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Brian Carr

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Brian Carr, previously a director of John Carr Liverpool Limited.

Brian was a staunch supporter of the UK factory-produced mortar industry. In the 1970s he was a founding member of the Mortar Producers Association, today known as MPA Mortar and recently attended the association's 50th annual lunch as a past chairman. He worked hard for the association, always remaining cheerful and was an active supporter of its aims and objectives.

He will be sadly missed by his friends and colleagues in the building and construction industries where he was well liked and respected for his sound, straight-forward advice, humour and kindness.

Chairman of the MPA Mortar executive committee, Stuart Russell, said: 'Brian was a proper gentleman of the industry, I always found his manner open and welcoming and he was always keen to offer support and advice to anyone in need.'

His presence and personality will be sadly missed. Our thoughts go out to his family at this time.

A boost for the training of bricklayers

The future of bricklaying has received a major boost this autumn with the opening of two apprentice training schemes, the Lee Marley Training Academy and a fourth training hub by NHBC.

A collaboration between Lee Marley Group and London South Bank University combines the state-of-the-art training facilities at London South Bank Technical College with a bespoke brickwork apprenticeship programme created and delivered by brickwork contractor Lee Marley's own in-house training team.



Lee Marley's training manager, Christian Hatherall-Good (left), opens the Lee Marley Academy with group director of apprenticeships, London South Bank University, Sammy Shummo.

The contractor's chief executive officer (CEO), Lee Marley, underlined at the academy's opening the importance of apprentices to his company as well as the construction industry as a whole. Highly skilled apprentices trained in the latest products, techniques, and materials are essential to be able to meet the high standards expected by main contractors and to give young people fulfilling careers.

The NHBC training hub is based at Bransholme, Hull and works in partnership with EN:Able Futures, a flexi-job

apprenticeship provider and part of Efficiency North Holdings. The hub will train 50 apprentices all year round to qualify in as little as 18 months. The fully equipped facility will provide them with a realistic working environment and an initial focus on bricklaying.

NHBC CEO, Steve Wood, speaking at the opening, said: 'Bricklaying is at the heart of housebuilding and a hugely important skill. An ageing workforce means we must find ways to encourage more people to come into housebuilding, with bricklaying being an excellent pathway into a rewarding and well-paid career.'



Opening the NHBC hub at Bransholme, Hull: left to right, CEO Efficiency North Holdings, Lee Parkinson; NHBC CEO, Steve Wood; and, regional managing director, Gleeson Homes, Wayne Sutton.

Other NHBC hubs are at Tamworth, Newcastle and Cambridge.



MPA Mortar producer member, Watts Mix, is supporting work at the Bransholme NHBC hub.

CPI on school wavelength



Former radio station is now a school.

CPI Euromix dry mortar was integral to the transformation of a derelict First World War radio station into a modern secondary school for more than 1,000 pupils.

The £39m project saw Rugby International Radio Station, a grade II-listed transmitter building in Warwickshire, repurposed as Houlton School, which opened its doors to its initial intake of 180 Year-7 youngsters in September 2021.

The 20-acre site's regeneration, which was carried out by Morgan Sindall Construction on behalf of developer Urban & Civic, has already earned a clutch of industry awards. The latest was at this year's Brick Awards where Houlton School won best refurbishment. Judges acclaimed the restoration as 'unique' and 'exciting', with special mention given to the school's distinctive brick campus in 'carrying the heritage of the radio station into the future'.

Speaking of the award, CPI commercial manager, Stuart Russell, said: 'We're immensely proud to have played a part in this historic building's superb transformation. It's fully deserving of the accolades that have come its way. For us as a dry mortar specialist, the Houlton School refurbishment's win at the Brick Awards was particularly pleasing. Congratulations to all those involved in this exceptional project'

CPI's involvement with the project amounted to supplying brickwork contractor, Caxton Builders, with its high-performance dry mortar for the school's all-brick campus. A total of 360 tonnes of CPI's E181 med-buff mortar was delivered to the school site from its Bilston manufacturing plant. The silo mortar arrived fully mixed and ready to install. This minimised on-site labour times, leading to a cost-effective installation that enhanced the project's sustainable credentials due to the relatively small mileage involved in the mortar's delivery.

New mortar attack data sheet

A new technical data sheet covering the effects on mortar of freeze/thaw and sulfate attacks is being developed by the MPA Mortar technical committee.

The data sheet, number 25 in a series downloadable from the MPA Mortar website, will explain mortar can be subject to attack by both freeze/thaw cycles and sulfates. It will stress that use of good quality materials and a mix design that is appropriate for the particular exposure conditions should ensure excellent durability and good resistance to both attacks.

Temperature factors will be covered. Masonry construction on site should stop when air temperature falls below 3°C, unless the mortar temperature can be maintained at a minimum of 4°C until it has hardened. Working at a lower temperature means that the characteristics of the mortar may change with longer-term consequences.

The need to keep an eye on the weather will be underlined. Protection against rain, snow and frost is essential for all newly erected masonry and masonry under construction,

as the mortar will harden and gain strength more slowly in cold weather. If this is not done, water in the mortar and masonry units could freeze causing a loss of bond or joint spalling and disintegration.

Mortar stored during prolonged bad weather should be protected and frozen mortar should be discarded.

Mortar sulfate attack needs three elements in place for it to be generated: a continuous ingress of water; a source of sulfate; and the tri-calcium aluminate in cement. With all three present, a chemical reaction takes place between the sulfate in solution and the tri-calcium aluminate, which forms an expansive product called ettringite. This is what causes the mortar to crumble, expand and crack, affecting durability and giving rise to the horizontal cracking appearing within mortar joints and the expansion of the mortar causing disruption and bowing of the brick or blockwork.

Sources of sulfate in construction can include salts in clay bricks, ground conditions or a heavily polluted local atmosphere.

Sulfate attack of mortar is rare but can be expensive to remedy as sulfation can cause spalling, degradation and ultimately failure of the mortar. As with preventing freeze/thaw attack, stopping bricks and blocks becoming saturated is essential, as is the need for good design and workmanship.

MPA Mortar aims to publish the new data sheet early in 2024.



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MPA Mortar is part of the Mineral Products Association, the trade association for the aggregates, asphalt, cement, concrete, dimension stone, lime, mortar and industrial sand industries.