Surviving Over 400 years as a Family Business:  
A Case Study of One of the Oldest Surviving Family Business in England

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Abstract: Casual conversations about family business and culture, usually result in the realization that many cultures have a phrase implying that businesses set up by grandparents are often destroyed by the grandchildren. This study therefore decided to interview family businesses that had been in existence for three generations, or more, in the authors’ local economy. Since much of the current academic and practitioner interest in family business simply reflects their widespread occurrence in the small business population, the drawing of a local convenience sample seemed appropriate. This survey took place during 2003, and, had three primarily objectives: to identify multigenerational family businesses in the area of Huddersfield, West Yorkshire (England); to conduct semi-structured interviews using an experienced and empathetic ex-small owner; and, to have respondents complete three questionnaires that would consider their entrepreneurial orientation; their marketing orientation; and the extent to which they could be classified as ‘family-first’ compared to ‘business-first’. Sixty companies have taken part in the survey but two of the companies stand out due to their particular longevity, one of over 400 years, the other of 260 years. This paper looks at the older of the two companies and attempts to identify the significant factors that contribute to its survival and the level of entrepreneurial behaviour that it demonstrates.