

U.K. Surveyors Gearing For Business Across The Channel

By DAVID YORKE

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Historically, chartered surveyors have gone into Europe over many years to do work for clients. This is particularly true of quantity surveyors, whose special discipline is largely without parallel in Europe.

The emergence of general practice firms — those specializing in property management, development and valuation — seeking to set up European offices as a logical extension of their United Kingdom practices is more recent and really dates from the early 1960's when the first negotiations to join the Common Market were in progress. After Genreal deGaulle's veto a few persisted and established their offices, notably in Brussels and Paris. Others maintained a watching brief, and some of these are now opening up as Britain seems to be nearing the point of joining.

The annual conference of the Royal Institution at Lancaster this year showed a lively interest in Europe from many divisions of the profession, including, in addition to those already mentioned, agricultural and mineral surveyors. They in turn were rightly encouraged by the attitude of the institution, which is pledged to the two objectives of selling its members' services within Europe and of giving information and assistance to members already engaged or seeking to engage in practice there. These aims are being vigorously pursued, not only by the secretariat but by committees drawing widely on members with first-hand experience of practice in Europe.

At first sight there is a splendid arrogance in the idea of taking one British profession and sending it out to win its spurs in Europe. Is there a corresponding expectation that European surveyors will be coming over here hoping to show how it should really be done?

In fact, few people seem to expect many Europeans to practise over here, but this is not really the point. The point is that we do have something special to sell in Europe for which there is no real counterpart. It is a profession of high repute qualified under one title to advise on virtually every aspect of real estate. There is no European profession with anything like this breadth of application. The Royal Institution, in its desire to further the interests of the profession if Britain joins the Common Market, has sought to define its sections, partly to show the Europeans what we do and partly to find the equivalent professions in other

European countries. Our own profession breaks down into 15 specializations: agricultural surveyor, auctioneer, building surveyor, estate agent, forestry manager, housing manager, hydrographic surveyor, land agent, land economist, land surveyor, minerals surveyor, quantity surveyor, town planner, urban estate manager, and valuation surveyor.

It is obvious that these overlap with many European specializations. Some, such as quantity surveyors, have no direct European counterpart, while building surveyors seem to be peculiar to the United Kingdom.

In practical terms the chartered surveyor who has set up in Europe finds that his British clients depend even more heavily on his advice than they do in this country. I can speak only for a general practice firm, but I have no doubt that other specializations have found this to be true. Apart from the general property skills which he has learnt, he has to educate himself to the particular circumstances of the country in which he is operating. He cannot acquire this knowledge through any ready-made educational course. It can only be done through a deliberate, intensive and expensive process of self-education.

It is probably right to say that most general practice firms who set up in Europe equipped themselves in the first case to act for British property developers who wished to extend their activities into the EEC countries. This activity is now building up with renewed interest in Europe, but the volume has been slower than originally expected because of the breakdown of the earlier EEC negotiations and the continuance of Bank of England control on foreign exchange. This, combined with the historical short-term investment climate in property in Europe, has made long-term property funding on the accepted United Kingdom pattern difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. If Britain enters the Common Market, exchange control should gradually relax in the transitional period, so stimulating the activity of our developers in Europe.

Chartered surveyors meanwhile have been called on for all aspects of professional advice in connection with development work up to the provision of a full project management service by retaining and interpreting the advice of other con-

sultants, leaving the client to make only basic financial and policy decisions.

Development work, although important, has been only part of the activity of the general practice surveyor in Europe. Consumers such as industrialists, retailers and hoteliers have sought advice on the acquisition, disposal or valuation of property in connection with their own expansion into Europe, and this has led to important new areas of activity such as location consultancy where, given basic business criteria, the surveyor advises on the most suitable situation for the setting up of a particular activity.

The surveyor's initial work in Europe may well come from British clients. His future prosperity, and incidentally his contribution to Britain's invisible exports, must depend on his ability to sell his services to the people of the country where he operates and in direct competition with the nationals of that country. This means maintaining and selling high professional standards including areas—estate agency, for example—where local standards may not sometimes be as high and, at the same time, being competitive in efficiency. It sounds a tall order. The profession seems to be in little doubt it will be met.

The Mail Bag (continued from page 25)

Dear Sir:

Since the definition of a Canadian Foot should be elementary knowledge to a surveyor, I am surprised to see an incorrect conversion table on page 28 of "The Ontario Land Surveyor", Nov., Dec., 1971. Admittedly the error is small but why not publish a correct table.

The published table is one made up for the U.S. market by Tellurometer Co. and incorrectly distributed in Canada. With sufficient distribution, many people are going to believe that this represents the definition of the Canadian Foot in terms of the International Meter.

Yours sincerely,
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Sorry about that.
Editor