

# There's no job too small for a man with big ambitions

**Tony McDonough** meets DAVID POOLE, managing director of McGoff & Vickers

LIVERPOOL building services firm McGoff & Vickers regularly takes on multi-million pound contracts – but it still refreshingly adheres to the no-job-too-small philosophy.

“We will handle jobs now worth around £2m,” said managing director David Poole. “But we still do call-outs for £54.60.”

However, now the company, which was founded in 1925 and specialises in most areas of electrical and mechanical installation, is keen to expand its horizons.

In decades gone by, McGoff & Vickers, which also has a base in London, has enjoyed a high profile in the city – perhaps higher than it is today.

It was responsible for the electrical engineering in some of the city's best-known buildings including the Adelphi Hotel and what was known as the Royal Insurance Building, recently renamed the Capital.

It also had contracts to work on every Roman Catholic school building in the country in the years following the Second World War.

Today it continues to trade successfully, turning over more than £7m. But Poole has ambitions to push that up to £10m and raise its profile once again.

A “six-figure” investment has now been made in the business introducing extra staff and new technology and the aim is now to widen the client base.

“We are basically an electrical contractor but we have diversified into things like security and fire systems and data services – in short, we will work on anything with wires in it,” said Poole.

“We do a lot of repeat work for existing clients but even some of them aren't aware of the full range of work that we do and we want to try to change that.”

“We have invested heavily in new systems because I think some of the ways we did things had become a little tired and old fashioned, and we are now in a very competitive industry.”

“The change has been a challenge for those employees who have been with us for many years. They have found some of the new technology difficult at first. But we are making sure



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people are getting trained and they are slowly getting the hang of things.”

Current clients include Pierhead Housing Association, Edge Hill University, the Office of National Statistics, Liverpool John Moores University, 20-20, Merseyside Police Authority, Anchor Housing, Liverpool Housing Trust, HSBC and Merseycare NHS.

The firm is just in the process of completing a £750,000 contract for Edge Hill University, working on its new Faculty of Health.

Poole added: “What we want to offer clients is a full building services package. We are currently running a pilot scheme from our London office looking at heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems.”

“We are now finding energy conservation is a huge issue for clients – people are worrying more and more about their carbon footprint – we are trying to promote ourselves as someone who can offer a service helping people to reduce their energy consumption.”

Poole, a 59-year-old father-of-two and “proud” grandfather-of-four, was born and brought up in Northampton. Career choice wasn't difficult.

“My father was an electrician so it was always going to be the case that I would be an

electrician,” he said. “I left school at 17 and started my five-year apprenticeship with a company called Pianoforte Suppliers. It had started off making piano strings – hence the name – but had branched out into making parts for cars.”

In all, Poole spent eight years at the firm learning all aspects of industrial electrical installation and at that time didn't have any ambitions further than to carry on learning his trade.

He then went to work for a company specialising in contract work to large automotive manufacturers in the south and the midlands.

He married for the second time at 29 and he and his wife, Claire, moved to London. At the same time, he went back to night school to study for high electrical engineering qualifications.

At around the age of 35, Poole applied for, and got, a job with McGoff & Vickers as a junior engineer. He had by this time started to take on more responsibility in his work and was now growing more ambitious. But taking the job meant relocating to Merseyside, something he was a little apprehensive about.

“Obviously, at that time, Merseyside had a lot of bad press – things like the Toxteth riots,” he said. “And the country was

## Q&A

**Age:** 59

**Highest educational qualification:** ONC in electrical engineering

**Biggest achievement:** Running a multi-million pound business

**Biggest regret:** That I didn't take up golf when I was much younger

**Best advice:** My father told me: “Become an electrician, lad.”

**Unfulfilled ambition:** To visit the Far East

still very much divided between north and south.

“But it was actually my wife who pushed me to take the job because she hadn't really settled in London.

“We didn't have that many friends other than those I knew through work and she felt it was time for a fresh start.”

So make the move he did and, thanks to the big difference in property prices between London and the North West at the time, was able to sell his modest home in the capital and buy a much bigger place up in Birkdale, near Southport.

He still lives there and as a keen golfer he is now in his element, with the area boasting some of the best courses in the country.

Poole settled in quickly to life

up north and things went well at the firm too.

He said: “You could say I started to shine. I was overseeing projects and I was getting a great deal of satisfaction from seeing things through from start to finish. The chairman said he had seen something in me so I was given more responsibility.”

“Going into management is not the easy transition. When you are ‘on the tools’ you think managers have it easy. You see them going for a drink with clients and you think that's an easy life but when you get here you realise it is not that simple.”

Now he is concentrating on driving both growth and diversification at the firm, but admits he is trying to teach himself to take a step back.

“Some clients like it that I take a personal interest in their projects. If they want me at a meeting at 9am on a Saturday morning, then usually I will have to go,” he added.

“But we do have a good team here and although I enjoy getting directly involved I am slowly learning to take a step back.”

“I do put in the hours but I think I also have a good work/life balance – although I'm not sure my wife always agrees.”

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