

A. C. MOLE

SOUTH WEST TO WILD WEST AND BACK

CENTENARY CELEBRATION



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FROM SOUTH WEST TO WILD WEST (AND BACK)

Albert Charles Mole was born at 14 Salem Place, Exeter on 20 May 1874. For a while he worked for A. Bromley Sanders at 20, Cathedral Close, before moving in 1894 to join his brother in Edinburgh, and to take up an appointment with the firm of Honeyman & Wilson. Bromley Sanders felt that A C's "good experience in bookkeeping and correspondence, and...fair knowledge of shorthand" would ensure his success. In Edinburgh he spent much of his free time working at a Christian mission and in refuges and shelters for the poor; he also became involved with the temperance organisation, the Band of Hope. On 23 May 1897 he celebrated his 23rd birthday with a trip to Loch Katrine and "a good spread including Devon cream". He can little have anticipated on that fine summer day what the next two years held in store for him.

Within two months he was to leave Edinburgh for Clifton, Arizona, to join the Arizona Copper Company. A couple of days before leaving he recorded in his diary "Went to shelter and Miss S. gave me a book as a remembrance". Of Miss S. we shall hear more. His employer again gave a glowing reference, having "had constant opportunities of observing his many excellent qualities to which I now willingly bear testimony...He possesses a sound knowledge of bookkeeping, is rapid and accurate at figures, and extremely painstaking in the performance of his work. At all times punctual, attentive and obliging, Mr Mole commands the respect of all with whom he comes in contact."



Clifton Arizona Copper Mine smelter.

Arriving in Clifton on 3 September, he found a very different world awaiting him. His diary for 13 October records "My first real Wild West experience... Tonight a cowboy shot the town up. He rode through shooting for all he was worth with Billy Hamilton, the Sheriff and others after him with 6 shooters. They ran him to bay at the top of town & as he refused to dismount Billy knocked him off with his gun; he was dragged across to the gaol on his back as he refused to walk & is now safe for the night. Billy says he felt the wind pass as one of the shots passed by." The cowboy was fined \$75. Ten days later the diary records that " a man arrested for murder was taken from the gaol and lynched.

About 1.30 this morning a crowd held up the two guards at the gaol & took out the prisoner to hang him, but as he began to make an outcry they shot him & left him between the gaol & railway depot."

By the following year, his thoughts had returned to Edinburgh, his diary for 21 January recording that he had "written to K.S. definitely today". Shortly afterwards he "received a letter from K putting all matters right". Having persuaded K to join him he set about acquiring a house, for which he borrowed \$800. Things were not however to progress without further incident: Clifton was hit by a smallpox outbreak. Fearing that his marriage plans would be thwarted, he left town on a freight train, reaching Lordsburg in New Mexico just twenty minutes before Clifton was quarantined from all passenger traffic. Travelling via St Louis, Cincinnati and Washington, he eventually reached New York. Kate (the "K" and "S" of the diary) arrived in New York on the Campania shortly after midday on 18 March 1899 and at 5 o'clock that afternoon she and A C married at the Marble Collegiate Church on the corner of 29th street and 5th Avenue.

They travelled back to Clifton by rail, stopping briefly at Niagara and traversing through a snow covered Canada. They were greeted on arrival by a huge "welcome" sign, firecrackers and, as they were retiring to bed, a mandolin band. They remained in Clifton until 1902, when they returned to England. They brought with them their son Stafford, who had been born two years earlier. On 1st October 1902, aged 27, A C began his accountancy practice in Taunton, opening an office on the corner of Billet Street and East Street. In June 1905 he passed the final examination of the Society of Accountants and Auditors and was admitted to membership. The following year he became a Fellow.

A C immediately immersed himself in the civic life of the town. He became a member of Taunton Town Council in 1913 and was elected Mayor in November 1915. The Somerset County Gazette for 15 November 1915 contains a report of the Council meeting at which he was elected.

Alderman Hitchcock proposed for the mayoralty "a gentleman whom all would agree was worthy to fill the office... a gentleman clever in his profession and possessed of business qualities to his fingertips." Alderman Vile added that "Mr Mole was a man of more than average intelligence; he held broad views; in business keen and always honourable. If it were possible for a man to find a needle in a haystack, Mr Mole was that man." Councillor West, in case their had been any doubt, asserted that "Mr Mole was entitled to be termed a true English gentleman (cries of hear hear)" He was elected unanimously.



In the coming years he would take on a number of important roles. He served on Somerset County Council for 43 years, during which time he never had to contest an election. He was a Justice of the Peace, serving on the County Bench from 1927 until he retired as Chairman in 1950. He was an Income Tax Commissioner from 1943 to 1957, serving as Chairman for all but the first year. He was a Freemason, having been Past Master of the Lodge of St George and Past Provincial Junior Grand Deacon (Somerset). In 1908 he also found time to write The Students Epitome of Accountancy and Bookkeeping.

