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As the only surviving family owned footwear brand in England, Crockett & Jones is a vestige of quintessential British tradition, quality and zeal. **Hugh Francis Anderson** visits its Northampton factory to discover more

Crockett & Jones has long been a manufacturer of beautifully handmade footwear. A brand rich in British heritage, it has been gracing the feet of gentlemen since 1879, when Charles Jones and Sir James Crockett partnered up to establish a company with one clear aim in mind: to produce shoes of unwavering quality. The company remains family owned to this day and boasts a clientele ranging from HRH Prince of Wales to Daniel Craig, who sported numerous pairs of Crockett & Jones shoes in the latest James Bond film, *Spectre*.

These shoes, like all Crockett & Jones designs, would have been pieced together at the brand's factory in Northampton, a place which is arguably keeping the tradition of British footwear alive. The factory itself is something to behold; a space reminiscent of the British Empire – an age when Britain formed the backbone of the global footwear industry – it is fascinating to see how little has changed over the past 100 years, emphasising not only Crockett & Jones' devotion to tradition, but the intrinsic passion in its craft.

In recent years, the rise of mass-production shoe factories abroad has seen a drastic decrease in the →



“Crockett & Jones has doubled its output
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→ output of British-made footwear. Now the only remaining family owned and run factory in Northampton, Britain's footwear manufacturing Mecca, Crockett & Jones has battled against the odds to be considered one of the finest makers of Goodyear-welted men's shoes on the market.

"Although the shoe trade is now a tenth of the size it was 50 years ago," says Philippa Jones, export sales manager and fifth-generation Jones family member, "Crockett & Jones has doubled its output over the past 15 years and has spent the last three to four at maximum capacity. There is worldwide respect for a pair of Northampton-made shoes (particularly Crockett & Jones); they are renowned for their comfort, durability and longevity in wear."

Visiting the vast Grade II-listed factory, which has remained almost untouched since the 1930s, its might hits with full force. As a building that famously produced boots for Sir Ernest Shackleton's polar expeditions, and over 1m pairs of boots for soldiers during the First World War, the space commands a certain reverence. Inside, some 300 craftsmen and women continue Crockett & Jones' impeccable lineage through an eight-week, 200-step process.

Firstly, the pattern is formed around the last design to make for a perfect fit, and then each pattern of the upper part of the shoe is given to a 'clicker', who expertly cuts each piece of leather by hand or press knife. "Leather is an unending and specialist subject, and not one for the faint-hearted either," says Jones. "Leathers are selected according to quality of product, with the highest-grade calf skins being used to make the highest-quality shoes. We are absolute about this, and continue today to only select the highest full-grade calf skins." After this stage, all the parts of the uppers are sewn together while the bottoms of the shoes are produced.

So along with offering superb products, how does Crockett & Jones maintain such quintessential British heritage? "Very simply... with a lot of hard work and by remaining family owned and family managed," says Jones. "The family aspect of Crockett & Jones runs throughout the company – its success relies heavily upon its factory

staff and their families to keep the 137-year-old tradition alive."

With some 11 independent stores and further expansion expected in the near future, it is clear to see that Crockett & Jones is going from strength to strength. In a world dogged by the mass-produced, Britain's own Crockett & Jones valiantly leads the men's footwear market to unprecedented heights, proving that heritage, quality and traditional family values are as important today as they have ever been.  Crockett & Jones, 20-21 Burlington Arcade, W1J (crockettandjones.com)

THREE OF THE BEST FROM CROCKETT & JONES



#1 Edgware Oxford, £390



#2 Galway Boot, £440



#3 Winston Monk, £525

All available at Crockett & Jones,
20-21 Burlington Arcade, W1J
(crockettandjones.com)