

Naylor Love

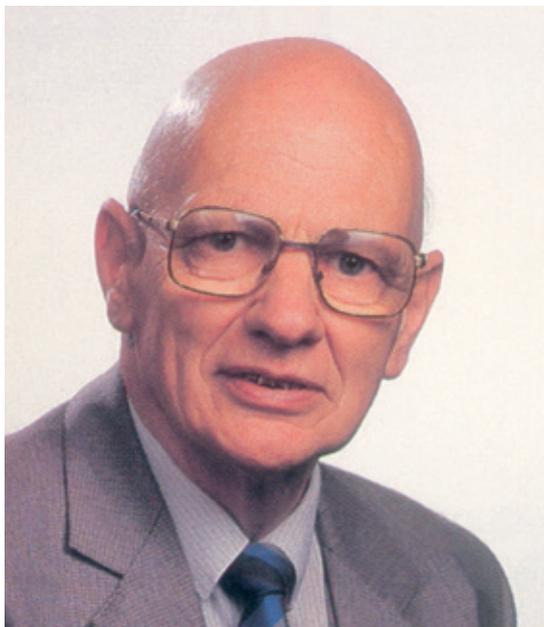
UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Naylor Love News

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Ben Naylor
1923-2015





Ben Naylor, 1990

A tribute to Ben Naylor

Benjamin (Ben) John Naylor died at the age of 92 on 20 October 2015. He was the former managing director of Naylor Love Construction, a firm with its origins in the company, W H Naylor Ltd, founded by his father Hugh in 1910.

BEN WAS INVOLVED WITH THE COMPANY from 1948, providing continuity of leadership in various roles for much of Naylor Love's history until he retired in March 2006 after 58 years of service.

Fair dealing was the only way for Ben to do business. He made sure that mutual respect and goodwill remained the basis for Naylor Love's dealings with clients, subcontractors and suppliers.

His staff thought the world of him. Jack Bartlett, who retired from Naylor Love in 1977 after 50 years' service, said of Ben: "He would be one of the nicest blokes to work for, a real gentlemen."

From mining to construction

Hugh, Ben's father, insisted that all his family went to university. "He had a bee in his bonnet that we should have a better education than he'd had as a primary school student in Clyde. Out of default, after leaving Otago Boys'

High School, I went to the Otago University School of Mines." Ben's three sisters, who were all at university, used to bring young male students home for meals to supplement the meagre rations at their digs. Some of these young men were studying at the School of Mines. Discussions with Ben influenced him to enrol and study as a mining engineer. "I thought, there's something practical."

Ben's mining studies were half complete when service in the European theatre in World War 2 beckoned. He served as a sapper and later as a corporal with the 8th Field Engineers in Italy, and then was sent to Japan as part of the first draft of J Force. When Ben returned home in 1946 he did another 18 months of study, but rather than finishing his thesis "I gave up the School of Mines and went into the firm - as I'd always wanted to." Ben's military career continued. After the war he joined the Territorials in Dunedin as an officer cadet, ending up as Commanding Officer of 3rd Field Squadron until his resignation in the early 1960s.

Drawn into design and supervisory roles, he committed to a key management role in the company when health difficulties required that Hugh pull back a little. Upon Hugh's death in 1959, Ben assumed the managing director's role.

Ben's mining background later proved useful when Naylor Love was looking for work on the West Coast during a lean period in the 1970s. "We built up a team to do mechanical services work at the hospitals in Westport, Hokitika, Greymouth. I had the advantage of course. West Coast people didn't like people from 'over the hill'. But when I was at the Mines School I'd worked on the Kaniere Dredge



Naylor Street sign in Clyde, a tribute to the Naylor family

and at various mines including Denniston, and immediately I got on all right with the Coasters because they probably thought I was one of them.”

Ben and W H Naylor Ltd

Benjamin became a director of W H Naylor Ltd in 1951. His father, Hugh, was active in the firm until his death in 1959 when Ben took over as managing director.

Hugh had built up many very good relationships with businesses and their owners around town. Ben carried on the tradition of maintaining the excellent connections, and the company built houses for several of the owners. Long-standing relationships based on mutual trust also provided W H Naylor with a steady supply of negotiated contracts for mercantile firms.

Ben loved talking about the work the company did for their longstanding client National Mortgage in the Chatham Islands – building the wharf, and then a crayfish plant. “Getting there was interesting. Either people went across on an Air Force plane, or they hitched a ride on a fishing boat. The factory had a helicopter deck on top so that bags of crayfish could be dropped down into big hoppers below which the crayfish were tailed. In those days the crayfish were huge – packhorse crayfish they were called.”

