

# Henry & Julius Caesar – Rustic House Builders

Henry and Julius Caesar were rustic house builders from 1871-1939. Their business was based in Brook Street, Knutsford, on the south side of the town where a new Aldi supermarket is to be built. Here until recently was Caesar's Place, the cottage where the Caesars lived, but was demolished without permission. This building is adjacent to the old library (grade 2 listed) and the Unitarian church (grade 1 listed), so the future that has now erupted with East Cheshire Council can be imagined. Unfortunately Caesar's Place is just outside the conservation area. What is worse is that the rustic porch attached to the cottage, and an arched gateway, which feature in the Caesars' 1920s catalogues were also demolished. Rustic buildings made by the Caesars fetch between £9000 and £15000 today, so Knutsford has now lost some original work made by them.

The Caesars had a long and distinguished career, being awarded over 200 gold and silver medals and diplomas; they had the royal patronage of King George V. Their ornamental garden furniture is unique and their repertoire extensive. Their rustic summerhouses were extensively fitted out and often had stained glass windows (Fig 1). They also made pavilions, bridges, boathouses, porches, arches, bandstands, gates, fences and seats, and all kinds of rustic decorations (Figs 2 and 3). They exhibited at the British Empire Exhibition in 1924. The following is a quote from one of their 1920s catalogues:

'We beg respectfully to call attention to our DESIGNS AND PRICES OF GARDEN FURNITURE, etc. We think it unnecessary to say much as to the QUALITY AND WORKMANSHIP of any article we manufacture, as we are well known throughout the United Kingdom. Suffice to say that, for elegance of design and durability, they are excelled by none. All goods are



Fig 1 Summerhouse



Fig 2 Arched gateway

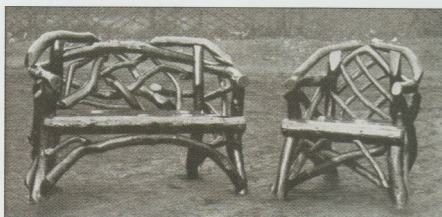


Fig 3 Garden seating

manufactured on our own premises, under personal supervision, and the greatest care is exercised in selecting sound and dry materials. We thank our customers for their past support of their favours, which shall at all times receive our careful attention. H & J CAESAR'.

The Caesars have proved so far to be elusive on the census returns, though a Dora Caesar, believed to be a daughter of one of them, is on the 1901 census. At the age of 13 in 1898, Dora was Knutsford's 'Royal' May Queen in a festival that has now been running for 146 years. Directories have proved more promising and Henry Caesar is recorded as a carpenter in Knutsford in 1876. Directories between 1892 and 1939 show Henry and Julius Caesar as rustic house builders in Brook Street, Knutsford, occupying almost the entire site where the new supermarket is to be. A recent acquisition by Knutsford Heritage Centre of a book of photographs c.1860-1888 has an image of the Brook Street site with rustic houses partly built. Some 30 Caesar catalogues have also come into the centre. Some litho plates used to print catalogues, and one half of a branding iron used to stamp Caesar's rustic houses are also thought to have survived, and possibly the base ironwork of a revolving rustic house. Two examples of preserved rustic houses are known, one locally that is believed to be a revolving summerhouse, and one at Fanshawe Gate Hall (Derbyshire) purchased by Edward VII. Others will no doubt be found and will be investigated. As yet we do not know if Henry and Julius were brothers, father and son or some other relationship. As research progresses more details will surely be revealed and more artefacts found.

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