

## **TRADA AND THE BBA**

My recent articles have been about the Building Research Establishment. Another organisation with a business based on research and technical expertise is TRADA – which originally stood for ‘Timber Research and Development Association’. It is hardly possible to build a house without incorporating timber into it, so some aspects of TRADA’s work must be of interest to selfbuilders. Particularly relevant are their books and booklets about timber frame construction, timber cladding, and timber decking. But as we will see, the original Association has evolved into a complex conglomerate with interests much wider than just timber. It is even more complex than BRE, and, like ‘BRE’, ‘TRADA’ is now akin to a brand name.

### **THE BM TRADA GROUP**

#### **History**

In 1934, the Timber Development Association was set up in London to promote the use of timber. The Association was funded by its members, who were from the timber industry. The imposing entrance to the Festival of Britain in 1951 had a glulam construction built to the TDA’s specification.

In 1954, the TDA set up research laboratories in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. Reflecting this research activity, the TDA changed its name in 1962 to the Timber Research and Development Association (TRADA). The government became a stakeholder, and TRADA took on some of the work of the Forest Products Research Laboratory. (As we saw in an earlier article, most of the Laboratory was merged into the Building Research Establishment in 1972, as a cost cutting measure.)

TRADA purchased Chiltern House in High Wycombe in 1967 – the name of the house was to become significant – and eventually this became their headquarters. Construction began there in 1971 of a fire testing facility, and this led eventually to the formation of a separate company, Chiltern International Fire.

In 1977, TRADA launched Quality Assurance schemes for trussed rafters and the like. This led to the setting up in 1987 of Trada Quality Assurance Services Ltd, which later morphed into the present company, BM Trada Certification Ltd.

Trada Technology was set up in 1990, taking on most of the staff and work of TRADA. In 1992 they published Timber Intermediate Floors for Dwellings, which was the first Approved Document of the Building Regulations not to be produced by BRE.

A management buyout of TRADA’s operating subsidiaries in 1994 resulted in the formation of the BM Trada Group.

#### **BM Trada Group**

The BM Trada Group is the holding company for four companies:

- Trada Technology  
Trading names: Trada, and Trada Technology.
- BM Trada Certification  
Trading names: BM Trada Certification, and BM Trada Q-Mark.

- Chiltern International Fire  
Trading names: Chiltern International Fire, and Chiltern Dynamics – which has nothing to do with fire.

The above three companies all share the same site in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire.

- FIRA International  
This is not relevant to selfbuild, and we need not concern ourselves with the Furniture Industry Research Association.

Readers might wonder what the ‘BM’ of BM Trada stands for. Some might guess that the ‘B’ stands for British, but the ‘M’? I eventually tracked down the origin – British Maritime! Don’t ask me why. But I suspect it is connected with the financing of the management buyout.

### **Trada Technology**

Trada Technology is the successor to the original Timber Research and Development Association. It is a not-for-profit, membership-based company whose aim is:

*'To provide members with the highest quality information on timber and wood products to enable them to maximise the benefits that timber can provide'.*

Some of this information is available to the general public, and they have a telephone helpline. Their website has directories of both products and services. Recently, a friend asked me about making his own timber frame on site, in order to cut costs. I suggested he could find somebody to design the frame on one of the Service directories of the Trada website. (The cost of designing a frame for a typical house with a floor area of 150 m<sup>2</sup> is likely to be about £1,000.) On the website there are also Product directories for timber frame buildings, timber windows, etc.

### **Trada Publishing and Bookshop**

Trada Technology makes a lot of its expertise available via books and booklets. There are 60+ booklets available as Wood Information Sheets, and these can be purchased as either printed paper or pdf files (£12 each). The booklets are short (eg, 6 pages), so, as for BRE booklets, the cost per page is high – you are paying for technical know-how, not for paper and ink.

A couple of sample titles:

*Strutting in timber floors,*  
*Wood preservation – chemicals and processes.*

For their current best-selling books see Further Info.

### **BM Trada Certification**

BM Trada Certification certify products, management systems, and chains of custody, not just in the UK but worldwide. Most of the certifying is to the standards of other organisations, but some is to their own standards, eg, for Q-Mark certificates. (See below.) Very little is related to their original expertise in timber. It seems that they now have a new expertise, certification itself.

Relevant to selfbuild, they certify Window Energy Ratings for the British Fenestration Ratings Council. (Check out window ratings before you purchase windows. Nowadays you should be purchasing top-rated ‘A’ windows – when will BFRFC introduce a higher, A+ rating?)

BM Trada Certification are one of several bodies that can certify the chain of custody for FSC and PEFC timber products. (FSC = Forest Stewardship Council, and PEFC = Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification.) They have also produced their own Chain of Custody scheme, the Forest Products scheme.

### **BM Trada Q-Mark**

According to the BM Trada website, their Q-Mark for a building product confirms that the product:

- Has been properly tested and appraised.
- Is manufactured to a consistent high standard.

What is the difference between a Q-Mark certificate and a BBA certificate? We’ll look at Certification another time.

### **Chiltern International Fire**

Chiltern International Fire was formerly the fire testing division of TRADA. The selfbuilder is most likely to come across this company as the certifier of fire doors and fire door sets – required, for example, for the entrance into a house from an adjacent garage.

### **Chiltern Dynamics**

This is a ‘sister company’ of Chiltern International Fire, and one that the selfbuilder may well have dealings with.

Their services include:

- Airtightness testing.
- Energy assessments (eg, SAP ratings).
- Code for Sustainable Homes assessments.

They also test sound insulation.

