

THE craft of cutting and dressing stone is about as old as civilisation; a Roman stonemason would have little to learn for his 21st century English counterpart. That's if he could find one.

Despite having more than six million Pre-1914 First World War buildings to maintain, there's a chronic shortage of skilled masons, which make Marcus Pond and Andy Oxer, directors of Newmarket-based Spectrum Stone, busy men.

They formed the company five years ago, catering for all types of stonework and have worked on, among others, King's, one of the most famous of the University of Cambridge's colleges carrying out essential repairs to the Gothic screen wall designed by architect William Wilkins 172 years ago.

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Inside the home they produce hand-carved fireplaces, stone flooring and bathrooms. As much time is concentrated on their other speciality – granite kitchen worktops – finished to a high gloss using the electric 110v water-fed UXF 4R SUHNER power tool, taking diamond impregnated pads up to a 6,000 grit.

Nothing is outsourced says Marcus adding: "Finishing is a very important issue; worktops and granite give you a one-off look, because every piece of granite is different. We wet polish as opposed to dry because you don't get the same finish from dry polishing. At the end of the day it's about customer satisfaction."

Marcus is a banker mason who shapes each cut stone into the geometrical forms required by a design, often these days using machine tools. He can produce anything from a plain stone with a simple chamfer, or ionic capital carving.

"Stone carving is not for everyone. You need an eye, a feel for stone, passion and lots of patience. Sometimes you can get



lost in a shape. You need to stand back, go and have a coffee. Think about it," he adds.

Sadly, part of the stone restorer's work today is making good previous botched repairs; from the early 1900s into the 1970s many stonemasonry firms used cement to carry out repairs. The problem with that says Marcus is that cement is so strong and not flexible, unlike traditional lime mortars.

"Mortars and joints have to be breathable and also flexible to an extent to allow for any movement that may occur in future.

"Many people think we just make grave stones. What I find funny about that is that wherever you go,

whatever city you're in is built predominantly from stone."

Should deteriorating material be replaced?

"It's a fine line," admits Marcus, pictured above. "With conservation you are masking a problem. The original shape is gone. Put a new stone in and you've got another 100 years in front of you."

With 14 years experience, Marcus has worked on pretty much every college in Cambridge ... Clare, Jesus and Trinity Wolfson and King's; other projects have included the Bobby Robson Memorial in Ipswich and Bury St. Edmunds Cathedral in Suffolk.

They'd been building their cathedral in fits and starts since the late

1950s, having been thinking about it since 1914 when the Church of England decided to make Suffolk into a diocese and gave it a cathedral on the cheap by upgrading a parish church.

Five years ago, the extraordinary moment arrived, the protective sheeting was removed, 25 miles of scaffolding poles dismantled to reveal the cathedral's brand new 150-foot perpendicular Gothic tower and Marcus was one of 10 stonemasons who helped piece together the intricate stone carvings with only millimetres to spare between the blocks.

"It was like dealing with an enormous jigsaw puzzle, mixing lime mortar to join them," he says.

## STRAIGHT TO THE POINT

WE all like efficiency and high reliability from our electric tools and they don't come any better than the UXF 4-R which is used with flexible diamond pads and backing pads to grind and polish natural stone, granite, marble and glass.

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Comparison with other power tools based on power input/output values shows Suhner machines to be in the highest category.

Practicality sums up everything that Suhner has achieved with its UXF 4-R which has a spindle waterfeed for cool grinding and lock-button for fast wheel change