By 1960 there were about forty or fifty men at Naylor’s, including a lot of Dutch immigrants. A second echelon of people worked for Naylor’s in the off-season – freezing workers, trappers and hunters. Ben was always good at providing seasonal work, even to students, although of them he used to say that “too many of them jump the fence when no-one is looking”. Through the mid-1960s, Naylor’s grew steadily.

Ben, in 1964, looking to succession, brought in a very talented, young quantity surveyor from Fletcher’s, Alex Coleman. It was through the drive and enthusiasm of Alex and Ben that the company won such projects as the Mater Hospital and Cargill House at a time when negotiated work opportunities were reducing.

Cargill House was constructed on the solid rock of Bell Hill, and the foundations had to be blasted out. “An explosives expert from Palmer’s Quarry would come and set the charges – which invariably set the alarms off in the bank next door!”

One of Ben’s favourite projects was building the new Mater Misericordiae [Mercy] Hospital. When the hospital outgrew its premises (a former private home in Royal Terrace built by Hugh Naylor), it was W H Naylor Ltd which built the 66-bed hospital, opened in 1969, on its present site. An enormous undertaking for this small firm, it displayed real confidence in Ben and his team.



Mater Misericordiae Hospital – an artist’s painting

The Mater Hospital contract was the biggest job that W H Naylor Ltd had done. The company had more limited financial resources than some of the national contractors who bid for the project, and their bank required shareholder guarantees to support the performance bond it was issuing.

By 1969, Naylor’s were client-orientated, focused and in very good shape. They weren’t the biggest construction company in Dunedin, but Hugh – had he still been alive – might have privately suggested that they were the best.

The W H Naylor joinery factory had eight people, including the machinists, working in it. They were kept busy, never having to look for work, testimony again to the company’s reputation for good quality at a fair price.

Ben's pivotal roles in Naylor Love

In 1969 Ben Naylor was approached by the general manager of the Evening Star Company, Vic Cavanagh. Vic and his board were aware that Love Construction was having some trading difficulties. They were keen to see Love's position strengthened. Love Construction was an important part of a local economy feeling the loss of commercial status as head offices drifted north.

Through a longstanding relationship with Hugh Naylor and then Ben, Vic knew that W H Naylor Ltd was a strong and resilient company, well able to service both its return client base and the emerging tender market. W H Naylor Ltd was seen as the logical cornerstone of a new public company, Naylor Love. The Evening Star Company and the W H Naylor Ltd shareholders clubbed together to buy a majority shareholding in the Love Construction Company. Ben Naylor was asked to lead the new company, and Alex Coleman to take on the general manager's role. Ben and his team moved out of their office in Frederick Street and into the Love site in Halsey Street.

Merging the two companies and cultures was no mean feat. It required determination, a sense of humour and the defusing of many difficult situations as Love's men and Naylor's men got to know each other. At the time of the takeover, Love's had the bigger workforce (W H Naylor Ltd had forty or fifty men working for them, while Love's had a staff of about 200) but they had little forward work.

Warner Gardiner, a quantity surveyor with Naylor Love,

described the first six to twelve months as being quite difficult. "When Naylor's took over, Love's had no work. Naylor Love had to find work for two hundred men." Warner felt that the Naylor Love culture grew out of the two companies. "Ben Naylor used to say, "My word is my bond." Bill Baylis, the chair of Naylor Love in 2006: "I don't doubt that those bomb disposal skills Ben learned in World War 2 came in handy in the defusing of many difficult situations as Loves men and Naylor's men (not too many ladies in those days) learned to live together."

In spite of the difficulties posed in bringing two teams together, the Naylor and Love organisations represented a formidable combination. Corporate restructuring is often a high-risk venture. However, history will record the formation of Naylor Love as one of the most successful.

During the 1970s, Ben Naylor and Alex Coleman looked further afield for work – on the West Coast, Invercargill, Central Otago. McLellans Naylor Love Partnership was awarded the coveted contract to build the State Insurance building in Invercargill as a joint venture. The Upper Clutha power project allowed Naylor Love to secure contracts in Cromwell associated with its expansion and the shifting of the town centre to a new site above lake level. And so started the Central Otago work which continues today.

