



Mary Murrell speaks to Brian & Paul Carrington



Striking

Neofloors celebrated its golden jubilee in May this year, marking 50 years of trading.

THE founder of the company, Brian Carrington, is now semi-retired, but he is enjoying this celebratory year knowing that its future is assured by his son Paul, now md.

Having weathered three previous recessions, the company is holding steady in the present downturn.

'This recession is different from others in that the effects were felt very quickly, due to the banks being so unstable,' says Brian. 'However, we entered the recession in a strong financial position.'

'Trade is difficult, but we are very busy quoting, although builders are reluctant to commit themselves to a project until the last moment.'

'Even if things start improving now, it will be a long time before the flooring industry benefits.'

In 1959 Brian, who had trained as a surveyor, was working for a building company. When it separated the flooring from the core building work, Brian set up Neofloors with two other directors. While he concentrated on the new company, his co-directors remained in the building industry until they retired.

Paul, also a surveyor, joined the company in 1994. While Brian remains chairman, he has overall control and also manages the ceramic tiling side of the business. Peter Bouvet manages the soft flooring division.

'We have 12 employees, one of whom joined us as an apprentice in the early days and whose son and



An installation by Neofloor at Unilever, showing Milliken carpet tiles (left) and InterfaceFLOR carpet tiles (right)



Large format ceramic tiles installed by Neofloors at Cambridge Regional College

grandson are now employed.

Another has a record of 36 continuous years with the company,' says Brian.

Neofloors joined the Association of Flooring Contractors, which later formed the CFA. Brian served more than 30 years on the CFA council, including two years as its president.

Initially the company specialised in timber, but later expanded into other materials including carpet, vinyl, linoleum, wood, mosaic and block, strip and sprung sports/dance floors, ceramic tiles for floors and walls, limestone, slate, entrance matting and accessories. It also offers floor preparation and sanding and resealing services.

Subsidiary Northfield Tiling is a member of The Tiling Association. Neofloor has completed contracts at the Hayward Gallery, the V&A Museum (Galleries) and the Cabinet War Rooms, all in London.

The companies' catchment area is Beds, north Bucks, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire and Northants where its customers include local authority and private schools, hospitals, nursing homes, offices, shops and the MoD. Although work can be

undertaken further afield.

Recent installations include: ceramic tiled walls and floors in the toilets and showers, and stone in the reception area at Cambridge University Institute of Manufacturing; soft floorcoverings and ceramic walls and floors in the offices of Fairline Boats; floor preparation, carpet tiles, safety vinyl and ceramic floor and wall tiles at Cambridge Regional College; the Unilever HQ, Colworth, where curved patterns were cut into carpet and vinyl sheet/tiles; a single unobstructed area of 800sq m ceramic tile floor for a warehouse in Newmarket.

A special project in the Cambridge site involved carpet tiles and inlaid marble in two prestige buildings in a complicated design featuring stainless steel inserts, to exacting tolerances, together with ceramic wall and floor tiles, to the value of over £200,000.

Like many flooring contractors Paul and Brian are frustrated by the unfairness of the retention system, the lack of adherence to the fair payment scheme, the increasing

bureaucracy surrounding H&S requirements and the fact that flooring contractors with non-CSCS compliant personnel are allowed on some sites.

'Building construction sites are inherently dangerous and we need H&S legislation, but it should be simplified, and properly enforced to ensure that only CSCS compliant floorlayers are allowed onto sites. It is far too easy for contractors who do not adhere to current legislation to undercut those who do.'

Brian now works three days a week and plans to reduce further later in the year. He has many memories of the industry particularly around export in the 70-80s.

'We worked in Gibraltar, Yemen and Libya. In a hospital in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, we laid flooring along one side of a corridor while patients lined the other side. Another time, at a military garrison, a floorlayer climbing stairs found himself looking down the barrel of a gun,' he says.

'Materials might take six weeks to arrive, and in some countries we had to allow for 20% to disappear enroute. North Yemen was the best for contractual management paying everything on time, including the retention which arrived exactly on the 365th day!'

When not working Paul enjoys sailing, while Brian pursues his hobbies of riding and horology.

'It was our reputation which enabled us to progress the company after the last recession,' says Paul, 'and that same reputation for high standards of work and service will carry us through these difficult times.'

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T: 01480 861199

www.neofloors.co.uk



Polyflor Kudos installed by Neofloors at Cambridge Regional College