



## A century of heritage



**Andrew Crispin** reveals how the Walter Lilly construction company has built a first-class reputation for stunning work.

BY LORNA COWAN

When you've been trusted to construct the 7th July Memorial in London's Hyde Park, a poignant tribute to the 52 people who lost their lives during the 2005 bomb attacks in the capital, you know your client has been impressed by your reputation and portfolio. And for construction company Walter Lilly, who undertook the project, it was an honour.

'We are particularly proud of the 7th July Memorial,' says Andrew Crispin, Managing Director of Walter Lilly, the London-based company he has worked for since 1984. 'It was touching to be asked to do the work. As a company we're employed to carry out one-off projects to the highest possible quality standards and that's always an honour. Every project is different and holds unique challenges, the successful resolution of which gives all of us involved a level of satisfaction that is indescribable. It is very satisfying to build something well.'

### Early days

Since Walter Lilly was established 92 years ago, the company has been responsible for constructing and renovating many world-class properties. Today it's a £75 million business, carrying out between 10 and 15 projects at any given time.

'The company was founded by Walter Gent Lilly back in 1924, a plumber who also enjoyed a bit of gambling. He won a builder's yard in Westminster in a card game,' Andrew reveals. 'From plumbing and then some painting and decorating, the business grew into a wider construction offering, and by the 1950s, when the second generation Lilly took over, the company was thriving and involved in some very large and high-profile projects of the time, including the complete refurbishment of the Café Royal and the conversion of London's Hippodrome.'

Throughout Walter Lilly's history, the company has always operated as a specialist contractor, working on many of London's listed buildings and buildings of historic interest. 'For the last 20 years, we have focused our attention on the high-quality residential market in Central London, country residences in the Home Counties and science projects for pharmaceutical companies, universities and colleges,' says Andrew. 'Our specialism in these markets means that our customers can expect a premium service from our highly experienced and long-serving staff, whose absolute focus is the delivery of a first-class product.'

Walter Lilly has certainly made its mark and has an unrivalled track record in the high quality residential sector.

The company has carried out the complete restoration of some of London's most prestigious private residences with addresses in Belgravia, Mayfair, Knightsbridge and Kensington. From refined classic opulence through to cutting-edge contemporary design, Walter Lilly caters for every client's need and their desire for perfection and splendour.

'We have our own in-house temporary works engineering department, which is a significant USP for the business, as we can confidently take on the most challenging structural alteration schemes and complex basement construction and then finish them to the highest standards,' Andrew explains. 'Our long standing in this market means we have forged very close working relationships with the country's finest craftsmen and this means we can assure our clients of a quality that is second to none.'

The high standard of construction projects completed by Walter Lilly has not gone unnoticed, with the company having recently been voted *Building* magazine's Contractor of the Year (under £300m). They were also involved in the conversion of Newport Street Gallery, a private gallery in Vauxhall where three listed buildings are now impressively flanked by new buildings at either end. The Gallery building went on to win the Royal Institute of British Architects' Stirling Prize 2016. 'It is the company's staff who I am most proud of,' smiles Andrew. 'The satisfaction of our clients, and any awards we win, are only a reflection of the efforts of our hard working and talented team.'

Around 150 staff are directly employed by Walter Lilly. Andrew, himself, walked straight out of the school gates and into the business 33 years ago. 'I had several interviews to join construction companies,' he recalls. 'However, I really liked the gentlemen who interviewed me at Walter Lilly so I started here.' The average length of service among staff is nearly 10 years, an impressive statistic in a notoriously transient industry. 'We must be doing something right as an employer,' Andrew continues. 'Our experienced and dedicated staff are leaders in their various fields of site



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management, surveying, design management, M&E services management, planning and estimating. Walter Lilly is a company that focuses on quality of service and quality of product. To do this we have to employ the best staff in the market, who are all at the top of their game and who all share the culture of the business.'

### Team training and development

Thinking of the future, the company invests heavily in training and development and has supported graduates from Loughborough University, students of construction engineering management and quantity surveying, for the past 18 years. 'We have sponsored over 25 students, many of whom have taken and still hold positions of responsibility within the organisation. It is particularly pleasing that our first ever sponsored Loughborough student, Chris Butler, is now a Board Director.'

The construction company is also a member of the 5% Club, an industry-led campaign focused on driving momentum into the recruitment of apprentices, trainees and sponsored students. 'Joining the Club formalises our commitment to ensure that, year on year, a minimum of 5% of our staff are trainees, apprentices or sponsored students. In 2017 we will see the third group of Walter Lilly trainees and graduates fly to Swaziland for two weeks to join the Build A Future programme, run by the organisation All Out Africa.'

Walter Lilly sponsors the trip and the team assists with the construction of building projects to support the many orphaned and vulnerable children in the local community of the Ezulwini Valley, near Lobamba. 'As well as an





opportunity to focus their energy on a community project and to put their construction knowledge to good use, the trips have been a humbling experience,' says Andrew. 'They also have had a profound effect on the working relationships and friendships amongst our junior workforce.' That same workforce participates in various charitable events, with an

impressive £65,000 being raised by the company and its staff in 2016. People sign up for sponsored cycle rides, marathons and walks, and Walter Lilly supports Operation Christmas Child. 'We have done so for the last 11 years,' Andrew tells us. 'Over 350 gift-filled shoeboxes have been donated by staff in that time.'

It was only in October 2016, however, that Walter Lilly became a member of The Guild of Master Craftsmen. As Andrew states, at first the company thought it was an individual trader's association. 'I now know that's not the case, so we recently applied for membership of The Guild because we felt that carrying the badge of membership would set us apart from others. It would add further to the confidence of our clients that in employing Walter Lilly they are assured a quality product.'

He continues, 'A lot of our clients are single-project clients, who live overseas, high net-worth individuals who are considering buying a home in and around London. They conduct much of their searching for constructors and people to trust to do their work on the web. For me, it was important to distinguish ourselves from other builders. I think that being accredited to The Guild does that for us. Having that emblem makes a huge difference.'<sup>GA</sup>



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