



Karen Wallace

meets

Steve Harris



Aiming for growth

While many flooring companies – fearful of the forecast recession – are merely trying to hold on to what they've got, Steve Harris, md of Brook Flooring, is aiming for growth:

IT was a chance glance in the situations vacant section in the local newspaper 40 years ago that steered John Shambrook in the direction of the flooring industry.

A Hertford company was looking for an apprentice floorlayer. That company was Altro. John started in the contracts department and was trained in all aspects of vinyl fitting. When the contracts department closed, John continued working for Altro as a sub-contractor.

Early in the 1980s, he started Brook Flooring in partnership with his wife, Angela, who handled the administration. After running the business from their home for several years, they moved to industrial premises in Milton Keynes.

In 1992, Brook Flooring became a limited company with a turnover

of around £1m a year, continuing to work mainly in the vinyl sector, using mostly Altro products.

The Shambrook family is still involved in the business with John, as John chairman, Angela as company secretary and their daughter Donna Barbarovich, financial director.

Their son Andrew works as a sub-contractor to the company, taking the same route as his father three decades ago.

Steve Harris has worked with the company for 10 years, the last four as md. One of his current roles is business development and marketing.

Brook has two divisions, contract flooring and hygienic cladding, which supplies and installs Altro Whiterock wall and ceiling systems.

Steve explains: 'By dividing our business into two sectors, we are able to provide a widespread range of products, whilst retaining specialist knowledge in each.'

Most flooring contracts it handles are within the UK, but hygienic cladding takes Steve and his fitters further afield. For example, a UK-based cleanroom refurbishment client commissioned Brook to fit sheet vinyl on floors, walls and ceilings abroad in places such as Jordan.

'We provide a consultancy service to cleanroom companies, specify products, and undertake the fitting. Apart from the high temperatures, it's very easy to work in the Middle East as the client provides transport and accommodation.'

Vinyl and timber flooring are the most commonly specified, along with linoleum, carpet and rubber.

One of the company's biggest jobs recently was a £900,000 contract for the 15,000sq m new-build Stoke Mandeville Hospital, including subfloor preparation and the fitting of Tarkett vinyl and carpet tiles.

Another recent large order was for the Kier Group at Westminster Kingsway College in London involving subfloor preparation and the installation of Freudenberg rubber flooring and InterfaceFLOR carpet tiles in a

ABOVE: Cheshunt swimming pool refurbished by Brook Flooring using Altro slip-resistant sheet vinyl on a Tremco surface moisture vapour suppressant system

LEFT: Fosse Park Food Court upgraded by Brook Flooring using Amtico vinyl tiles

contract worth £430,000.'

Despite market conditions, the company has increased its turnover from around £1.15m 10 years ago to £4m currently. It's aiming for sales of £5-6m in the next five years, according to Steve.

In 2006, Brook acquired new offices with larger warehouse facilities at Redmoor, Milton Keynes. 'The move is part of our expansion programme and we are now closer to the M1 and A5 to help us continue our nationwide operations,' says Steve.

The company has work for 25-30 installers at any one time. Four directly employed fitters have undergone extra training for the cleanroom installations.

While healthcare establishments, schools and leisure centres currently form a large part of the company's work, Steve is aiming to expand more into areas such as retail and hotels.

'Luckily, most of our business is word of mouth. And despite strong local competition, we believe the quality of our work is as good as any in the country. We are proud of our reputation for professionalism, project focus and performance reliability.'

CFJ

T: 0870 161 3110

www.brook-group.co.uk



Stoke Mandeville Hospital where Brook Flooring pumped screed on a Tremco surface moisture vapour suppressant system overlaid with Tarkett vinyl and carpet tiles