

THE LEGEND STORY

by **Sheila & David Cochrane**

At the 'Legend' company 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 was the company's 50th Anniversary.

Legend started its life very humbly. Mr. Alec Cochrane the company's founder had always been a bit of an entrepreneur. In his army days during the second World War, he used to supplement his pay by making wooden model aero planes 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 then decided to ask at every outlet he could, the question 'what sort of product would you like see in your shop that would sell very well'? The answer was very easy, the shops needed souvenirs. As Alec was mainly working in the North Wales area, which has always been popular with holidaymakers and tourists, Alec & Joan his wife then decided to have a range of souvenirs modeled and to stock the shops themselves. They decided to start the range with traditional Welsh ladies models. The designs were all dual purpose, so although they were decorative they were also useful for instance for egg timers, thermometers, calendars and match holders.

At the time the Cochrane family lived in a very large old Victorian old house, which had a big cellar. The manufacturing of the infant company was being done from the cellar. David (the now managing director) had a bedroom at the top of the house in the attic rooms. He clearly remembers hearing very strange noises and smells coming from the cellar. He decided to investigate and was astonished to see hundreds of what he thought were tin soldiers lined up in rows. Of course they were Welsh ladies their hats all lined up in rows. (he was only four at the time)

Soon the company was running out of space and they couldn't make these items fast or efficiently enough in the cellar and things were getting out of hand.

The year was 1947 and it marked the birth of the company. Alec soon found a place to work from and rented a floor in a mill in Stockport called Reynold's mill, located on Newbridge Lane in Stockport. Cheshire. As soon as the company was installed in its new premises it started to expand and to do very well.

Soon Alec had enough money to be able to enter into negotiations to buy another company called Guildcraft, unfortunately for Guildcraft they had a large fire and could not continue to

operate, they had a lot of designs of plaques or plates in 3 D mostly countryside scenes, but also many other things too numerous to mention here but we are fairly certain that the famous flight of ducks from Hilda Ogden's Mural in Coronation St was among them. Alec bought the whole lot including the copyright.

It was shortly after this still in 1947 that Alec decided to advertise for a sculptor/ modeler in the Stoke on Trent newspaper. Stoke on Trent is the heart of the pottery industry in England and is where some of the finest pottery in the world is made.

Stoke is rich in talented artists and eight applicants answered the advert. Each was give a test piece and although all were good one outshone the rest for quality of sculptural detail. This was Fred Wright and he was commissioned straightaway. Fred had a style, that 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 clearly seen in over 85% of the Legend wall mask range.

Fred worked for Legend on a part time basis but Fred was a very quick worker and no sooner had he been given a piece to do than it was finished and he was looking to do the next. Alec just couldn't keep Fred busy enough and Fred needed more work. They worked together for a few years then Alec 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 on behalf of Alec because Fred was soon offered fulltime work at Bosson's (then a rival company) who knew what a find he was and Mr Bosson tied Fred up with a contract so that he could not work for anybody else for quite some time.

Alec was very sorry that he had lost Fred to the rival company but as nothing could be done about it he had to accept it. Many other sculptors where employed by the company and many varied collections where designed and produced. It was at this time when the company began to produce the first wall masks that have become so popular with the collector's of today.

The first masks where oriental and we believe that Alec had the idea from an Italian book that he had. Then in the mid fifties the company began to produce the very large 8"to 9" heads.

The guidelines used in producing those first masks were laid down and the process is a closely guarded secret that we still use today. The designs of the masks are chosen to represent people from all over the world especially those associated with Legend's and Myths.

As each wall mask is produced the sculpting technique is painstakingly done to show incredible 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 piece.

David Cochrane joined the company at the age of sixteen. He had to work in every department and got no special treatment from his father he had to learn the hard way. Alec thought it best that David learn this way how to run the company he would perhaps one day inherit.

In 1964 The Company moved from Stockport to Macclesfield, firstly they were located in The Regency mill on Wardle Street (now demolished). Then the company moved to The Albion Mill in 1969. This was an old silk mill and had five floors. It was built in 1843 and is an impressive grade II listed building. It was built on the banks of the river Bollin. Macclesfield has many silk mills, which are listed for architectural and historical importance and the Albion mill is one of the most interesting.

The silk industry has been traditionally manufactured in Macclesfield since the Industrial revolution in England during the nineteenth century. Unfortunately due to cheap imports from the Far East it has now fell into a sad decline.

The old stone steps that are located at the workers entrance are badly worn away in the middle of each step by the workers clogs going up and down.

In 1970 at a trade show in Blackpool Alec was surprised to get a visit from Fred Wright and his wife Kathleen. They had come especially to see Alec. They told how Fred was totally disillusioned with his career at Bosson's . Fred had fallen out with Mr Bosson who had lowered his pay several times.

Fred wanted to know if there was a possibility of returning to work at Legend, he had like working with Alec and was very fond of David having no children of his own.

David was also very fond of Fred and did not want Alec to make the same mistake again. It was agreed that Fred should start as soon as possible.

