

Surveying a rewarding career

Work continues to be busy but fulfilling, reflects the winner of the 2018 RICS Young Building Surveyor the Year award

Jonathan Wright

A career as a building surveyor is rewarding in itself: each day brings new and varying challenges, making it a fascinating occupation that requires you to grow and develop.

Those who know me well claim that I was interested in buildings long before I even knew what a surveyor was – a much-loved book of home repairs that I grabbed from my buggy still sits proudly on my bookshelf at home alongside my copy of *Harry Builds a House*.

Having graduated during the global financial crisis, however, I was left unsure whether I would be able to find my first job and start a career in surveying – so you can imagine how pleased I was, a decade on, to win the 2018 RICS Young Building Surveyor of the Year award.

When I first heard I had been shortlisted, I was delighted just to have my name and achievements published alongside a talented group of capable young surveyors. Winning on the night was totally unexpected, and the numerous congratulatory messages I received from clients, colleagues and friends were positive reminders of what a great profession ours is. The judges' comments on my selection were also highly encouraging: they recognised my achievements and my client focus, and that I am already giving back to the profession.

We all strive to achieve the best for our individual clients, but the endorsement for giving back to the profession feels particularly personal, reflecting my appreciation for my early mentors. Grateful for the support they gave me in my early days through my work placement and the APC process, I am motivated to pay this back in what little ways I can.

I live and was educated in and around Cambridge, and it is to Bidwells – coincidentally, now my employer – that I owe my initial professional experience. The firm was able to offer me my

first taste of surveying in practice when it took me on for work experience shortly after starting university. Undertaking surveys and site visits confirmed my belief that this was an interesting career that I wanted to pursue, having chosen this path aged 14.

On leaving school I had ventured north to study at Sheffield Hallam University, enjoying both my degree course in building surveying and a year out on industrial placement, working in the university's own estates department, which began at the start of the recession in 2008. Although the department hadn't been my planned destination, I soon learned how fortunate I was: it provided a safe learning environment in which I could start putting my knowledge into practice ahead of my final year of study, after which I graduated with a first-class honours degree.

If finding a placement at the start of the recession was hard, finding a suitable job after graduating was near impossible; so I am grateful, too, to Carter Jonas, which provided further work experience, eventually leading to a role in its commercial team. Two years later I secured a post with Bidwells, working full-time as a building surveyor at last.

Since I joined the firm, I have been given the support needed to develop my skills, becoming chartered in 2014 and being offered further help in growing my career steadily since. I have also had access to a wide range of professional opportunities that both enhance my career and help repay some of the time invested in me: mentoring colleagues, joining the local RICS Matrics committee and being appointed as an APC assessor.

Core work

These opportunities have been very satisfying, but so too has been my core work as a surveyor. I have been fortunate to be involved



Cambridge Science Park, showing the new entrance extension

with some stimulating projects in recent years, for great clients. With our dedicated commercial and project management teams, for instance, I am privileged to take a lead building surveying role on many instructions for Trinity College, across the world-renowned Cambridge Science Park as it is redeveloped (see photo above and bit.ly/CamSciPk). This covers more than 185,000m² of office research and development space across a 60ha site. Bidwells has been involved with the site from inception in the early 1970s, and it offers a pioneering example of the kind of collaborative work that we undertake.

On the park there is always something to do, and I am usually advising on several jobs at once. Whether these be dilapidations and landlord and tenant works, simple repair or wholesale refurbishments, the tasks are never boring or repetitive. For instance, we have just finished an unusual project that involved upgrading the site-wide CCTV system and infrastructure, comprising more than 16km of duct and cable installations, which has been three years in the planning. This, alongside a new-build estate office and a comprehensive category A office refurbishment, extension and fit-out, has kept me busy recently. Over the next few months, I will be working on the demolition of the original phase of buildings on the site, and the team has further exciting instructions in the pipeline.

This year also sees the culmination of other projects begun in my five years of work at Bidwells, as we see the first of four aircraft hangar refurbishments with Marshall Aerospace Defence Group near completion. I started working on these as a graduate in the lead design role, taking the client through the initial feasibility stages and concept development. This continuity of work for a single client has been rewarding, enabling me to build stronger

ongoing relationships than is possible with shorter instructions. When the construction phase started, the role of the team was extended to take on the project management duties alongside the lead design. I now look forward to completing the first hangar as we ramp up operations, hoping to make a seamless switch to work on the second hangar later in the year.

Working in the city in which you grew up and still call home can be challenging at times. While it is exciting to be involved in the development of the built environment around you, the changes themselves overlay childhood memories of places you know well. But I am lucky to be working at Bidwells: although celebrating 180 years in business, it is today a modern, progressive firm offering an amazing, agile working environment. It has maintained its core client base, providing the opportunity to work with some of the oldest and most influential institutions and landowners in the area. This includes the University of Cambridge and many of the associated colleges, which seek to protect and enhance their surroundings and respect the heritage of the city I know and love.

I also enjoy working in the construction industry as it brings me into contact with a wide variety of people and entails collaborative working, which is stimulating. I'm proud to be involved in the Employers' Advisory Board at Sheffield Hallam University, too, which offers me the opportunity to travel back each year with colleagues and maintain relationships with my former lecturers – as well as meeting future surveyors and helping them find their way into the profession. Maybe one of them will themselves become a Young Building Surveyor of the Year.

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