



Karen Wallace

meets

Neil Carmichael



Situated north east of Inverness, Jack Carmichael (Flooring) is the northern-most member of the CFA:

MOST of the work undertaken by Jack Carmichael (Flooring) is within 60-miles of its base in Elgin, Morayshire. Although a sparsely populated area, it includes some large towns and several RAF bases.

The owner Neil Carmichael, Jack's grandson, says: 'We concentrate on Elgin and Inverness. Poor road links mean that travelling to Aberdeen isn't really an option as it takes us so long to get there.'

The company has had close ties to the CFA for many years and the only member in the Moray area. 'This is what really sets us apart from the other local contractors', explains Neil.

'In Inverness, there is some competition but we are the only CFA member for miles around. If a customer wants a contract done to a high standard, then hopefully they will come to us.'

'Being close to our customers also gives us an edge and most of our jobs are repeat business or word-of-mouth.'

'We do have companies pricing against us but our fitters always make the effort to try and be better than the rest.' Neil employs four office-based workers and eight full-time floorlayers plus a selection of self-employed tradesmen to call upon at peak times.

Not only is the company an active member of the CFA, it also had links with former director Richard

Highland fame



The show room at Jack Carmichael (Flooring) in Elgin

Wollerton whose wife, Valerie, came from Cullen, 20 miles from Elgin.

'Richard always showed an interest in our company and would always have time for me at exhibitions, says Neil.

'The legal advice and support the CFA offers fully justifies our membership. Once when a customer didn't follow our advice and the flooring failed, the CFA backed us up and the dispute was



Walkers Shortbread's new offices where Jack Carmichael (Flooring) specified and installed bespoke Wilton carpet

settled.

Jack Carmichael was recently involved in the refurbishment of Aberlour House.

Originally part of Gordonstoun Preparatory School, the 18th century Georgian mansion was refurbished to accommodate Walkers Shortbread's sales and administration teams.

Former Gordonstoun schoolboy HRH Prince Charles inaugurated the opening on April 8, 2008.

Neil specified and installed a bespoke Wilton carpet from Wilton Weavers designed to match the red tartan used on Walkers' products. The 27in wide carpet was fitted down the stairs as a runner with solid brass stairrods and in the main circulation areas.

The company also recently installed carpet and vinyl at the newly-refurbished and expanded Eden Court arts centre in Inverness.

Neil has carried out several installations at distilleries, mostly in visitor centres, control rooms and offices.

'This is one of Scotland's main tourist attractions', he says, 'and a good place to show potential customers the quality of our work.'

Jack Carmichael, whose trade was upholstery, started out working for several local furnishing companies before setting up his own china, drapery and flooring business. After Jack's death, Neil's father Brian

took the company more into contract flooring.

However, Neil reports that the domestic side of the business is on the increase again. 'There was a gap in the local market for top-quality domestic flooring and so we opened a showroom within our current premises. This started at 20% of the business; it's now 30% and could rise to 35% this year.'

Neil says the company makes a reasonable profit every year, but he is reluctant to expand the business much further. 'I've always taken a hands-on approach. Increasing our workload much more would prevent me from being as close to customers.'

Neil has developed the contract business since he took over at the age of 18 following his father's premature death. But he had grown up within the family business, helping out during school holidays.

Taking over at such a young age wasn't easy and some clients took advantage of his relative inexperience, he recalls.

'Some people conveniently forgot that they owed us money and there were several disagreements. But I stood firm and customers have grown to respect me.'

Neil has ensured that the company works closely with major suppliers.

He holds 'key contractor' or 'recommended contractor' status with major manufacturers, including Amtico, Spacia, Brintons, Ryalux and Altro. **CFJ**

■ T: 01343 552412

■ www.flooring-scotland.com



Amtico flooring at the Gordon Macphail distillery