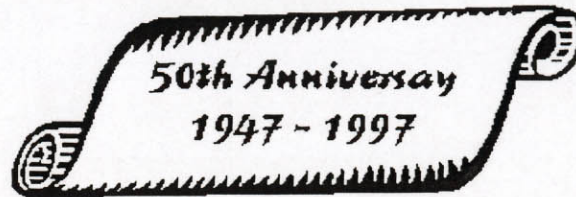


LEGEND



THE LEGEND STORY

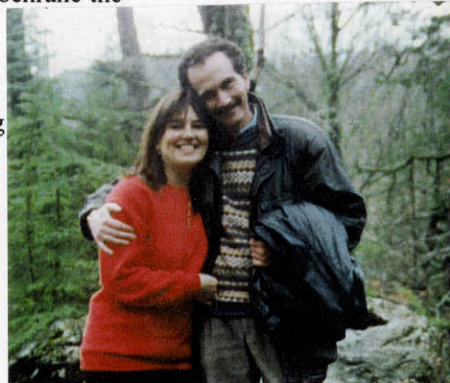
At the 'Legend' company of England we are very used to receiving many enquiries about our famous products. We receive letters and phone calls every day asking for more information. In response to this interest we have decided to write this short story of our company's history.

1997 is the company's 50th Anniversary.

Legend products started its life very humbly. Mr. Alec Cochrane the company's founder, had always been a bit of an entrepreneur. During his army days during the Second World War, he used to supplement his pay by making wooden model aeroplanes and sold them to his comrades. After the war ended obviously everything was in short supply. Alec managed to get a job selling brassware but he wasn't doing very well and wasn't selling very much. He decided to ask in every outlet he could, the question "What sort of product would you like to see in your shop that would sell very well?". The answer was very easy, the shops needed souvenirs. At this time Alec was working in and around the North Wales area which always has been very popular with

holiday makers and tourists. Alec & Joan his wife then decided to have a range of souvenirs sculpted and to stock the shops themselves. They decided to start with Traditional Welsh Ladies the designs were all dual purpose, so although they were decorative, they were also useful; for instance egg timers, thermometers, etc.

At the time the Cochrane family lived in a very large old Victorian house, which had a big cellar. Alec & Joan had three children; David who is now the Managing Director of Legend was the eldest and only boy. David's bedroom was at the top of the house in the attic and right next to a very large



David & Sheila

playroom. One day David was intrigued to hear some loud and strange noises coming from the cellar, on investigating he was amazed to find thousands of little ladies with black hats all

lined up in rows. He thought at first they were some kind of toy, but before he could get really involved he was shown the door and told to go back to the playroom. David would have been about four years old at the time. These items were of course the first production units of the fledgling company and Alec & Joan soon found that they couldn't produce them fast enough. The help of several neighbours was enlisted but of course then there wasn't enough space and things were getting out of hand.

The year was 1947 and it marked the birth of the company.

Alec & Joan soon located a place to work from and rented a floor of an old cotton mill called 'Reynolds Mill', this was located on Newbridge Lane in Stockport, Cheshire. As soon as the company was installed in the new premises it started to expand and do very well.

It wasn't long before Alec had enough spare capital to be able to enter into negotiations to buy a company called 'Guildcraft', this company had been involved in a bad fire on their premises and couldn't continue to operate. Alec then bought all their designs and the copyright. At the time they were producing two dimensional, round wall plaques of various scenes mostly countryside cottages. There were also many other sculptures too numerous to mention here, but one that should be mentioned is the flight of ducks, we are fairly certain that they are the very ones depicted on Hilda Ogdens Mural in the Coronation Street soap Opera. Over the years since the many designs have been resculpted and improved to achieve much more intricate detail and realism. The plaques we have in our current ranges are all the work of Fred Wright.

It was shortly after this that Alec advertised for a sculptor in the Stoke-on-Trent evening newspaper. Stoke is the heart of the pottery industry in England and it is where some of the finest China and Porcelain in the world is produced. Stoke is also rich in talented artists and eight applicants replied to the advert. Each was given a test piece and although all were good, one outshone the rest for sculptural detail, this was the work of Fred Wright and he was commissioned straightaway. Fred had a style which is borne out of true artistic genius and natural ability. No amount of schooling or training can produce such talent and Fred's unmistakable style can be seen

in over 90% of the Legend wall mask collection.

Fred worked for Legend on a part time basis for some time but Fred was a very quick worker, no sooner had he started a piece than within a very short time it was finished and Alec couldn't keep him busy enough. Alec then suggested to Fred that he should advertise his sculpting skills elsewhere and take commissions from other people as well as working for Legend. Fred did so and ran an advert, looking back now it can be seen that this was a disastrous move for Legend, this would have been around 1955. Fred was offered full time work and went to work elsewhere. Other sculptors were commissioned by the company and many and varied collections were designed and produced. It was around this time that the company began to produce the wall mask faces that are so popular with collector's. The first Masks were very large, around 9". Alec introduced the concept and all the masks right through to the present day have been created following those first guidelines. The process is a closely guarded family secret. The designs of the wall masks have always been chosen to represent people's from all over the world and many have been chosen to depict characters especially associated with favourite myths and legends.