Construction is known for its ups and downs, and the early 1980s was a time when many construction companies went to the wall. Pickings in Dunedin were lean. A round of trade staff redundancies occurred in a particularly difficult patch. Ben Naylor had to read out the names of people who were made redundant. One of the staff said, "He had tears in his eyes. He hated doing it."

By 1983, Ben and Alex had each served more than thirty years in the industry, and the board understood that within a decade or so there would be a new team at the helm. Starting with the ownership structure, they set about preparing the company for this change. Ben and Alex, with their W H Naylor background, favoured a private company model. The shareholding of Naylor Love had remained relatively compact throughout its years as a public company, and delisting would be relatively easy. The board approved this move in 1983. Ben was appointed managing director, a role he held until his retirement from it in 1987. Ben remained on the board of directors.

In March 2006, Ben Naylor resigned from the board after fifty-eight years' service to both W H Naylor and Naylor Love. A very well attended function was held in his honour. The speech of then chairman Bill Baylis encapsulated the feelings of both staff and the Otago business community: "W H Naylor was a very versatile company with a top reputation. Under Ben's leadership, with the late Alex Coleman as his deputy, it provided stern competition to the national companies on the tender market, while at the same time having a very strong negotiated and return client book that few others could match.

"Ben's leadership style didn't come from a textbook. In his formative years, he saw his father struggling to hold his business and workforce together during the great depression. He understood the circumstances of many



Ben (centre, on ladder) with three former employees of Loves, Alan Angus, Len Smith and Jack Cardno



A merging team, 1969

of the people who formed the backbone of the industry and, to this day, he holds very strong humanitarian values. One day would see Ben in Wellington giving no quarter in national carpenters' wage negotiations, and the next day he would be helping out a staff member in times of difficulty.

"Naylor Love in 2006 was very different from the organisation which emerged from the merger in 1969. However, except for size, it was very similar to W H Naylor in its focus on main contracting. Ben was always ready to remind us of where our core skills lay."

Naylor Love held its centennial in 2010, one hundred years after the establishment of W H Naylor and Love Brothers. At a cocktail function, held in the Glenroy Auditorium on 23 September 2010 to mark the occasion, William Cockerill, managing director of OCTA, presented Ben Naylor with a large parcel. The story dates back to 1975 when Ben, who identified with William's interest in history, took William into the attic above Naylor Love's sheet metal factory in Halsey Street. "Here, have this or it will be thrown out. It was the rubbish bin of the general manager of Love Construction. Made in the joinery factory I suspect." So, as William said, "Thirty-five years on, at the time of Naylor Love's centenary celebrations, it was appropriate that the rubbish bin found its way home."



Ben and Elizabeth Naylor receiving William Cockerill's parcel at Naylor Love's centennial celebrations in 2010

Hugh Naylor's legacy to Ben

Ben, keenly interested in the history of Naylor Love, could talk at length and most interestingly about the early days of W H Naylor. His father's cashbook from 1910 was a wonderful source of stories. As a boy, Ben also visited many work sites with his father.

W H (Hugh) Naylor, or Hughie, as he was affectionately known, was born in Clyde in 1884. After attending Clyde Primary School, he began serving his carpentry-joinery apprenticeship with Wilkinson, a builder in Clyde. In those days it was a seven year apprenticeship, but Wilkinson ran out of work before Hugh's time was up. So he signed off Hugh's papers and told him to go down to Dunedin where there was plenty of work. Hugh's first job in Dunedin was with Thomson Bridger, a hardware and joinery firm in Princes St near the Exchange. He soon started contracting on his own.

In 1910 Hugh Naylor built his first house at Portobello.



Hugh Naylor | Page from a W H Naylor cashbook, 1911

Hugh and his friend, Alf Abbott, decided to go into business together. They took out carpenter's wages (1/6 per hour), and ploughed the rest back into the firm. In May, when they first started, they were paying themselves £1.0.0 a week.

Much of Hugh's initial work was repairing and building cottages on the Peninsula. Hugh's 1910 cashbook gives some real insights into his work and prices. For example, Hugh built a five-bedroom cottage at a contract price of £338/12/0. An account from Thomson Bridger & Co. quotes £106/6/0 for joinery.

By 1913, Hugh Naylor was doing much more work in Dunedin, and he built a house for himself and his wife in Calder Street, St Kilda. His reputation for quality meant that he was given commissions for quality housing. The Halstead home, designed by an English architect, was built at 19 Royal Terrace in 1922. The home later became the first Mater Hospital before its shift to the grounds of Marinoto in the late 1960s.

