



# 'Mortar' the point

**Professional Builder's Lee Jones meets a builder who is doing his level best to save time on bricklaying.**

**A**t 72, septegenarian builder, Kevin Hollowed can't quite tear himself from the tools and is, in fact, devoting his spare time to supplying a time saving device to the trades. "I'm a general builder and over the years I've found it very difficult to source bricklayers for some of the smaller jobs," explains the proprietor of a now 35 year old concern, Oakdale Buildings. "We're a company that specialises in domestic maintenance and improvement. With things like dwarf walls we often ended up doing them ourselves but it's obviously paramount that the finish is still as professional as it can be."

The Harrogate-based builder was faced with just such a scenario, when he won a job that involved building a long garden wall, and it was then that the idea for the Mortar Joint Gauge was born. The skill in brickwork is keeping the courses plumb and level, and the key to that is accurately maintaining the depth of the bed joints. Kevin maintains that any competent builder can pick up his invention and do just that, and hopes to introduce it to apprentices.

"I've been talking to colleges about using the Mortar Joint Gauge as a teaching aid but in truth, it doesn't matter

how experienced you are, it will still speed up the process for time served bricklayers because, once you've set the Gauge, it stays at that level. It's simply a question of measuring your brick or block. If that is, for instance, 65mm, you would then set the gauge for 75mm. The device is then clamped to your spirit level, start laying bricks and you'll inevitably be left with a 10mm bed joint.

Like many a tradesman turned inventor

the path to market has been a protracted one. Kevin's initial idea was some ten years ago, in fact, and since then he's been perfecting various prototypes on his own building projects. "In truth I wasn't aware of just what's involved in launching



*The inventor of the Mortar Joint Gauge, Kevin Hollowed*



## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

With the Mortar Joint Gauge, set the gauging rod to suit the depth of the brick or block you are laying, plus your mortar bed joint.



Fasten the Mortar Joint Gauge to your spirit-level before you start and ensure the base you are working on is level.



Spread the mortar for your first course and set your brick, and measure with the gauging rod.



On the base and over the brick, tap the brick down until it shows the brick is level.

## SPECIAL REPORT

### INVENTORS' CORNER



Continue this process every time you lay the bricks. When you are building with 10mm corner bed joints, if you are using 65mm bricks, set your Mortar Joint Gauge to 75mm to establish the mortar thickness.

a product in terms of time and cost," admits Kevin. "The patents can be a painful process, but finding the best way to manufacture is down to trial and error. We initially opted for an injection moulded plastic product, and had to have the moulds made for them in order to produce the tool, but when we trialled

them on site we found that we couldn't securely clamp the Gauge to the spirit level. That meant going back to the drawing board and coming up with an aluminium solution instead."

So has that journey been worth making? Kevin believes that he has a tool that bricklayers and general builders

everywhere can take advantage of: "I've used the tool for up to seven years on site now, and I can't find any faults, and even some of the experienced bricklayers that I have given it to can see the potential in it."

*For further information on the Mortar Joint Gauge use the reader enquiry number 138*