

# S Nicholson & Sons



We work passionately on local projects of all sizes



Managing Director Stephen Nicholson with his three sons

In the beginning, Stephen Nicholson had nothing. He left school at the age of 12 without being able to read or write and with no formal qualifications. At 16, he enrolled on a decorating course at the local college and was subsequently taken on as an apprentice by a nearby firm. Following completion of the apprenticeship, he used a £1,000 Prince's Trust grant to put a deposit down on a van and buy a few ladders. In 2008, Stephen incorporated S Nicholson Decorators – known now as S Nicholson & Sons – and the business has gone from strength to strength in the 11 years that have followed. He tells *The Parliamentary Review* more.

As the youngest of four children, I was always taught the value of family and enjoyed an excellent relationship with both my mother and father. It was with this philosophy in mind that I renamed the business S Nicholson & Sons after the birth of my second son – I want to keep the business in the family for generations to come.

Following completion of my apprenticeship, I built upon the skills I learnt at college in a working environment. Soon enough, members of the community asked me to undertake a number of small decorating projects over weekends. I had always wanted to own my own business, however, and after a good few of these side projects, commenced operations with a partner under the name of Premier Decor.

## FACTS ABOUT S NICHOLSON & SONS

- » Managing Director: Stephen Nicholson
- » Established in 2008
- » Based in Bishop Auckland, County Durham
- » Services: Bespoke decorating
- » No. of employees: 15
- » Turnover in 2017/18: £520,000
- » Stephen received £1,000 from The Prince's Trust in 2008 when he started the business – he used the money to buy ladders and put a deposit down on the van
- » [www.snicholsonandsons.co.uk](http://www.snicholsonandsons.co.uk)

“Although it may sound clichéd, we really do believe that no two jobs are the same”

## Standing strong – from 2008 to the present day

I set up S Nicholson Decorators in 2008 – right in the middle of the financial crisis, when construction and many other trades were experiencing a serious decline – after Premier Decor dissolved. Working alone from the outset with no other members of staff was a gamble, but I continued to win jobs around the local area.

The business has since grown to currently employ 15 staff, operate seven vehicles and generated an operating turnover of just under £500,000 in the 2017/18 financial year.

## Getting the right jobs

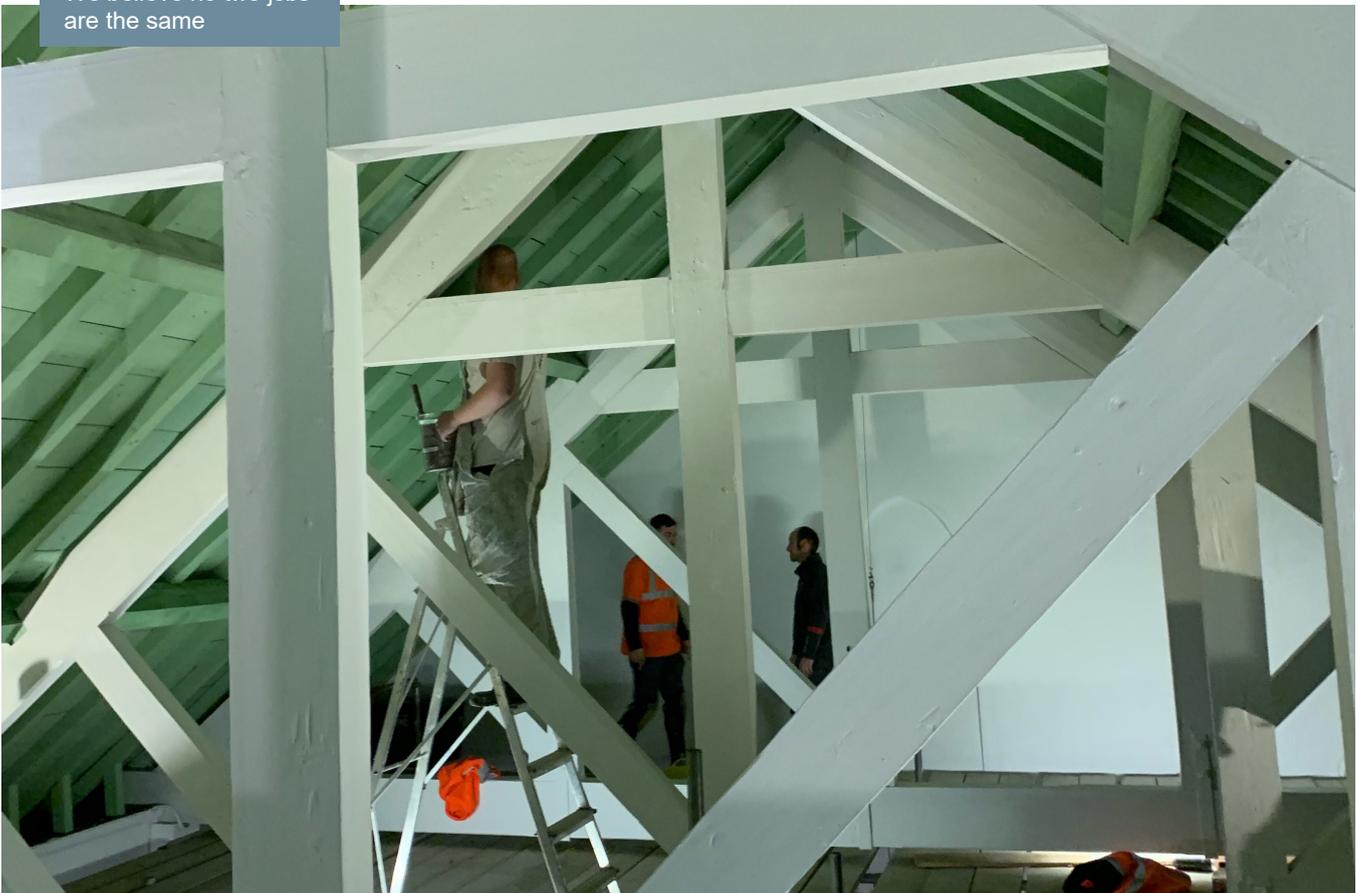
I pride myself in the fact that S Nicholson & Sons have never taken the easy route in terms of gaining contracts. We have been offered contracts from national housebuilding companies and local authorities to

