

## Rattee and Kett

# 150 years of achievement



*For 150 years, Rattee and Kett have been constructing and restoring some of the finest buildings in Britain.*

*Examples of their work can be seen in palaces, churches, universities and many other public buildings.*

*Founded in 1843, in Cambridge, by James Rattee who was later joined by George Kett, the company prospered under the guidance of these two master craftsmen.*

appointment by the Cambridge-based Ecclesiological Society as their woodcarver. Rattee was an early patron of this Society, which, in 1841, began to promote principles of church design and layout, similar to those of Pugin. The Society's profound influence helped create a large market for church fittings such as screens, rails and stalls, which specialist firms like Rattee and Kett were able to satisfy.



George Kett 1809-1872.

George Kett (1809-1872) was working on the cathedral in Norwich when he was asked to submit designs for the House of Lords. His previous relationship with Rattee, who had already left Norwich at this stage, is unclear. Kett worked on the interior of the Houses of Parliament from 1845 until 1848 where he is said to have

1000 and colleges needed to expand to accommodate the numbers. Rattee and Kett were responsible for a new hall and library for Pembroke College in the 1870s; new lecture rooms at Gonville and Caius Colleges in the 1880s. During these years the firm took on a number of large new building projects reaching the height of ambition with the Catholic Church in Hills Road which was completed in 1890. The supply of church fittings continued throughout, as did church restoration. However, the largest project undertaken was the rebuilding of Arundel Castle, in Sussex, for the Duke of Norfolk - a truly mammoth task.

The acquisition of the company in 1926 by John Mowlem enabled the company to combine the knowledge and experience of an established builder with the resources and backing of one of the largest construction groups in

James Rattee's carving of the oak screen at the

tee designed and built the distinctive workshops together with his own house on the corner of the site.

The construction of the new Houses of Parliament was seen as an opportunity to encourage carving and in 1843 the Royal Commission of Fine Arts asked for craftsmen to send in specimens of their work. Amongst those who submitted designs were James Rattee of Cambridge and George Kett, a woodcarver from Norwich. From 1844 onwards, Pugin, who together with Charles Barry had won the competition to design the new Houses of Parliament, was appointed superintendent of woodcarving. The connection between Pugin, James Rattee and George Kett was to prove





Dear Mr. [unclear]  
 it is with great pleasure that I write to you together with Charles  
 of John Mowlem & Company in connection with the  
 achieving your 150th Anniversary  
 When Mowlem acquired Rattee and Kett in these difficult times  
 Company had an enviable reputation for craftsmanship  
 I am delighted to see, even in these difficult times  
 successfully maintain those ideas upon which your reputation is  
 based and have supplemented them with a strong commercial business  
 sense.  
 Best wishes to you all for 1993 and may you continue to prosper and  
 grow as part of John Mowlem construction plc, whilst providing  
 quality building for many more satisfied clients.

*Yours sincerely*  
 Philip Desk  
 Philip Desk

Registered in England Number 17622  
 Registered Office: White Lion Court, Swan Street, Stroud, Gloucestershire, G11 1JY

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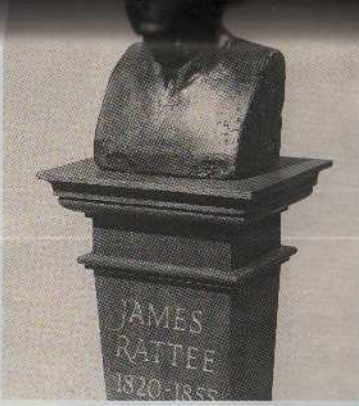
With the  
 new Houses of  
 Parliament under con-

struction in London and the specta-  
 cular growth of Manchester and the  
 other industrial towns of the  
 North and Midlands, Cambridge  
 may appear by comparison to have  
 been something of a sleepy back-  
 water in the 1840s. But when  
 James Rattee set up business in  
 Cambridge, his company was to  
 benefit from his choice of location  
 in three ways.

The first was the supply of work  
 provided by the University. A rapid  
 increase in the number of stu-  
 dents had already led to a building  
 boom in the first part of the  
 century.

The second was the coming of  
 the railways to Cambridge in  
 1845. The crucial factor in the  
 supply of building materials was  
 the high cost of transport and the  
 railways allowed for materials to be  
 imported economically from much  
 further away. In return, finished  
 items such as pulpits, lecterns and  
 stalls, could be sent with ease to  
 distant parts of the kingdom.

The final factor which allowed  
 James Rattee to establish his repu-  
 tation and supplied him with a  
 steady flow of work was his



Bust of James Rattee 1820-1855.

carved the Royal Arms behind the  
 Throne. During recent restoration  
 of the ceiling of the House of  
 Lords, a boss bearing the name of  
 Kett was discovered.

In 1848, James Rattee was  
 joined in partnership by George  
 Kett, but this did not prevent the  
 deterioration of Rattee's health  
 due to overwork. Recuperation on  
 the continent and subsequent vis-  
 its to some of the cathedral towns  
 of Northern Europe provided  
 inspiration for his great work at  
 Ely, following which, just a few  
 years later, he died. After Rattee's  
 death, his wife Caroline continued  
 the business partnership with  
 George Kett. George died some 17  
 years later in 1872.

While George Kett (I) did not  
 enjoy the same stature as James  
 Rattee, the Kett's came into their  
 own with George Kett (II) who  
 lived from 1836 until 1914. The  
 second George Kett's period in  
 charge coincided with a second  
 boom in University building.  
 Between 1860 and 1900 the num-  
 ber of matriculations at Cam-  
 bridge increased from 410 to over

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 established builder with the  
 resources and backing of one of  
 the largest construction groups in  
 Europe. Today, almost 70 years  
 later and as a member of the  
 Mowlem Group, Rattee and Kett  
 continue to enjoy a high local pro-  
 file and to be associated with both  
 new building and restoration  
 works in this University town and  
 East Anglia.

*James Rattee's  
 carving of the oak  
 screen at Ely  
 Cathedral was  
 documented in  
 Volume IX No 441  
 of The Builder, the  
 original name of  
 today's Building  
 Magazine, which is  
 also celebrating its  
 150th anniversary  
 this year.*

*Rattee and Kett  
 workshops, in  
 Station Road,  
 Cambridge. On the  
 extreme right, is  
 James Rattee's  
 house - an eccentric  
 mixture of elements,  
 a central chuch of  
 chimneys, rusticated  
 corners and pilasters  
 and off-centre bay  
 windows on the  
 North and West  
 sides.*

