

# THE ARNPRIOR CONNECTION

BY BRYAN DAVIES



H. E. BRITTLE

**T**HE MADAWASKA River tumbles merrily into the Ottawa River about forty miles West of the City of Ottawa in the middle of the pretty, historical and bustling town of Arnprior.

Arnprior was founded by Archibald McNab in June of 1825 when he brought twenty families comprising eighty-five souls from Scotland who promptly set out to colonize the area at the river mouth and then outward to the boundaries of the newly laid out Township of McNab.

These first Scottish settlers brought their hardworking, loyal and persevering attitude to the new town and while Arnprior now claims citizens from many nationalities, these early attributes have remained through the years making the town one of the most enterprising in Ontario.

Many and varied industries have flourished in Arnprior and today it is the home to aerospace, nuclear, pharmaceutical, electrical and computer companies and one renowned land survey firm, Gibson, Sury and Rowe Limited.

Andy Gibson, the founder of the firm, became the Editor of the OLS Quarterly in 1974 and served us faithfully until his retirement in 1984. Andy was the person responsible for finding and forming a fine business relationship with the printer of this magazine, Harry Brittle.

This marriage of editor and printer must have been made in Heaven because as Harry said recently, "God knows how we got some of the issues out." In fact, Harry also says he taught Andy everything he knows about editing!!! Rebuttal from the former Editor is invited.

As a new editor I felt obliged to make a pilgrimage to Arnprior, the jewel of the Ottawa Valley and visit this paragon of printers to see first hand how our magazine is actually put together. It was a most enlightening experience and was made all the more interesting by the personally conducted tour of the facility by the "Gutenberg" of Eastern Ontario, Harry Brittle himself.

It was my first experience with the working side of the printing business and after seeing the Spring issue safely through the presses I sat down with Harry and a cup of coffee and learned a little more about the man and his business.

Harry Brittle was born in the industrial city of Birmingham in England and as was common in those days he became apprenticed to a Master Printer. Apprentices counted themselves lucky in those days if they could get a place and Harry's father paid the Master the sum of one hundred pounds (well over five hundred dollars at that time) for the privilege of becoming what amounted to a slave for the next seven years. Harry then became a journeyman printer.

World War Two intervened in Harry's life as it did in many others and the next five and one-half years were spent in the British Army. France must have agreed with Harry because he stayed in France after the War and 1947 found him working for the Continental Daily Mail and based in Paris. Paris proved to be more than just a place to work however, as it was there that Harry met and married his wife of the past thirty-five years, Lillian.

Harry was enticed to Canada in 1951 by a "friend" who told him that Perth, Ontario had a population of some 80,000 people and offered him a job on the local newspaper. It must have been quite a shock when Harry stepped off the train to find a town less than one-tenth the size expected.

In any event Harry stayed in Perth for a year or so and joined the Arnprior Chronicle in 1953. For the next six years, Harry spent a great deal of time and effort in helping to make the paper a success and rose to the position of Vice President. After this success he felt he needed a change and left printing for a few months.

At that time Arnprior had no commercial printing company and with the promised support of a number of local industries and individuals Harry set up "H. Brittle Printing Ltd." in September of 1960. The firm is now in the middle of Silver Anniversary celebrations and a special silver calendar has been printed to commemorate the event. Harry began with one employee, himself, and the firm has grown to its present staff of seven.

One of these employees is Harry's son Hedley who started at the bottom at the age of twelve during summer jobs and has reached his present position with the firm through a combination of hard, practical work and training in Graphic Arts at Algonquin College in Ottawa.

Harry and Hedley divide the administrative labours with Harry handling the business portion of the firm while Hedley is in charge of production which includes design, colour handling and photographic work as well as the printing itself.

This highly efficient business operates in a variety of areas including local "job" printing for commercial and industrial accounts, yearbooks, catalogues and hardbound books as well as our Quarterly. The hardcovers include a most interesting history of Arnprior and a soon-to-be-released biography of General Chris Vokes, one of Canada's well known military figures.

A measure of the success of the company is the fact that it has expanded three times since moving to its present location and Harry estimates that the business is now valued at over half a million dollars with the newest press costing over eighty thousand dollars itself. H. Brittle Printing Ltd. is a modern business with computer typesetting and an elaborate camera for making the printing plates but a link with the past remains in the office in the form of an ancient Linotype machine which was considered just the latest thing in about 1910.

Harry Brittle brings old-world craftsmanship and pride to his business and these extend to his son and the entire staff. Nothing goes out unless it is right and this is obvious in the fine appearance of this magazine. The AOLS has a good friend in Harry Brittle. Harry proofreads, suggests layouts and was the main proponent for the use of colour in the publication. It may be a small town concern but it operates with a big city technology and professionalism. ●