

Northamptonshire Record Office

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Records of W.H. Cave & Son Ltd.,
Craftsmen in Wood and Funeral Directors, of
79-83, London Road, Bozeat.

Accession 1978/150

The grandfather of the present proprietor of W.H. Cave & Son died when young, leaving a wife and large family of which most of the children were brought up by relatives. They lived, at this time, in Cambridge and his widow took in students to help out. Mrs. Cave then moved to Bozeat and kept the Red Lion and it was about this time that her son, Mr. William Herbert Cave (born 1885, died 17th. November, 1952) became apprenticed to a carpenter, wheelwright and funeral director in Bozeat, named Everest. After he had served his apprenticeship Mr. Cave moved to the joinery works at Rushden, which later went bankrupt. Jobs were difficult to come by and on learning of work at the town of Welwyn Garden City, which was in the process of being built, he walked from Rushden to Hertfordshire in search of employment. This was an unsuccessful quest and he soon returned home. Mr. Cave then secured a good job with a firm in Coventry which paid 9d. per hour and it was on the strength of this that he decided to get married to Miss Lillie Corby. Unfortunately, however, that form of employment was not to last and he was out of work at the time of his wedding.

In 1908, Mr. Cave started his own business of carpentry and joinery in a shop in Mile Street, Bozeat, later moving to London Road, Bozeat, where his only son, Mr. Thomas Corby Cave, was born in 1913. During the 1914-18 war the business did not function, but after the war he began again. In about 1920, he moved premises to the present site at 79/81 and 81, London Road, Bozeat.

The funeral side of the business was developed at about this time and Mr. Cave employed one man and an apprentice. The firm specialized in repair work, jobs for the Oakley Hunt and farm work. Up until then there had been little or no new building in the village.

Mr. Thomas Cave, who is an only child, was educated at Bozeat Council School. This he left at the age of fourteen to work with his father, but he later went for further training with a carpenter at Wollaston. After this came the building of the first Council houses in Bozeat and Mr. Thomas Cave got a job with the architects (the firm of Charles Riddey, Kettering). This was unrewarding work and after about six weeks he left. The next employment came about by means of a coincidence. Mr. Cave senior was a church warden and at a performance of the Stainer-Crucifixion the bass soloist was one Charles Adams - a well known builder in Wellingborough. (Records of the firm of C. Adams & Sons, builders, deposited at Delapre Abbey, Northampton.) Mr. Adams was the builder

Records of W.H. Cave & Son Ltd.

(cont.)

for the council houses and Mr. Cave secured a job with C. Adams and Son and worked as an improver (a position following on from that of an apprentice). Mr. Cave (senior) became ill and Mr. Thomas Cave left Adams to work with his father, which he continued to do up until the Second World War. From 1939-45 Thomas Cave worked on the Mosquito wooden aircraft in Wellingborough. After the war he returned home to go into partnership with his father, the firm becoming a Limited Liability Company in 1952. (The Certificate of Incorporation dated 11th. March, 1952). The directors of the firm were William H. Cave, Managing Director, Mr. Thomas Cave and Mrs. D. Cave (wife of Thomas Cave), Company Secretary. The same year Mr. William Cave died.

Mr. H. Drage, who was a cousin, was left some shares in the firm by Mr. Cave and he was made a director, Mr. T. Cave became Managing Director and his wife remained as Secretary. This continued until December, 1977, when Mr. Cave retired as Managing Director due to ill-health. The board now consists of five directors - J. Fisher, Managing Director, who had worked for the firm for over twenty years; Mrs. B. Fisher (wife), Company Secretary; Mrs. D. Cave; Thomas Cave and H. Drage. Mr. Cave has one daughter, but no sons.

Mr. Cave took his first funeral at the age of fourteen in Northampton, as his father was ill. He wore his father's morning coat and a top-hat stuffed with newspaper. For many years the firm mostly took village funerals using the church bier and they hired vehicles to work further afield. The coffins would sometimes travel by the passenger bus into Northampton.

Until about ten years ago approximately 95% of coffins were constructed of oak and 5% of elm. The firm purchased the wood in 7' lengths called a butt (this is the trunk of the tree which has been sawn into planks and stacked on wooden spacers to allow air to circulate through). All coffins were made on the premises and each took two-three days to complete. The building process involved sawing; planing; shaping (using steam); nailing together; pitching (to make them watertight - the pitch, which used to be in cake-form was heated up on paraffin stoves to bubbling point and then poured into the seams and joints); lining and finishing. The firm continued to make their own coffins up until about three years ago, but the cost of materials and labour now make it prohibitive. Today coffins are purchased from manufacturers and come in veneered chipboard.

The cost of an ordinary funeral varies today, but can be anything between £60-£200. The council allocates money to pay for funerals of those unable to meet the cost themselves. Mr. Thomas Cave, who is still active in the business, was a founder member of the Northamptonshire Funeral Directors Association.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE RECORD OFFICE

Records of W.H. Cave & Son Ltd.

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|---|---|------------------------------------|
| 1 | <u>Day Book</u> : shows name; job done; materials used and quantities, with price and total. At back of book is a section showing the itemized account of building an 'F' type house at Earls Barton with materials, labour, plus and total. Also pages for additions and deductions. | Dec 1933-Dec 1940 |
| 2 | <u>Day Book</u> : shows name, address, goods materials used, carpenters time with itemized prices, total and date. All jobs, including carpentry work and funeral business. | 1st. Jan 1941-
30th. Nov 1949 |
| 3 | <u>Indexed Day Book</u> : as above. | 18th. Nov 1949-
14th. July 1961 |
| 4 | <u>Indexed Ledger</u> : showing separate page for each person, with date, work done, price per foot, etc., total and grand total. | 1940-1953 |
| 5 | <u>Materials Record Book</u> : shows name of person for whom job was done, materials used, with quantities, job in question and initial of employee. | Nov 1960-Oct 1963 |
| 6 | <u>Indexed Ledger</u> : showing various contracts and the materials used, cost per foot, etc., total cost, labour, grand cost and the price of the contract.
A few bills attached to pages of the relevant jobs. | 1949-1955 |
| 7 | <u>Indexed Ledger</u> : showing details of purchase orders, with firm's name on separate pages; invoice no., date, goods price and total spent each day. | 1928-1950 |
| 8 | <u>Payments-Out Book</u> : showing date, name or purpose of payment, amount cash, amount cheque, with total at bottom of page. | 2nd. June 1948-
27th. Jan 1956 |
| 9 | <u>The Illustrated London News</u> : Vol LVIII. | July-Dec 1870 |