### **Chiltern TMC**

Chiltern TMC is based in Dubai, and is another ‘sister company’ of Chiltern International Fire. It offers management consultancy and training services throughout the Middle East. Apparently, TMC stands for ‘Texas Management Consultants’. The connection between Texas and the Middle East is oil, but how TRADA comes to be involved is puzzling. Anyway, the company is very remote from selfbuild, so we will look no further.

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## THE BRITISH BOARD OF AGRÉMENT

For traditional building products – bricks, sand, cement, etc – there have long been British Standards. For newer building products there is a need for some sort of certification to show that they are fit for purpose. It is for this reason that the Agrément Board was set up by the Government in 1966 as a limited company which did not distribute any profit and which was under the ultimate control of the Government. The concept was derived from a scheme in France – hence the French é. (Nowadays, the company is independent of the Government.) The company is located on the BRE site on the outskirts of Watford, but the two organisations are unrelated.

A manufacturer (or importer) can submit a building product for testing, and if successful the product is awarded an Agrément certificate – ‘agrément’ translates as ‘approval’. Both builders and building inspectors can be reassured if a product has such a certificate.

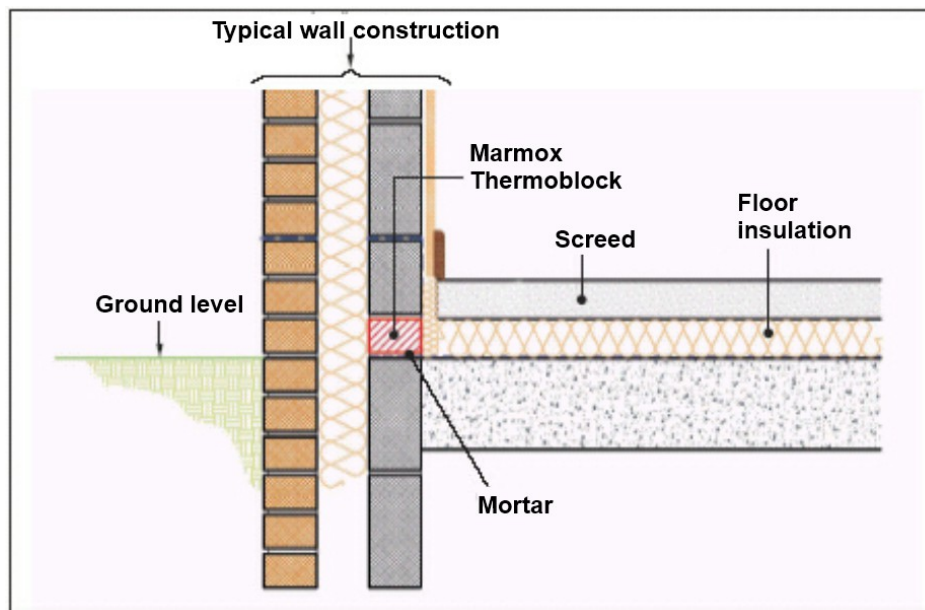
In 1982, the name of the company was changed to the British Board of Agrément (BBA).

The reformed building regulations of 1985 recognised the Agrément certificates – building inspectors could no longer object to a product which had been awarded an Agrément certificate. (In the early days of the certificates, some building inspectors would not allow full-fill cavity insulation, for example, even if the materials and method of installation were covered by an Agrément certificate.)

### BBA Agrément certificates

It is always sensible to check whether or not a non-traditional building product has a BBA Certificate. And it is often useful to view the certificate itself. This is easily done, as the certificates can be freely downloaded from the BBA website.

In writing this article I thought it would be interesting to look up the Agrément certificate of the Marmox Thermoblock. In conventional construction involving cavity walls and a solid floor, there is invariably thermal bridging where the wall and floor meet. That is becoming increasingly unacceptable, but how can it be avoided?



Using Thermoblocks to reduce thermal bridging in the inner leaf

Thermoblocks are one solution, and I was pleased to see that the blocks do have an Agrément certificate: 10/4778. (The '10' indicates that the certificate was first issued in 2010.)

There is usually some information to be gleaned from an Agrément certificate over and above the information put out by the manufacturer. The certificate for the Marmox Thermoblock gives the effective conductivity of the block: 0.078 W/m.°C – good, but not amazingly good. It is 30% less than the conductivity of Celcon Solar blocks: 0.1. (Foamed glass blocks have the lowest conductivity, about 0.045 – but are very expensive.)

The Thermoblock certificate does reveal one surprising detail: Marmox is an Egyptian company.

### **BBA Approved Installer Schemes**

Most of the BBA Approved Installer Schemes apply to the installation of insulation into walls or lofts. Not only must the material be satisfactory, but it must also be installed in an approved way. That is especially important for cavity wall insulation – I know, as I used to install it.

If you are using cavity wall construction, you can either get your bricklayers to build insulation into the wall (possibly retaining some clear cavity) or you can have full fill insulation injected from the inside after first fix. In this case, make sure you engage a BBA approved installer.

FURTHER INFO:

#### **BM Trada Group**

[www.bmtradagroup.com](http://www.bmtradagroup.com).

#### **Trada Technology**

Advisory helpline: 01494 569601.

Their website requires free registration for access to more info.

The online Trada bookshop is on this website.

Current best-selling, TRADA books:

*Timber frame construction* (264 pages, £60)

*Green oak in construction* (184 pages, £65)

*External timber cladding* (80 pages, £40)

*Span tables for solid timber members in dwellings* (112 pages, £45)

*Timber decking manual* (80 pages, £30).

[www.trada.co.uk](http://www.trada.co.uk).

#### **BM Trada Certification**

Includes BM Trada Q-Mark.

[www.bmtrada.com](http://www.bmtrada.com).

#### **British Board of Agrément**

[www.bbacerts.co.uk](http://www.bbacerts.co.uk).

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