Fred then set to with great enthusiasm and determination and he sculpted endless models for the company all sorts of things were made some of which were never released. Fred redesigned existing ranges and really went to town sculpting many hundreds of beautiful things.

This went on for quite some years. David who by now was in his early 20s assisted Fred with the designs and they became very close.

Around 1975 Fred decided he wanted to model some huge pieces, he wanted to make them his life's achievement something very special that he would always be remembered for. Alec agreed to give this a try and Fred then modeled the huge and now famous panels:-

THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO ALL 20" BY 26"

THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR

SEVERAL CONSTABLE TYPE SCENES

A VIKING RAID

ROMAN GLADIATORS IN COMBAT

A TALL SHIP ON THE SEA

These pieces are simply exquisite, they are the most wonderful sculptures and definitely some of the best work ever produced by Fred.

Unfortunately the panels did not sell well for the company probably as they were too top market and too expensive for the then Legend customer base.

Fred however still wanted to achieve his life's ambition and make his name remembered for posterity. Alec couldn't accommodate Fred in this venture so with good feelings on both sides Fred decided to go and work for Aynsley's China in Stoke on Trent where he worked until his retirement at the age of 65. There he produced many wonderful and well remembered pieces.

After Fred had retired he found that he still wanted to work part time and approached David to come back to Legend. This was in 1980 and he came back and worked right through until he was taken ill in 1993 with a stroke. Sadly Fred Died in 1994. During the time after his retirement Fred really enjoyed coming to work, he liked to keep busy. There was always a good atmosphere in his studio and he made everyone laugh with his tales of the terrible drivers he had encountered on the road on his way to work. Although he had retired he just loved fast cars and loved to drive fast in them.

He had many hobbies, water colour painting and building models from scratch. He left David a wonderful boat that he had made it's a Cornish Fishing ketch named ' Kathleen,' it is a marvelous piece every single item has been hand made right down to the tiny anchor and buckets and miniature rowing boats on board. David was very honored to have been given this gift, which he still has to this day.

All in all Fred Wright worked at the Legend Company for 21 years from 1950 to 1994.

He is very much missed by us all and very fondly remembered.

In 1989 Alec retired from the business. For quite some time before this he had only been coming into work one or two days a week from his home in North Wales. Sadly Alec died in 1996. The company is now run by David and his wife Sheila.

In 1995 the legend Collector's club was launched in response to demand from collector's all over the world who wanted more information on the intriguing pieces they had bought.

It is hoped that all the pieces ever brought out by the company in the last 56 years will be catalogued and photographed into a special book; this clearly could take some time. In the meantime, we wish you happy collecting, Keep in touch; we love to hear from you.

David & Sheila Cochrane

FRED WRIGHT'S STORY

THE STORY OF HIS CAREER AS TOLD BY BY FRED'S WIFE KATHLEEN WRIGHT

Fred, my husband was born the second child of William and Harriet Wright, he was an identical twin, but his brother died at childbirth.

In very early years Fred showed a remarkable talent for drawing and painting. He painted at a very early age,

Portraits of remarkable likeness, they were as good as photographs, they were so real. He studied anatomy, so he knew the structure of animals, birds and people, it was therefore a great help to him in later years when he came to model them in clay.

At fourteen he attended the Burslem school of Art in Stoke on Trent this was a two year course. At sixteen Fred went to work at the 'Doulton' China pottery in Burslem Stoke on Trent, painting fine china and he was there until 1937 when war was looming. He knew that he would be called up for the forces so he decided to volunteer for the Royal Air Force.

I met Fred at Doulton's where I also was painting figures having attended Burselm school of Art. It was a short courtship for us, but our letters kept the courtship going.

Fred was in the desert as an engineer maintaining the planes for the pilots to fight with. For four and a half years he lived in terrible conditions there. Even in the desert he painted pictures of fighter planes in action, and these he sold.

After four and a half years the war was over with Germany, so he came home and the flags were flying and everyone was so happy to have their loved ones back home again, We were married and went to live at Baldwin's Gate near Newcastle in Staffordshire. Fred was demobed and went to work at the 'Paragon' china works at Longton stoke on Trent, painting beautiful roses on to china plates. Some of these lovely lifelike pieces were made for Royalty. Also Fred painted roses on a huge vase and it went on show at Harrod's store in London.

After working at the 'Paragon' pottery for seven years, it was suggested to Fred that he might try his hand at modeling. Although he had not done any since he was at the school of art. So he got a ball of clay and he modeled an old Persian man, he got my father to sit and he modeled his hands. If he had done modeling all his life he could not have done any better, it was so real, Fred had it fired and painted it himself. I have this figure in my room. It is a one off.

Having had this success Fred gave up his job and went to work freelance. The first company he worked for was Halls China Works of Longton Stoke on Trent. Where he was modeling birds and animals, they were very lifelike, but he needed more work. He had been doing work for Mr Alec Cochrane of Legend Products in Stockport near Manchester for quite some time but he needed more work to fully utilize his working day.

