

NEWS



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VOLUME 25 ISSUE 1

NEWS FOR THE MEMORIAL INDUSTRY

DON'T BE AN OSTRICH!

The memorial trade changes slowly, masons quite often pass skills down through the generations without significantly changing over time. It would be wrong though to think that this can last forever. When Cyril started work in 1930s, memorials were all hand cut with a relatively small range of materials available. Funeral directors provided funerals, memorial masons provided memorials and the councils and churches ran the cemeteries and graveyards. Over the last few decades funeral directors have gradually taken business away from the local masons but worse may be just around the corner.

We've covered the topic of local authorities selling memorials a few times over the last year or so but things are gradually coming to a head. On 12 March the memorial advisory board (MAB) organised a debate at the House of Commons to discuss local authority trading and how it was affecting local businesses. Whilst the debate focussed around the few authorities who are selling memorials the motion for the debate was much more wide ranging and covered any area where local authorities were competing with their tax and rate payers. We were asked by MAB to present the case on behalf of memorial masons so Rob prepared and presented a speech outlining the issues facing masons at the moment. Masons in NE



Lincs and Camden have been in competition with their local authorities selling memorials for a while now. This has already led to one mason being made redundant. It seems incredibly short sighted of councils to put local businesses under pressure in this way. Making just one person redundant has a significant cost to the government. Whilst employed, a person earning around £25k will contribute approximately £9k to the government in way of PAYE, NI contributions and VAT. If that same person is made redundant, instead of being a net contributor they become a net drain, costing the government £12k. That means it costs the government £21k for each person earning £25k that is made redundant. How many memorials would you have to sell to make a profit of £21,000?

All those figures however pail into insignificance should a business fail as a result of local authorities competing and taking their trade away from them. The loss of business rates, corporation tax, VAT and PAYE contributions would be significantly more than the figures above.

Local government is being pressured into cutting costs all the time. And depending on the election results it's likely to continue well into the next parliament. So authorities will continue to look for ways to supplement their income. The issue facing masons is not just that there is another player on the market though. We all face new tradesmen starting or expanding businesses in the local area. In the local area to us we have a number of competitors, including one situated right next door but the key difference is that private competitors generally compete on an equal footing. It can be argued that funeral directors have an advantage because they see the bereaved first but they only see their own customers first. Councils get information about all the deceased interred in their cemeteries. Councils also don't pay for their premises and they don't have to charge VAT. It certainly can't be described as a level playing field!

So what can we do about it? Unfortunately the council is perfectly within it's right to compete with local businesses. The Localism Act 2011 specifically allows councils to do anything that an individual can do; they could decide to open a sandwich shop on the high street if they felt it was worthwhile. There are legal requirements though. Councils should set up independent companies to trade at a profit, something not all councils seem to be doing but

these are just hoops and eventually councils will create a blueprint that will satisfy all the legal requirements. What we really need is for the Localism Act 2011 to be reviewed in light of the way local authorities are using the new powers.

In the Christmas newsletter we pointed you towards a standard letter written by NAMM that you could send to your local MP asking them to look into the unintentional effects of the Act. Thank you to all those that did but there is more we can do. Politicians are at the moment pre-occupied with making sure they have a job after May and aren't particularly interested in investigating our concerns right now. Once they have a job sorted for the next five years we might have a window of opportunity to get them to revisit the Act. In our next newsletter (which will be produced just before the NAMM Tradex show) we will include a letter you can use to send to your local MP. If enough people act and petition their local MPs then there is a chance we can get them to investigate if the current situation was an intended consequence of the act or whether councils are exploiting an unintentional loophole in it. Whilst our presentation at the House of Commons might have been preaching to the converted, it did shine a light on how we move forward. We need to scream and shout as loud as we can after the election because if we don't we could experience a severe decline in the memorial trade in the UK. We can't afford to bury our heads in the sand about this, we need to do something about it now!

NAMM TRADEX

It's trade show year for the funeral industry with 3 potential shows you might want to visit. The Natural Stone Show in Excel caters more towards the slab industry with significant focus on the use of natural stones in the building trade. In the recent past there was only one trade show for memorial masons, the National Funeral Exhibition was jointly promoted by NAFD and NAMM as a show for the entire trade. In recent times,

the amount of support from the memorial trade diminished to the point that it is no longer viable as a supplier to exhibit there. It became a vicious circle where wholesalers started to drop out meaning less masons came to the show and gradually most suppliers stopped exhibiting. This year NAMM have broken away from the NFE and are hosting their own trade show. The show is specifically aimed at the memorial trade, in fact, only memorial masons are expected to be attending. Wholesalers and suppliers have embraced the new NAMM Tradex which will make it well worth visiting. Our next newsletter will contain all the details as well as information on what you might expect to find on our stand.

