

The Crumbling Concrete Challenge

Can any of you remember those far-off days when you could walk directly into the entrance of a large store and collect a trolley? Then you could jostle your way to the relevant aisle, peruse the many products on display, select exactly what you want and make your way to the till? Exciting news – those days are coming back!

I've had to wait longer than most as I'm classed as a 'vulnerable person'. Meanwhile, there's been Click and Collect. To the purchaser of DIY materials this has presented interesting challenges. Firstly, if you're not very practical like me, you can't easily judge what to buy just by viewing pictures on a website. I needed some clout nails and ended up buying ten times the quantity I needed, of nails the wrong length.

Secondly, there's been a nationwide shortage of ready-mix mortar. You can find it on many a store's website but usually there's none in stock. "Aha! I think I've found some!" I cry, only to read, in tiny type, 'Not Available for Click and Collect'. On some websites you have to try each of their stores individually whereas the Wickes site helpfully tries to find the nearest one where there is some in stock. Hence, we have done a tour called West Yorkshire By Wickes. On one occasion I could buy some mortar from them but only on Home Delivery, the cost of which was greater than that of the product. I was soooo desperate, I went ahead anyway.

Thirdly, paying for the stuff ain't straightforward. Wickes wouldn't accept my order because my mobile number was, so they told me, not a UK phone number...Nobody else seems to agree.

In last week's article I told you about the crumbling concrete base on which sits Dad's Wendy House as our kids call it. In usual Hearson style I'd prayed, 'Lord, what do I do?' I turned to chemistry for an answer and phoned Bostik. A polite young lady explained that...

"Well, Sir, we can't sell you anything that'll make bad concrete good. But we can recommend one of our products that'll make good mortar stronger. It's a latex resin mix called Cementone SBR. Screwfix stock it."

Well...it works. During those dry Spring weeks, I got busy chipping away the crumbs of loose concrete, a process that was unnervingly easy,

then rebuilt the areas using concrete blocks and souped-up mortar, to some of which I added pebbles. Finally, just before the weather broke, I coated the base with horrendously expensive magnolia paint.



In the depths of mortar-less despair, I thought I'd found an answer. If you didn't mind buying a 20 kg sack rather than a tub, a Blue Circle product was available. I'd added a pointing trowel to the order. Imagine my horror when I realised the mortar mix contained lime, which wouldn't work with my magic potion, SBR. Grrr... Then I remembered all the loose coping stones up and down my garden which "perhaps I ought to secure". This saw me braying loose mortar off the joints and learning to apply the contents of the bag, duly mixed with water, to fix the coping stones back in place *proudly using my*

brand new trowel. A fence post at the back of the garden had been straddled between two loose coping stones so after applying my mortar I had to buy new fixings and drill bits to make this sound.

Most days, I managed to restrain myself from diving into my morning DIY activities, until I'd enjoyed my devotional time. I listened to some podcasts by theologian Tom Wright in which he refers to Jesus' declaration,

"Behold, I make all things new." (Revelation 21 vs 5)

Tom Wright sees the work of Jesus as that of rescuing, restoring, renewing. The Gospels describe so well how he modelled the Coming of God's Kingdom as he interacted with people. And Tom sees potential in all noble human activity to reflect God's heart. My work of repairing damage and seeking to create a beautiful space has value in itself. But is it also a parable of the way Jesus comes to mend broken lives?

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