

Oxon firm carved its name with pride

AN OXFORDSHIRE firm which specialised in church work and restoration is the subject of a fascinating exhibition at Banbury Museum.

The firm, Franklins, which operated in Deddington from 1850 to 1917 was founded by carpenter and joiner Mr Robert Franklin and established a national and international reputation for church carvings.

Perhaps the firm's most well-known work was a chancel screen and pulpit it made for the Cathedral church in Hobart, Tasmania, between 1868 - 1894.

A leaflet produced by the museum says the sending off of the work caused a great stir in Deddington.

"No-one seemed to know where Tasmania was, except that it was a long, long way away," one resident was reported as saying at the time.

In his early days, Mr Franklin established a highly successful builders' yard and employed ten men by 1851.



Craftsmen's tools: Banbury Museum attendant Julia Taylor with some of the carving equipment used by Franklins.

By 1871 his widow employed 84 men and eight boys. Later brothers Henry and William Franklin took over the firm, which became a very big operation by the 1890s, employing more than 200 men.

But in 1912 a family crisis occurred, when William's wife left him, taking most of the money.

Franklins became a limited company with two new directors, Mr Frank Gray, the MP for Oxford City and bank manager, Mr Margate.

The firm continued in business until 1917, when it was forced to close because of bankruptcy.

The museum leaflet reveals Franklins received a large order for stretchers during the 1914 - 18 war, which it turned out six inches short of War Office specifications

The War Office refused payment and the Official Receiver was called in.

Franklins was also to have worked on Liverpool Cathedral but because of its financial problems, it could not take on the work.

The firm's output was prolific. As well as producing fittings and furnishings for churches, Franklins also produced work for Oxford colleges, schools and private houses.

The exhibition, which continues until January 12, has attracted many people, especially from the Deddington area.

Some of the most interested visitors were a party of tourists from Tasmania, who popped into the museum quite by chance and were amazed when they discovered the origin of the fine furniture in their church back home.