

FACE TO FACE



Ketley Brick and Dreadnought Tiles are longstanding names in the building industry. Owned by the Davenhill family, the business manufactures 'Class A' Engineering bricks, clay pavers, quarry tiles and clay roof tiles from its single factory in Dudley in the West Midlands, where it has operated continuously since 1805.

Dreadnought tiles is known primarily for their naturally burnt clay colours, which are made without artificial stains, whilst Ketley's Class A Engineering bricks are said to represent "the ultimate in durability" due to their low water absorption and high crushing strength.

All of the firm's products are made from its own reserves of Etruria Marl clay, enabling it to control and maintain "a consistently high quality" throughout the manufacturing processes.

PBM speaks with Alex Patrick-Smith, Managing Director of Ketley Brick and Dreadnought Tiles.

Q How did you get into the industry and to your current position?

A My career has been unconventional. I started in the banknote industry working for a security paper manufacturer, selling to Central Banks around the world. I then moved into digital post-production, working initially for a manufacturer of special effects computers in Film and TV, before setting up a pan-European post-production business.

I came into this family business initially on the marketing side and then was lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time when the owners were ready to hand over to the next generation.

Q How do you feel the industry has changed in recent years?

A During the 12 years I have been involved in the sector, we have faced the deepest recession of the last 50 years. Although the industry has emerged leaner and more efficient, brick and tile manufacturing is now concentrated into a few multinational companies, with only a handful of small independents surviving and prospering.

More regulation has meant that the cost of doing business has gone up. However, this is less of an issue now that the market is buoyant, the industry is financially healthier and builders,

developers and architects increasingly value the benefits of using traditional clay brick and tile.

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Q Which individual has influenced you most in your career?

A Since joining the company, I have been greatly influenced by Richard Davenhill, who was the Managing Director of the business for 40 years. He has passed onto me the importance of thinking long-term and putting away in the good times in order to survive the tough times. His wise counsel and support continues to be invaluable.

Q What has been the biggest challenge so far?

A Apart from surviving the recession, the need to evolve and develop the company for the future is a constant challenge. We have secured the clay reserves to see us long into the future and this has given us the confidence to make the big investments required to take the business forward.

Q What has been the highlight of your career to date?

A During the past five years, we have diversified into the manufacture of quarry tiles and brick slips and seeing how this investment has prospered is a source of pride. We have also developed the export side of our business, selling our products to New Zealand, Australia and South Africa as well as across Europe.

Q Where do you see yourself in five years' time?

A We are looking to develop the next generation of management, so I hope that my role will evolve into one of supporting them as they take on more responsibility and run the business in the future.

■ For more information on Ketley Brick and Dreadnought Tiles, circle readerlink 101