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It's hard to find the right plumber or a reliable painter. **Victoria Whitlock** shares some names and numbers

The secrets of my Little Black Book revealed

SHOULD my house ever catch fire, the first thing I'd try to rescue (after the children, of course) would be my Little Black Book of Contacts because without it, I'm doomed. As a landlord it's my most useful tool. To be honest, it's my only tool.

Quite a few readers have tried to get their hands on my contacts, emailing me requests for a heating engineer, electrician or plumber and I'm not surprised because it can be really tough to find reliable tradespeople. So, as I promised in my last column, here are a few of the good guys.

First of all, you'll need a handyman for all those odd jobs and any plumbing emergencies. I've road-tested a few odd job outfits and one of my favourites in south London is PTG Services (0845 621 0169). Tony pitched up at short notice the other

The accidental landlord

day to mend a constantly running lavatory which had been keeping my tenants awake at night. When he'd finished the job I would have hugged him – if he hadn't just had his hand down the loo.

If your property is in or near Buckinghamshire, I'd recommend High Wycombe-based Handy Andy (07952 645150). He's only a one-man band, so don't all call at once. But he'll tackle anything, and I mean anything. Andy mended my shower – which a couple of plumbers had told me was beyond repair – by



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painstakingly searching the internet for a spare part. His fees are very reasonable, too.

Even the best handyman can't tackle your boiler – they're not allowed to – so you'll need a registered Gas Safe (previously Corgi) plumber for that. Colin Burnell, of CRB Services (07931 341176), is my plumber in shining armour (well, jeans, but a girl can dream, can't she?). He'll turn up on time, won't rip you off and he'll keep your tenants nice and toasty this winter.

For small tiling jobs, I can recommend Arrow Tiling (07970

817811). They're not the cheapest but they know what they're doing so could save you money in the long run. I once made the mistake of hiring a cheap tiler to lay a bathroom floor and it cracked within hours. Never again.

Patrick at PMC Decorations (020 8348 3464) is an excellent painter and decorator and I've always found his quotes to be lower than the competition. For small building jobs, Stefan Macovei of Wood Green-based Steven Group (07837 603899) is good. AOCs Property Maintenance (07930 396935) are very good

domestic and commercial window cleaners.

You should probably get an inventory prepared before you let a property but I'd avoid some of the big companies. I've used a couple of them and they have been less than thorough, which is exactly what an inventory should be. Kestrel Inventories (07515 029692) have been recommended to me, but I haven't used them yet.

Personally, I wouldn't carpet a rental property because they can get really mucky (better to stick down some laminate if it's budget accommodation or hard wood floors in smarter homes) but if your place is carpeted, I'd suggest you call in FabClean of Worcester Park (020 8330 4014) every few months to get them freshened up.

They are more expensive than some other cleaners (they charge about £25 per room) but they use a really cool van-based system and manage to get out the stains other cleaners just laugh at, though even the absolutely charming Manny was defeated by the curry stains left by one of my tenants.

There you have them: all my top contacts, so don't say I never give you anything. Hope you are having a very good new year.

Mother-of-two Victoria Whitlock lets three properties in south London.

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