sites off our coasts. In the next few years, listed places of worship, conservation areas, and Grade II buildings will also be included. Heritage at Risk will provide key benchmarks to measure progress in tackling the problems it identifies.

The East of England has 123 Grade I and Grade II\* buildings at risk (BARs) - these represent the region's most important historic buildings deemed at risk of decay. Examples from the range of Heritage at Risk in Essex include: Easton Lodge, Great Dunmow; Coastal Fish Weir, Maldon and Coalhouse Fort, East Tilbury.

Greg Luton, Regional Director for English Heritage in the East of England, said "Heritage at Risk is a work in progress, but already it is giving us an unprecedented window into the state of the region's historic environment. Like the Buildings at Risk register, this is not a name and shame exercise, but a tool to understand threats and prioritise action. Excellent work is being done to protect our heritage, but the study raises some serious causes for concern".

At Noble & Taylor we are delighted to be playing our part in the conservation of buildings of historic value to our communities and even our nation. Two of our current projects include stone cleaning and restoration at the Corn Exchange at Ipswich and roof repairs to Westminster Abbey.



Corn Exchange, Ipswich - façade stone cleaning, restoration and roof repairs [c £900k project over 39 working weeks]



Westminster Abbey - repairs to the east aisle north transept roof [c £400k project over 38 working weeks]

## New staff

Since the last newsletter, two new faces have joined us and it's good to welcome Lisa Steel, who joins our admin team and Joe Clarke, as a Working Foreman. Lisa comes to us from a senior administrative role with a Fortune 500 UK subsidiary. Joe's previous role was heading up a small residential development project.

Already their different contributions in strengthening the staff team have been clear to see. We wish them both a long and successful career with the firm.

## N&T staff earn praise

At N&T we welcome constructive feedback – no one is perfect and we do strive for constant improvement. It is always encouraging to receive positive letters and we are delighted when our clients write to us to express thanks for a job well done and to highlight the effort and achievement of particular members of staff. One such recent letter from a private client earned a staff member our quarterly award.



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