ONE SHOT PAINT SYSTEM

Most people just think of One Shot paints as enamel paints for lettering or design work but in fact there is a complete One Shot paint solution available which starts with primers and ends with UV resistant sealants and one shot specific brush cleaners. Whilst we don't need to use the primers when painting onto stone, there is a thinning agent that allows you to thin the paints by 10% for use with



an airbrush; normal thinning agents are too strong and interfere with the properties of the paint itself. As you are probably aware, you can mix paints together but be wary of mixing the reds with white to produce pink – it reduces the durability of the paint. When looking for darker shades of a specific colour, use the tinting black paint which can also be used with white to produce differing shades of grey. The UV resistant sealant has a couple of useful purposes, it can be used to seal

lettering enamels but can only be applied 3 days after the painting was originally done. It's also possible to apply the UV seal over gold leaf to give it a bit more life expectancy, it doesn't dull the gold and is available in a spray can for easy application. The final product is a colour restorer, applying the restorer over lettering enamels brings back the glossy finish and brightens jaded colours.

PRODUCT LINES

One of the things we hear far too frequently is "I didn't realise you sold those". We try and highlight any new products via our newsletter but maybe we don't tell you enough about all the different products we sell. For those that didn't know, here is an incomplete list!

Stencil tapes – Anchor – StoneMask – Barrier – Tesa – Overblast tapes – Application tape – **Precut Stencil Service** – **Stencil Supplies** – Stencil knives – Goldmann resharpenable – Xacto craft – Swann Morton scalpels – Border line/Compass cutter – Stencil pickers – **Stencil Plotters** – Graphtec – Summagraphics – **Stencil Lettering and Design Software** – Signum 2D – Signum 3D – Corel – **Plotter Supplies** – Sign vinyl – Plotting paper – Replacement cutting blades – Smart knives – Pens – Cut-off blades – **PhotoBlast** – PhotoBlast systems – Letralite kits – Standard film – Spray adhesive – Pressure sensitive film – Rayzist – Vellum – Magic black intensifier – Burnishing tools – Ready to blast stencils – One-off stencil service – **Ground Anchors** – Peg and Tube – LockDown – **Stainless Steel Fixings** – Smooth dowels – Threaded dowels – Bolt kits – Cement-free kerb fixings – **Resins and adhesives** – FirmaFix – FirmaBond – **Flower Containers** – Bronze flower holders – **Bronze Ornaments** – Strassacker – Plein Bronze – Bronces Jorda – **Gilding Products** – Gold leaf – Gilding size – Size brushes – Gilding Mops – Cuttlefish – **Lettering Paints** – Enamels – Acrylics – Two part long life – MonuPaint – One Shot – Artist brushes – Air brushes – **Stone Cleaning and Protection Products** – Stain removal – Rust – Algae – Candle wax – Customer cleaning kits – StoneClear – **Chippings** – **Sandblast Machines** – Goldmann – Hodge Clemco – PAB – Basic blast pots – Dustless recycling units – Automatic sandblast units – Microblasters – **Sandblast Machine Servicing** – **Sandblast Nozzles** – Boron carbide – Tungsten carbide – Ceramic – All makes of machines – **Blasting Abrasive** – Aluminium oxide – Virgin – Reclaim – Sintered – **Blast Cabinet Supplies** – Cabinet glass protection – GlassClear – Fine mesh – Filter bags – Armhole sleeves – **Spares for Lindsey Blast Pots** – **Personal Protection** – Blasting gauntlets – Air-fed helmets – Blast capes – **Diamond Core Drills** – Standard wall – High speed thin wall – Water chucks – Flex drills – **Diamond Polishing Pads** – Three step – Seven step – Felt pads – Backing pads – Flex angle grinders – **Lifting Equipment** – Gantries – Lifting handles – Suction tables – Suction pads – Scissor grabs – **Setting Out** – Waterproof crayons – Paint pens

Hope you had your glasses handy!