

Private sector skills support: David Ball Construction Ltd at Perran Foundry, Cornwall

The former Perran Iron Foundry comprises a complex of listed buildings constructed between the late-eighteenth century and mid-nineteenth century as the foundry, which manufactured parts and machinery for the Cornish and global mining industry, prospered and expanded. The site, which lies between Truro and Falmouth, is within the Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape World Heritage Site, and four of the grade II* listed buildings – the Dry Sand and Green Sand Shop, Engineer's Shop, New Pattern Shop and Warehouse – are on English Heritage's Register of Heritage at Risk.

At its height, the Foundry was the principal supplier to most of the Cornish mining industry and employed 400 people, but it closed in 1879 when the industry fell into decline. Although it was subsequently used as a flour mill, the site closed for the last time in 1982 and fell into disrepair.

In 2005, the complex was bought by a private investor and discussions about its regeneration began. A mixed-use scheme was agreed, and in 2010, local company David Ball Construction Ltd was approached to undertake the work.

Founder David Ball has a strong interest and a wealth of expertise in repairing historic buildings, having worked on a number of historic properties in Cornwall. As a beneficiary of an apprenticeship scheme early in his career, for which he won a national award, David intended that the regeneration of Perran Foundry should help local construction students to develop skills through hands-on experience.



Learning traditional skills through the regeneration of Perran Foundry, Cornwall. Copyright: Toby Weller



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David Ball Ltd currently has six apprentices – three masons and three carpenters – at work at Perran Foundry, and runs regular training sessions at the on-site joinery workshop for full-time NVQ carpentry and joinery students from Cornwall College. Site manager Alan Rule, also a former Cornwall College apprentice, knows the value of involving

students in a long-term regeneration project: 'the apprentices see the job right the way through and get training in a lot of different areas, thus gaining in-depth knowledge and experience from timber framing and joinery to roof work and kitchen fixing. I try and pass all my experience on to them and get them involved, especially with restoring things the traditional way.'

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