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.

te 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 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) 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 concerns in...
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 beneficial to all parties.

With the new Houses of Parliament under construction in London and the spectacular growth of Manchester and the other industrial towns of the North and Midlands, Cambridge may appear by comparison to have been nothing short of meteoric as, in 1843, he purchased a large site on Station Road and founded his own woodcarving works. It is said that the premises included a stone works, joinery works, builders' yard and offices. Over the following ten years, Rattee and Kett workshops, in Station Road, Cambridge, On the extreme right, is James Rattee's house - an ecletic mixture of elements, a central clock with chimneys, rusticated corners and pilasters and off-centre bay windows on the North and West sides.

James Rattee (1820-1855) was apprenticed in Norwich as a carpenter and joiner, but after only two years he sought a different path. He “commenced business on his own account in a humble way in Cambridge” and his success must have been nothing short of meteoric as, in 1843, he purchased a large site on Station Road and founded his own woodcarving works. It is said that the premises included a stone works, joinery works, builders' yard and offices. Over the following ten years, Rattee and Kett workshops, in Station Road, Cambridge, On the extreme right, is James Rattee's house - an ecletic mixture of elements, a central clock with chimneys, rusticated corners and pilasters and off-centre bay windows on the North and West sides.

Bust of James Rattee 1820-1855. 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.

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 visits 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 Kett 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 number of matriculations at Cambridge increased from 410 to over