

BUILDER'S FRIENDLY FIX FOR PROPPING UP WALLS

Four years ago, Stephen Cheshire was running a small construction firm with his two nephews. Now he is about to start mass production of the Prop Pal needle clamp, a product that he invented. He talks to Master Builder about his journey

Stephen, a builder with 25 years' experience and a brickie by trade, first came up with the idea for his new product Prop Pal four years ago while mulling over an issue that he was increasingly facing on site.

He had noticed an architectural trend for forming new openings in walls, which required steel support beams to be hidden within the floor chamber creating a flush ceiling effect. Installing beams in this way means that temporary wall support must be provided above the floor chamber and under the floor joint.

After years of "putting needles through cavity walls using old pieces of steel and timber, then packing with slate followed by a prayer that it will be okay until the steel goes in" Stephen decided that there had to be a better way of doing the job.

The most common way of working has been to put needles up through the wall above the floor and put an Acrow prop on either side, but this means making holes in the ceiling and floor and the needles can be quite easily knocked.

"I was thinking there had to be something better out there. I had a look to see what is available and the research came back blank and I was gobsmacked that there was nothing out there that could do the job," explained Stephen, who is one of the stars of the FMB's new TV ad.



"I must have been mulling it over in my subconscious for some time because it was a bit of a eureka moment and I woke up one morning with the idea. It just came to me. I just jumped out of bed and grabbed a piece of paper and a pen and sketched it."

After making a model out of plywood, Stephen set about finding someone who could build a prototype Prop Pal for him out of steel.

The first one "didn't cut the mustard" so he went to somebody else and the product has been developed over time.

Stephen's thin steel frames can be passed through a hole in the wall from

the inside to the outside. Prop Pal is designed so that a builder's prop location into the needle is locked into position once it has been wound up. At the other end the swivel plate has four holes allowing it to be fixed to the floor boards securing its position. It has been proof tested to a safe load capacity of 1,500kg.

"The biggest benefit really is safety," explained Stephen. "It is a lot securer than anything else that is used. It is quite an efficient device, there is less disturbance to the walls and you don't have to damage the ceiling or wall.

"The props lock into position as well on the needles so they can't fall out. They can be screwed to the floor in the inside of the house and it isn't going to move."

Stephen applied for a patent for Prop Pal two years ago and sold his share in his family building company, a Member of the FMB, to concentrate on developing and marketing the product and to set up his company Prop Pal Ltd.

He has recently been working with a company in Oldham, Greater Manchester, to manufacture Prop Pal on a large scale, in order to meet the growing demand.

And what does the future hold for Stephen? Well, there could be a Prop Pal mark 2 in the making, but that is a story for another day.

For more information visit www.proppal.co.uk

