

# Magnificent casket is piece of local history

**When we think of the Torquay and South Devon marble industry we tend to imagine spectacular Victorian marble pieces.**

Beautiful local stone specimens inlaid into imported black marble or ornate architectural fittings such as fireplaces in local pink and grey limestone.

However, one firm continued to work right through the 20th century surviving two world wars and incredibly they are still going.

Grants Marble Manufactory follows an unbroken line back to Harry Grant and Sons Ltd, Art Marble Workers established in 1836.

The work of Grants through the 20th century has gone largely unnoticed by the antiques trade.

When the local stones disappeared, most were quarried out or were reduced to the products of one or two quarries, Grants changed their products.

In the early part of the century they started working with imported white and green onyx, making range of products including cigarette and trinket boxes, inkwells, desk sets and cases for clocks.

Many of these were mounted in silver and inlaid with malachite, lapis lazuli and coral.

Often they didn't mark their work or if they did many dealers have failed to understand the mark.

This leads us to a rather magnificent casket presented to Robert Henry Rooke in 1968 now on display in The Secret Museum exhibition.

Robert Rooke was born in Chelston and entered the service of Torquay Borough Council in 1920 as

**Barry Chandler, of Torquay Museum, tells the story behind an item included in The Secret Museum exhibition**

a junior clerk. He had worked his way up to mayor's secretary by 1924 and he sat on various committees.

During World War Two, Rooke helped with food supply and was deputy controller for the civil defence area.

Post war, his work included securing important and attractive events to come to the town including the 1948 Olympics.

Rooke served for 38 different mayors and was made a freeman of the town in 1968.

His certificate was presented to him in a hansom white onyx casket with an enamelled Torquay Borough crest on the lid. It was made by Harry Grant & Sons Ltd.

This beautiful but unfortunately damaged casket is now a key piece in understanding the work of Harry Grant and Sons through the 20th century. The casket is the only item so far known with an instruction from the company on



The Mayor of Torquay presents civic dignitaries with onyx caskets. (PR3467 - order this picture from the museum using this code)

headed paper which links the item to the firm.

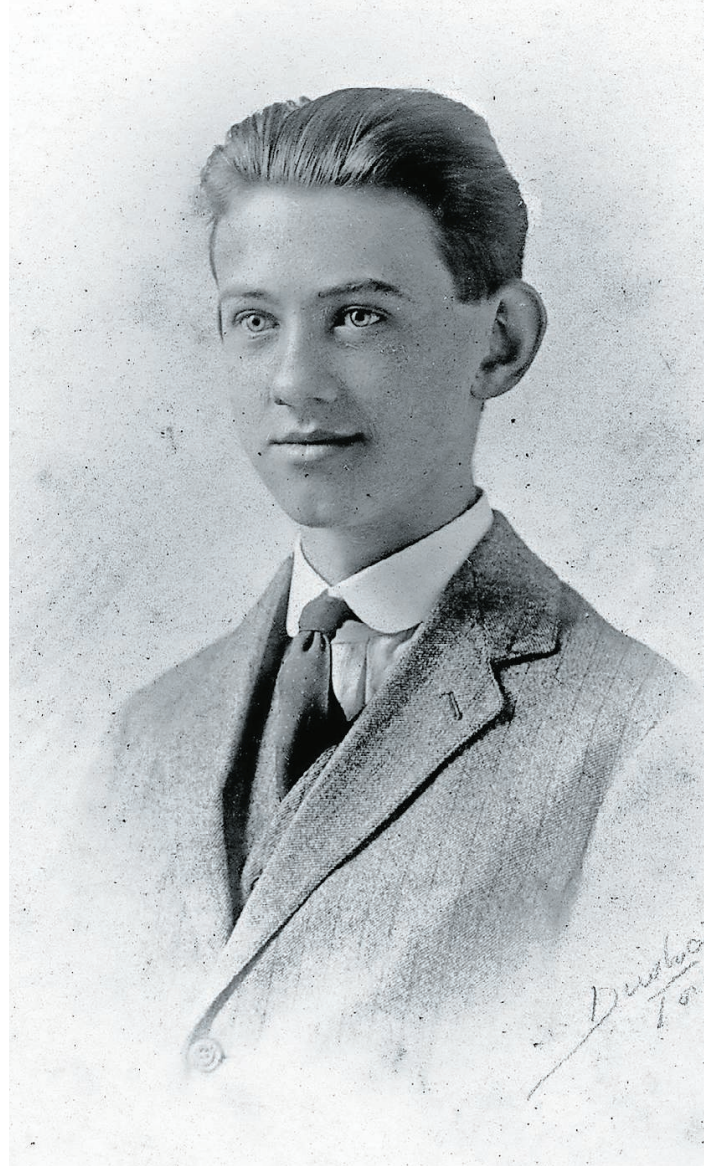
Importantly, it also has a maker's mark reading H.G.&S. on the hinge.

The combination of the two things leaves us in no doubt who made these caskets and if additional proof were needed, there are pictures taken in the factory of their production.

The identification of this maker's mark opens our eyes to the range of spectacular high-end products that the factory produced in the 20th century, some of which were supplied to very top London retailers such as Asprey and Thomas Goode.

We hope to have the casket repaired in the future ideally by incredible local company that produced it.

You can see the casket on display all summer in The Secret Museum exhibition.



A professional photograph of young Robert Rooke by Dinham & Sons of Torquay

(PR26598)

Pictures: TORQUAY MUSEUM



The onyx box made by Harry Grant & Sons, now on display in The Secret Museum exhibition.