decorate both new-build properties and renovate existing assets. My vision for the business, however, has always been to offer a bespoke service working directly with clients in order to satisfy their individual requirements. Although it may sound clichéd, we really do believe that no two jobs are the same.

I feel that this approach has helped position us as one of the leading decorating firms in the North East. Of course, the business wouldn't be in the position that it currently is without our excellent team. Everyone has been trained to the highest standards and all have consequently developed their skillsets by working on the bespoke projects we undertake.

I have never forgotten my roots; having started out on the journey as an apprentice before becoming a fully qualified decorator, I now liaise with local colleges to recruit new apprentices and help them in their future careers. I am proud to state

We believe no two jobs are the same



that many of them have now started their own small businesses in the local area and I stay in touch with all of them to offer advice and support when required.

## Raby Estates

One of our earliest successes was winning a contract with Raby Estates, where we undertook a variety of interior and exterior projects on small homes and outbuildings across the Teesdale area.

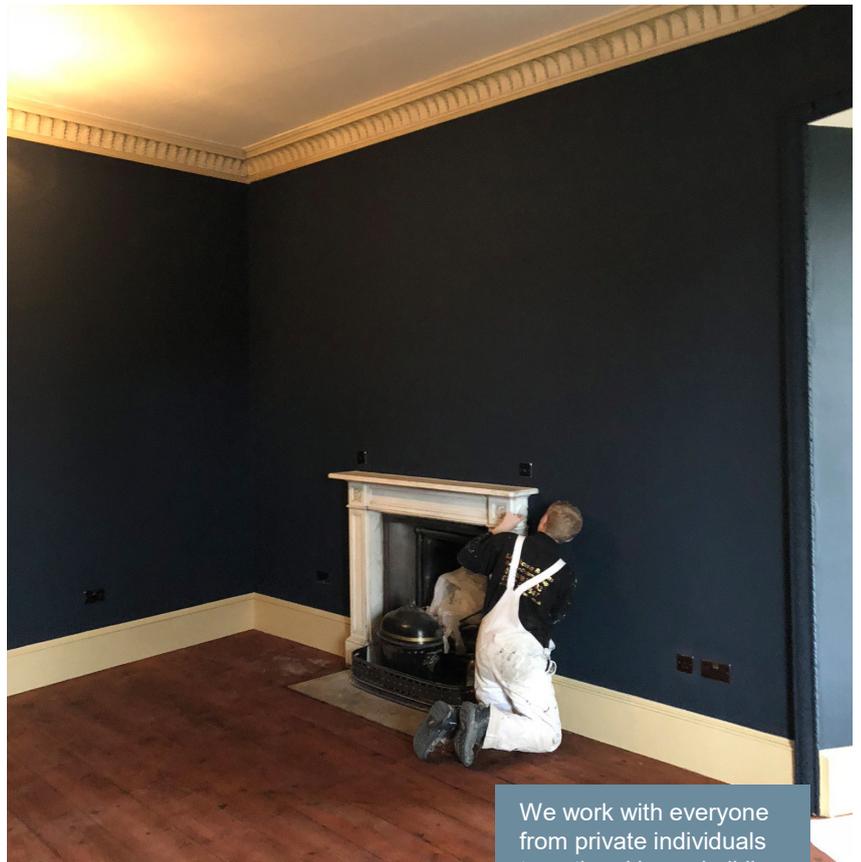
We soon won a contract decorating the magnificent 14th-century Raby Castle – home of lord Barnard and the jewel in the estate’s crown. Some of the properties within the Raby portfolio are listed buildings, and therefore any renovations must match the specifications of the initial construction.

The Raby Estates project exposed us to a variety of “new traditional” working practices using materials which are not only unique but also environmentally friendly. This is where I first gained experience working with lime and clay-based paints alongside other decorating materials and techniques with the aim of preserving the existing features of each building.

This project only allowed the business to develop further; since completing it, we have won a variety of similar heritage contracts for the restoration of various churches within the Diocese of Durham. These have ranged from small interior refurbishments through to larger-scale property overhauls.

## Keeping the business in the family

Of course, these projects do not simply come around on a daily basis and as such, our current project portfolio includes hotels, local and national businesses and individual homeowners.



We work with everyone from private individuals to national housebuilding companies and local authorities, and provide the same outstanding level of service every time

No job is too big or small for us and this continues to be a central part of our ethos.

Going forward, we would like to train more of our own staff and bring employees through that way. There is a skills shortage in our sector – as there is across British industry as a whole – and educating more leaders and skilled workers is something I feel very passionately about. This does not solely cover external apprentices – I want my own children to learn, develop and join the business in due time.

The name of the business is S Nicholson & Sons – being a father, my goal has developed and shifted to ensure that my children have the best start in life that they possibly can. I am grateful for the childhood I had and would not change a thing. One day, this business will be theirs, but only if they work for it in a way that suits our vision – I want them to ensure that the values and ethics that underpin our work only continue to do so.

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