

## Meet the industry's new ambassadors



### Graham Stone, Stonehouse Property Care

Stonehouse Property Care has grown from a husband-and-wife, one secretary, one operative start-up to an 18-person team in 15 years. The Henley-based company is now a leading expert in the specialist field of waterproofing, flood control, damp-proofing and timber decay. It operates within an area from the South Coast to Birmingham, although if a project requires their expertise they travel further afield and even abroad. The company works both as a sub-contractor and directly for homeowners. Graham himself has a BSc in Timber Technology and 30 years' industry experience.

#### People

The company has a number of loyal long-serving employees. When recruiting new staff, Graham looks for key qualities: "We will take a person through our in-house training process, but we also look for personality. Our HR consultant or my wife Lucy will meet them – the priority is, would they work to our high standards, fit in with our company ethos and would we be totally comfortable with them representing us in front of to every property owner."

Alongside its own in-house training, the staff regularly attend Property Care Association courses. It also develops individual staff expertise, with one foreman taking a surveying qualification and earning the Property Care Association 'Student of the Year' award in the process. In 2015 the firm won the Property Care Association award for National Contractor of the Year.

#### Business

The Stonehouse logo isn't the usual corporate emblem. Instead, a child's drawing of a bright pink house was adopted giving the message that they are approachable and that every property has its uniqueness. Graham's graphic designer wife worked on the company's branding, but enlisted the help of their then four-year old daughter to draw the house. It proved to be a simple but effective solution, says Graham. "It worked well for us because it gave us impact straight away. We carry it on our vans and uniforms. I believe the image has helped us greatly – when a customer asks about it, we can tell the story behind it."

Graham is selective about accreditation schemes. He says, "There are so many accreditation bodies around, many unselectively raising money from the internet. We believe TrustMark does the best job of any in filtering the most reputable contractors because it is independent, it is not a commercial organisation and genuinely offers help to the customer."

The company's website, which is currently being updated, predominantly serves to reassure customers. Graham says, "We get most of our work through reputation and recommendations – we have stopped advertising."

The company has evolved its business systems from those Graham has used in the past, with processes being increasingly digitized. The company is about to introduce iPads on site for operatives. "That will be the next step forward, it will improve communication between the office and our customers" says Graham.

#### Customer service

Stonehouse's fully qualified and experienced surveyors visit the property, inspect, diagnose and formulate quotations in full consultation with the customer. Once accepted, a dedicated Contract Administrator handles the timing and progress of each project. All operatives are directly employed and arrive at site with the instruction to treat each property as if it was their own home. Disruption is kept to a minimum with the emphasis on courtesy and efficiency. "Details like punctuality, floor protection, freshly washed dust sheets make a difference to all households undertaking structural works." The company takes a very firm line on the use of radios, with no smoking or poor behaviour on-site. Any waste from the firm's activity is returned to its own office skip for responsible recycling and disposal. Waste plastic waterproofing membrane is collected from the office by manufacturers when they make deliveries as part of an environmentally conscious commitment.

The company's feedback procedure rectifies any concerns swiftly. Graham says: "We do not leave customers with any doubt that they have been treated fairly and professionally. Very often people come to us after having a bad experience elsewhere. I know our honesty and quality of work is the foundation of our reputation." Customers receive a 10-Year Guarantee as an industry standard, so the company is in a continuing relationship with its clients.

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