It was decided by all concerned that an advert would be placed in the Stoke Sentinel, Mr Bossons was one of the people who replied. Both Legend and Bossons were making small plaster plaques so Fred worked on small pieces for both firms for a while, soon thereafter

Mr Bosson had Fred work on some larger plaques with flowers on them, roses chrysanthemums, spring flowers. Mr Bosson was so pleased with them that he offered Fred a job full time as his modeler, Fred accepted and was soon underway modeling heads with turbans, Indians with feathered headdresses, birds, heads of all nationalities.

Mr Bosson would look in to Books and then Fred would model the head from the book he had chosen. I must emphasize that Fred was the modeler, he breathed life into clay, and also he painted the pattern for the girls in the factory to copy.

We were living at Alsager now, Mr Bosson's firm started expanding, orders for countries abroad, besides the home market, he made great wealth but this did not come our way.

Mr Bossons dropped Fred's wage twice, so Fred gave his notice in. Because Fred was leaving Mr Bossons would not let Fred have his pension transferred, but his firm was never the same after Fred had left. He had no new models to bring out, so slowly it went down. Now the firm is closed and Mr Bossons is not a well man.

(Mr Bosson has since died in 1999)

Fred then joined Alec Cochrane's company in Macclesfield. Fred had modeled for Alec before when he was freelance. Many people could not understand why the Legend heads were so like Bosson's the reason is they both had employed Fred to do work for their firms. Fred enjoyed working for Alec Cochrane and particularly his son David, Fred modeled the same type of work heads, birds, plaques. Because it was a more relaxed atmosphere he looked forward to going to work. After working at Legend for a few years and putting the firm on its feet, Fred decided to go back to a china firm, he got a position at Anysley China works, Stoke on Trent. they wanted to open a works making animal kingdom, they made a wide search for modelers of high standards, Fred got the position and started modeling animals and birds. They sold very well most of them were huge and limited edition of 750 pieces making them much more valuable in years to come.

Fred modeled a bald eagle, it looked so real, it was nineteen inches high standing on a rock. The Queen and prince Philip were going to America to commemorate the Bi Centenary of the United States of America in 1976. All the leading firms were asked to submit a piece of china for the queen to take as a gift she choose Fred's bald eagle. Her majesty Queen Elizabeth and his Royal Highnesss Prince Philip presented it to the Bostonian society and it is preserved today in the old courthouse, Boston Massachusetts. The bald eagle is an impressive true to life sculpture in fine porcelain of the national emblem of the United States of America. Mr Gillow was very pleased with at this honor He gave Fred an Eagle, it is so real, and when I dust it I feel it may peck me.

If you can buy any of Anysley's animal kingdom, they will be very valuable due to only so many being made.

Fred was very happy working for Mr Gillow at Anysley's, buut when he was sixty- five he decided to retire from full time work and take up part time work at Legend products. This being the third time he worked for Alec and David Cochrane at Macclesfield. He worked for them intotal for 21 years.

Fred was working there when he had a massive stroke paralyzing him down him down his right side.

Fred was in hospital for twelve months, he came home, but he wasn't in a fit state to be home. I looked after Fred myself for two years without help from the nurses. Our Minister Mr Challinor was a great help in my trouble, he did things for my husband no one else

would have done. We got him on his feet with another mans help and he took him to chapel in his car, we walked him up and down in the school room. For a time Fred was then able to go once a week to a day center.

All through Fred's life he had a great love of fast cars, so he struggles to get better so he could drive again. Our Doctor called to see him and Fred asked him if he could have his driving license so he could drive his car, but the doctor told him you will never drive again. When I was out of the room alone with the doctor I told him you should not have told Fred he would never drive again, he will give up trying to get better. At this time I was also in a poor state of health. I wondered who would go the first, so the social service nurses came to help. We all struggled to keep Fred going but he died on June 6th 1994. I loved my husband and life will never be the same.

Fred was an unusual man in many ways. He was a perfectionist, that showed up in his work, he also painted some very good pictures and sold them. I have some up in our home. We had a caravan in Wales, and Fred like nothing better than packing to go. We both had a great love of dogs and over the years we had three spaniels and an English red setter. They were like our family we had no children.

Fred made models of aero planes and went flying them, he also made model boats, a special one he made all himself, it had sails and rigging he did not have a kit to make it, he just cut it all out himself. It was a large boat about 4 ft long.

They used to sail them on the Thames, they have dark red sails, Fred gave it as a gift to David Cochrane.

Fred also built a sports car it was finished off in all details and was registered as a new car. The other love of his life was going on holiday to Cornwall, he would have liked to have lived there, but I enjoyed it as a holiday but not to live there.

As I look back Fred would have been better off working free lance all his life, he could have got high prices for his work, we would have had more time in our caravan in Wales and we could have gone to Cornwall more. Fred was an atheist, he did not believe in an after life. I do, I am a Christian. Fred was buried from our home. Mr Challinor our minister spoke of the life of Fred to the friends and relatives who had attended the funeral. Fred's grave is the churchyard of Christ Church, Alsager, Cheshire.

At the end of this book of Fred's I should like to thank neighbours, friends, relatives and nurses, also Sheila & David Cochrane who helped me in caring for Fred during his illness, without them I could not have carried on.

Kathleen Wright