In the years before the First World War he travelled to look at two copper mines in what is now the Republic of Georgia, at the request of James Colquhoun, for whom he had worked in Arizona. His report presumably recommended the acquisition of the mines by the Caucasus Copper Company, but unfortunately Colquhoun's arrival coincided with the Russian revolution and he had to flee for his life.



Copper Mines at Dzsansoul, Caucasus 1910.

His strong Christian faith and the sights he had seen in the shelters and refuges of Edinburgh drove another side of the man. He was secretary of the Bath and Wells Diocesan Board of Finance from its formation in 1913 until 1944 (when the office was moved from Stafford House to Wells) and was still a member of the Board at the time of his death. The minutes of the Board's Annual Meeting for 1944 record his retirement from the secretaryship: "It is to him more than any other that we owe the sound structure of our diocesan finance with all its resultant benefit. The confidence in the Board felt by the whole Diocese and the stability and strength of its present position are the finest testimony to his creative work. It is a great satisfaction to know that although we must now release him as Secretary we can still draw on his immense experience and extraordinary organizing ability".

Perhaps the most intriguing venture was the Western Counties Public House Trust. The Trust was incorporated in 1902 and its object was to own and run public houses in such a way that, although alcohol was served, the managers had no direct interest in profits derived from its sale. There was thus every incentive to encourage the purchase of soft drinks or only moderate amounts of alcohol. By the 1950s it had become impossible to compete with brewers in the open market and the Trust was wound up. A surplus of over £25000 was distributed to local charities.

A C's practice grew quickly, attracting some of the largest and most prestigious businesses in the area as clients. By 1925 he needed a business partner and was joined by A G Browne. In 1928 and 1933 respectively his sons Horace and Edgar became partners. His first son Stafford, who had qualified as an architect, died in 1938 and to help to get over their loss, A C and Kate set off on a trip around the world. They travelled via the Suez Canal to Australia. In Sydney, on Christmas Eve, they received greetings via beam wireless from "Home & Stafford House" and from "Spiller, Castle Hotel". They continued to New Zealand, returning home via Pitcairn Island (on which the Bounty's mutineers had settled, having scuttled their ship offshore) and the Panama Canal. A C retired from the partnership in 1940. The next year Kate died. He had recorded in his diary on 18 March two years earlier, their 40th wedding anniversary, "I realise that I owe to her more than I can say and that whatever success I have made of life, spiritually and materially, is in large measure due to her companionship and inspiration."

Although retired from the firm, he continued to be active in his many other roles. A subsequent purchaser of The Grove, the house A C had built on coming to Taunton, testified to his ability as a gardener, wondering "how he had time to be an accountant when he seemed to run Kew Gardens". In 1941 he re-married.

He died on 21 May 1960, the day after his 86th birthday.

The future for A.C. Mole & Sons

A word about technology

Although comptometer machines (which could be operated at lightning speed by the ladies in the boardroom) had been in use for some years, the dawn of the eighties saw the first true computer system in the office. The Radius machine was a processor box with eight "dumb" terminals distributed throughout the building. One was connected to the Castle Cary office by landline. The computer handled the firm's time costing ledger and could be used to produce accounts. Each set of accounts had to be designed to match one of a number of pre-set formats. Although the system was upgraded in the late eighties, it handled only a fraction of the firm's accounts. At the time it was state of the art. The pace of change quickened dramatically in the nineties with the introduction of a PC network and Iris software. The network now links around fifty PCs in Taunton and Bridgwater. Iris enables us to generate accounts without word-processing and generates tax returns. The "grossing up" tables of Peter Shapland's days are a thing of the past with computations now fully automated. The system proved itself to be right at the cutting edge in 1997 when we filed the UK's first electronic tax return. That event was recorded the next day on the front page of the Financial Times and was widely reported in the tax press and on BBC radio.

In December 2001 we filed the first Agent Internet Service return and our experience in electronic and Internet filing is such that the Inland Revenue regularly ask us to comment on and trial new features before they are launched. IT also revolutionised the office

library during the nineties. Initially books became available on CD but by the end of the decade access to virtually all of the tax reference library was via the Internet direct to a desktop PC. The ability to receive information from clients by email, to access their computer systems from Stafford House and to work at their offices using lap tops became routine.

The New Millennium

The firm continues to build upon its great strengths, harnessing technology and technical skills to provide the highest quality of personal service. Our success in that aim was recognised in May 2002, when we reached the final shortlist (of three) in the national Butterworths Tolley Tax Awards for "Best Tax Team in a Small to Medium Sized Firm". In the autumn of 2002 the firm was authorised by the Chartered Institute of Taxation to practice as Chartered Tax Advisers.

A century of achievement lies behind us. A century of challenge lies ahead.



The A.C. Mole & Sons team on 1st October 2002.