Banks, too, were built by W H Naylor. Banks were notoriously conservative in the early part of the 20th century. Their conservatism included ensuring that their buildings reflected their commercial standing. No 'Johnny come lately' got to build the banks – except Hugh Naylor.

Hugh then built a new home and office at 63-65 Frederick Street, Dunedin, property still owned by the Naylor family today. Hugh ran the business from the Naylor's living room, with his wife helping him out with the books. He then bought a property alongside, and knocked the building down. These two addresses were the registered office of W H Naylor.

The building was typical of Hugh's houses – cavity brick, a relatively high-pitched roof with clay tiles, chimneys, and wooden casement-type windows. Copper spouting was usually a feature. Houses built by W H Naylor for mercantile firms were the same standard design, a design Ben later followed when he built houses for prominent Dunedin businessmen.

Although W H Naylor in its early years concentrated on the housing market, by the mid 1920s it was doing more alterations and additions for local firms. Hugh Naylor was careful in his targeting of clients and projects. His strategy was clearly to build the best for the best. He struck up a relationship with the University of Otago, and in the mid 1920s, Hugh won the tender for the original Dental School.



A typical WH Naylor home and Hugh's former office and home

In 1927, W H Naylor was awarded the contract for the Evening Star Co Ltd building, which Ben remembers as one of his father's favourite buildings. It remains a prominent Dunedin landmark, and the relationship formed with the client was to prove significant in the formation of Naylor Love forty years later.

W H Naylor built many enduring buildings, including the administration block for Dunedin Hospital. Yet another was the classic Art Deco bus terminal for New Zealand Railways Road Services. It is now part of Toitu/Otago Settlers' Museum.

Over the years, Hugh Naylor had gained the confidence of longstanding architectural practices such as Mandeno and Fraser and Mason and Wales. Ted McCoy, then a young architect, was making a considerable impression on the city, and he, too, turned to Hugh Naylor to make sure his ideas were faithfully reproduced.

W H Naylor was widely recognised as a leading builder of executive homes and landmark institutional buildings. Hugh Naylor differentiated the company from its competitors through his uncompromising attitude to quality. Because he also knew that bigger didn't always mean better, Hugh limited the size of his business to that which he could oversee personally.

On 12 December 1935, W H Naylor was incorporated as a private company, W H Naylor Ltd, with its registered office at 65 Frederick St. The first meeting of the directors was held on 30 January 1936. W H Naylor was to remain a director until 1959, and his wife, Annie, until 1951.

The high regard in which Hugh Naylor was held was clearly evident when James Fletcher, in his capacity as Commissioner of Works, appointed Hugh as his provincial representative when World War II broke out. It was Hugh's responsibility to allocate government work in Dunedin to appropriate contractors.

During the second world war Naylor's focused more on commercial construction and less on housing. Work for the Hospital Board, university and mercantile sector continued.

At the end of World War 2, Hugh Naylor ran his business



Dunedin Dental School

as a sole proprietor. Even if he hadn't intended the business to grow, his reputation and relationships made it inevitable. Recognising this, he brought his son, Ben, into the business.

In 1948, the whole staff, including that in the joinery shop, numbered only twenty-five. Naylor's joinery factory was kept busy with all the additions and alterations that the company was doing for firms around the town and further afield. Colin Anderson, who was an apprentice in the joinery shop, describes it: "The beauty of Naylor's was that we did a



Evening Star Building, 2009

lot of jobbing work. We did the odd house, but we did a lot of alterations. Mr Hugh Naylor would take you to a job and leave you. So it was sink or swim. You learned to do a lot of things. Mr Naylor would never have been called anything but Mr Naylor. He was a gentleman, very quiet, a man of very few words. Old Mr Naylor expected the best. His foremen were very reliable and expected the best too.”

Cyril Bowey described Hugh Naylor as being very honest with his prices and the most honest man he had ever met. “He was a very tough boss, but very fair, and he would always look after his men.” Peter Craddock: “As apprentices we kept our distance. He [Mr Naylor] seemed a formidable character to us but he set in place very high building standards and a reputation second to none.”

Third generation Naylor

Ben always saw the Naylor family as retaining a long-term interest in the company. To this end, he appointed his son Christopher to represent the family interest on the board. Few companies in the construction industry in New Zealand can boast three generations of founding family governance.

A grandson of Hugh Naylor who founded W H Naylor Ltd in 1910, and passionate about sustainability, Chris lives near Clyde in a straw-bale house of his own design and construction. The house, the first straw-bale residence permitted in New Zealand, won the Otago Regional Council environmental award for innovation in 2000.

