

GB 0154 1973/355

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NRA 21290



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Records of Knight and Lawrence,  
Footwear Manufacturers, of  
Manton Road, Rushden

Accession 1977/355

The firm of Knight and Lawrence began in December 1889, in small premises in Ebenezer Terrace, Newton Road, Rushden, where mens and boys boots were made. The firm was jointly run by Mr. W.C. Knight and Mr. Lawrence. In 1890, the business moved to larger premises in Alfred Street, Rushden, but by 1893, trade had increased so much that a new three storey factory was built in Manton Road, where the firm remains today.

In the early days much of the boot production was contracted out to individuals or families working at home. Many of the houses had small brick-built 'shops' at the bottom of the garden especially for boot manufacturing, particularly for the closing, hand sewing and finishing processes, but the initial cutting of the leather was done inside the factory. By 1914, however, much of the out-work production had ceased, except for a few specialised processes, some of which, for example hand thonging, are still done outside the factory.

The factory's premises were increased frequently, to keep up with orders for shoes and to accommodate new machinery, purchased or rented from the British United Shoe Machinery Company. In 1896, a new bay was added to the factory and this had been doubled in size by 1913. In 1917, two more bays were added and a further two a few years later. In 1906, Mr. Lawrence retired from the business and disappeared to South Africa, but the name Knight and Lawrence remained the company's name. Mr. W.C. Knight ran the business with his two sons, Harry and Horace. Mr. Knight was also the company's travelling sales representative in Scotland, whilst the representative in England was Mr. A.E. Bates, father of H.E. Bates the author. The Bates family lived locally and Mr. A.E. Bates' wife still lives near to the Knight and Lawrence factory.

Mr. Knight died suddenly of pneumonia aged 61, in February 1915, leaving a wife, three sons and a daughter to carry on the business. The obituary in the 'Wellingborough News' of February 26th. 1915, shows Mr. Knight to have been a member of Rushden Temperance Band and the Temperance Society.

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Records of Knight and Lawrence

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During the Second World War the firm also made womens shoes for women in the forces, which led to the production of womens bowling shoes, golf shoes and cossack boots after the war until the 1960's. Today, 99% of the shoe production is in mens footwear and some youths motorcycle boots. These shoes, of medium to top grade quality, are sent all over Britain to wholesale and multiple companies. The firm also has a large export trade, especially to Europe, U.S.A. and the Gulf States. The waxwork model of Prince Philip, in the Blackpool Waxworks Museum, is wearing a pair of Knight and Lawrence shoes and Yves St. Laurent of Paris purchased denim, platform-soled shoes from the firm, who, until c.1973/4, ran a small mail-order business.

Knight and Lawrence has now become part of the Dalaco group of companies, which includes Lattaway's of Wellingborough and Davies of Kettering. Knight and Lawrence is still partly run by the Knight family, who employ about 120 people in the factory.

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Knight and Lawrence

- 1 Boot and Shoe Costing Book: May, 1907  
All the materials, manufacturing processes and their costs for each type of shoe produced are calculated. A description of each shoe is also given, with the last number, type and size of the leather, the colour of the shoe upper, type of heel and lining. The book is ready printed, listing all the materials and production processes of the factory. The total cost of materials, production, wages and working expenses shows the total cost of producing each shoe.
- 2 Boot and Shoe Costing Book: January, 1909  
Description as above.
- 3 \*Boot and Shoe Costing Book: c.1912  
Description as above.
- 4 Photocopy of The Boot and Shoe Trades June 20th, 1914  
Journal:  
Contains short histories of most of the local shoe firms, with pictures of their owners. Also has many advertisements of local shoe firms.
- 5 Copy of 'Work' - The Illustrated Weekly July 30th, 1904  
Journal of Handicrafts:  
Contains diagrams and instructions for making various household objects or for experiments. Replies given to readers queries. Also contains an advertisement of W. Barratt and Co., Sterling Shoe Works, Northampton, for a Mechanics Working Boot, price 9/9, by mail order.

\* Gift to the Record Office.

November, 1977.