The size of those first masks was reduced to 6". Each face was painstakingly sculpted to show incredible lifelike detail. Books on anatomy were included in the already extensive Legend reference Library, and they were and still are studied before each face is begun. This ensures that the correct muscle structure under the skin is captured in clay before the final detail, such as wrinkles can be added to the sculpture. David Cochrane joined the company at the age of sixteen. He has worked

in every department and learnt at first hand how the company he would one day inherit, ran.

Not long after this Alec decided he wanted to move location and relocate the factory in Macclesfield, Cheshire. Suitable premises were located but due to the Macclesfield Planning Authority, the premises were demolished and Legend had to find yet another base. The Albion Mill was up for sale and Alec decided it would be ideal.

The Albion Mill is a five floor old silk mill built in 1843. It is an impressive listed building which was built on the banks of the river Bollin. Macclesfield has many such mills which are listed for architectural and historical importance and The Albion Mill is one of the most interesting. The silk garments made in Macclesfield had been traditionally manufactured here since the Industrial Revolution in England during the nineteenth century. Unfortunately the industry fell into a sad decline due to cheap imports from the Far East. The old stone steps that are located at the workers entrance to the mill are worn away in the middle by so many clogs and boots going up and down them. Legend bought the Albion Mill in 1970.

Soon after this at a Trade show in Blackpool, Lancashire, Alec and David were visited by Fred and Kathleen Wright. They had come especially to see Alec, they told of how Fred was totally disillusioned with his career at the Bosson company. He had fallen out with Mr. Bosson who has lowered his pay several times. Fred wanted to know if there was a possibility of returning to Legend, he liked working for Alec and was very fond of David. A good word was put in by David who was also very fond of Fred and didn't want his father to make the same

mistake again. It was agreed that Fred should start as soon as possible, Fred then set about with great determination and enthusiasm and he sculpted endless models and redesigned the existing ranges. This lasted for several years, David assisted Fred with all the aspects of the designs.

Around 1975 Fred wanted to sculpt some especially large pieces, he wanted to make them his life's achievement, something very special. Alec agreed to try them and see if they sold.

Fred then modelled the very large battle panels 'The Battle of Waterloo'; and the 'Battle of Trafalgar', the Constable type scenes, A Viking raid, Roman Gladiators fighting, and a Tall ship on the sea. These pieces are exquisite, they are the most beautiful sculptures and definitely some of the best work ever produced by Fred. Unfortunately they didn't sell well for Legend, mainly due to the fact that the Legend customer base thought they were too expensive. Fred still wanted to produce more big pieces and make his name remembered. Alec couldn't accommodate him, so Fred then left with good feeling on both sides to go to work at "Aynsley's" China works in Stoke, where he worked until his retirement at the age of 65.

After his retirement Fred was still full of life and wanted to come back again to Legend. He returned for the third time in 1980 and worked right through until he was taken ill with a stroke in 1993, and he sadly died in 1994. He used to really enjoy coming to work after his retirement, he liked to keep in touch and busy. There was always a lovely atmosphere in his studio and he made everyone laugh with his tales of the terrible drivers that he had encountered on the road on his way to work. Although he had retired, he loved fast cars and loved to drive

fast in them. He had many hobbies; Water colour painting, building models completely from scratch. He gave David two wonderful boats that he had made, one is a yacht which is 5ft long and whose masts are 7ft high. There is also a Cornish fishing ketch named 'Kathleen', it is a marvelous boat, every single thing on it has been handmade right down to the anchor, tiny buckets and miniature rowing boats on board. David was very honoured by these gifts.

All in all Fred Wright worked for the Legend company for approximately 21 years. He is very much missed by us all and very fondly remembered.

It was 1989 when Alec retired from the business. He had only been coming in to work one or two days a week for quite some years as he lived in North Wales which is a good two and a half hour journey, sadly he also died in 1996.

The company is now run by David & Sheila Cochrane, they are constantly adding new sculptures to the ranges. All the designs are personally overseen by them in all the various stages of their creation. Special techniques are used to create very lifelike sculptures of exceptionally high quality.

In 1995 the Legend Collector's Club was launched in response to demand from the collector's all over the world. It is hoped that all the pieces sculpted by the company in the last 50 years will be catalogued and photographed into a special book, but this could take some time. In the meantime, happy collecting to you all. Keep in touch, we love to hear from you all.

David & Sheila Cochrane