A self-employed builder for 30 years, specialising in historic restoration and eco-building, Chris was the classic country builder. “As well as project management and carpentry, I often designed, plastered, made the stairs and joinery, and sometimes even the skirting and scotia dressed from rough timber. While power tools and nail guns dominated my kit, there were always times when a specialist hand tool was sought from the tool chest of my grandfather, Hugh Naylor.”

The photo below shows Chris at right, a client at left, and his son Rory, the fourth generation Naylor to wield a hammer, in the centre.



Eulogy to Ben

“When I joined the Naylor Love team in 1987, I received a one page letter from Ben. It welcomed me and told me how much I was getting paid. It confirmed that I would have the private use of a company car, a comparative rarity then, but reminded me that it would be a model that suited the requirements of the company first and foremost, and that it must be available during work hours for general use. The letter also told me that my detailed conditions of employment would be as set out under the National Award for carpenters. Short and simple.

“Ben was not one to over-complicate things. He believed that an employment relationship was a simple thing largely defined by the laws of courtesy and common decency. You were trustworthy until proven otherwise.

“As far as Ben was concerned, the company would own no more cars than it needed and they weren’t going to be flashy. Controlling overhead costs was important because we needed to be able to survive tight times.

“While not a tradesman, Ben had great respect for those he employed. He saw no reason for his management staff to be employed under more favourable terms than them. He was truly egalitarian and it was this that set him apart from many of his contemporaries.

“Under Ben’s leadership, the company gained a reputation for fighting hard to retain its people when the going was tough. Ben knew that the company needed to be profitable, but it had to do the right thing by its people. Underneath a sometimes gruff manner, Ben was a charitable and generous man who would help an employee in difficulties almost without question.

“Ben didn’t have a burning desire to be in the construction industry. He saw it as his duty to take over the firm. He employed Alex Coleman, an emerging talent in the Fletcher organisation, and when Loves hit hard times, W H Naylor were the natural choice of partner for those keen to build a new enterprise.

“For Ben the merger was a tough assignment, and assimilating two very different cultures was something which was done by the seat of the pants without the help of change and leadership experts we have access to now.

“Ben was a forward thinker. He understood industry trends and introduced a number of innovative agencies and new product lines within the company’s specialist subcontracting divisions. However, the cultural difficulties sometimes meant they didn’t reach their full potential. He invested in a start-up electronics development company called Eiss Subtronics. He couldn’t quite see the digital revolution emerging but he knew there was something going on out there!

“When I joined Naylor Love I chose it ahead of a job I had been offered with Downer and Co. I told the Downer man I had decided to go to Naylor Love and he said, “Well, you can do a bloody sight worse than go to work for Ben Naylor.” A recommendation which, for me, proved to be abundantly true.”

Trevor Kempton

(Trevor was Managing Director of Naylor Love from 2002 to 2010)



Ben Naylor, front row, fourth from the left, with staff celebrating 25 years of service

Farewell to Ben

Ben's funeral was attended by family, friends, members of the business community, Naylor Love Board members, executive, staff and retired staff members. Rick Herd, Scott Watson and Nick Clayton all travelled to Dunedin for the funeral as part of a large Naylor Love contingent, there to acknowledge and honour Ben's 58 year contribution to the firm. Four other employees, who worked for Ben and are still with the firm, also attended – Peter Finlay, Brian Crabbe, Ewan Oats and Andy Flett.

Chris Naylor, Ben's son, gave a warm and heartfelt eulogy for Ben – husband, father, grandfather, businessman, community contributor, gardener, sailor and friend of many.

Ben's granddaughter Ysrafel spoke with feeling about the grandfather she knew, loved and adored, and about what an important part of her generation's life Ben filled.

Ian McPherson, a current Naylor Love director, spoke of the Ben Naylor of Naylor Love Construction. He noted how Ben's legacy continues through the company's values and the many buildings dominating the nation's skyline today.

Ian Booth spoke about his involvement with the Naylor family and the long term ties which have grown from that.

Lastly, Sir Julian Smith spoke of the close business and family ties his family had with the Naylor family. He regularly called on Ben for construction advice, even after the Christchurch earthquake, and relied on him to do many design build projects for Allied Press.

A video feed of the funeral was uploaded so that three of Ben's grandsons, in Italy, Norway and England, could be part of the service.

A touch Ben would have been very pleased about, and would have closely identified with, was his plain pine casket, with no fancy brass fittings in sight!

