



Moulders at Green's Foundry

DISCOVER ECCLESFIELD'S WORKING PAST

Until relatively recently, the village of Ecclesfield, now part of Sheffield's northern suburbs, relied on the exploitation of the physical resources within its parish boundaries: the land, the woods, the stone, the coal, the iron and the power generated from its small streams and brooks. These gave rise at an early date not only to farming, quarrying and woodland crafts but also to a tradition of light metal trades, and later to foundry work, engineering and coke and chemicals production.

This, the third of three leaflets, together with accompanying information boards, is designed to describe and explain the working past of the area from Nether Lane to Butterthwaite Dam.

For bus times to Ecclesfield contact South Yorkshire PTE Traveline 01709 515151 or find timetables online at www.travelsouthyorkshire.com

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3. WRAGG / OLIVER WHEEL

The first record of this wheel was in 1510 when Thomas Parker of Whitley left to his younger son, Richard, the tenancy of his water wheels at Nether Hartley together with a furnace, two stithies (anvils), his smithy gear, two grindstones and two coltroughs. We must assume that Richard Parker, like his father, was a scythe maker. The next mention of the wheel that has survived is for 1637 when Nicholas Wilkinson is recorded as having a cutler's wheel at the end of Hartley Lane. By 1680 it was in the possession of Nicholas Ragge, hence its new name of Wragg Wheel.

From 1767 until about 1810 the site was occupied by a water-powered paper mill. A 21-year lease of 1769 to Hugh and John Meller mentioned 'all that Paper Mill and Drying House...with the Dams & wears, shuttles...upon Ecclesfield Common'. It appears to have been sub-let to William Colley and later to his son.

The next phase of industrial activity on the site lasted from the 1820s for at least a century – this was fork making. By this time Wragg Wheel was not just an industrial site but a residential community of as many as 12 households, some of the cottages being converted from industrial premises. One row of cottages as late as the 20th century had a loft running the whole length of the row and a tall chimney at one end. By 1901 the site had become known as Oliver Wheel and later as Oliver Cottages.



Oliver Cottages



In the 1820s eight people were employed in fork making in the workshops at Wragg Wheel. This figure had risen to 29 at the height of industrial activity in the 1860s. By 1922 there were only two fork makers still at work there – members of the Tingle and Andrews families. These two families, together with the Gregorys and the Roebucks had a long association with fork making on the site, the Tingles right from the very beginning.

Window depicting fork making at Hatfield House Lane Methodist Church, designed by Bryan Woodriff

The process of fork making was quite simple. First the blanks were forged and stamped to create a pronged outline, a bolster and a tang. These were then ground at a wheel powered by water or a steam engine and then filed and polished. The blanks had to be carried or carted from Sheffield and the finished forks returned by the same means and more blanks collected. Forging and grinding were mainly boys' and men's work but the filing and polishing was done by girls and women. The stone and metal dust from grinding was inhaled by the grinders who in the 1830s had a life expectancy of only 28-32 years.

One 14 year old worker at Wragg Wheel, John Brook Greaves, gave evidence to the Children's Employment Commission published in 1865. He said he had to work 12 to 14 hours a day. He was then a glazer (polisher) and had been apprenticed at 12 for nine years. He said 'Master is middling kind, and does not hit me except sometimes when the work is not done very well'. He complained of always getting dust in his eyes and the sub-commissioner who took the evidence said he spat repeatedly, presumably because of the ingestion of dust.

In the 1930s and 1940s the site was purely residential. The dam by then had silted up and the cottages were eventually demolished. The site was then largely developed as a small industrial estate.



4. BRIGHTSIDE FOUNDRY

Brightside Foundry workers



The Brightside Foundry and Engineering Company Ltd was founded in 1900 following a merger of several companies. The Ecclesfield site, first developed just prior to the First World War, occupied a large area on either side of the Blackburn Brook adjacent to the then Midland Railway. They manufactured engineering and steelworks equipment and large-scale heating and ventilating apparatus. The firm was subject to a number of amalgamations and re-organisations in the 1950s and 1960s and eventually the Ecclesfield foundry was closed. Part of the firm's former property still stands on Butterthwaite Lane.

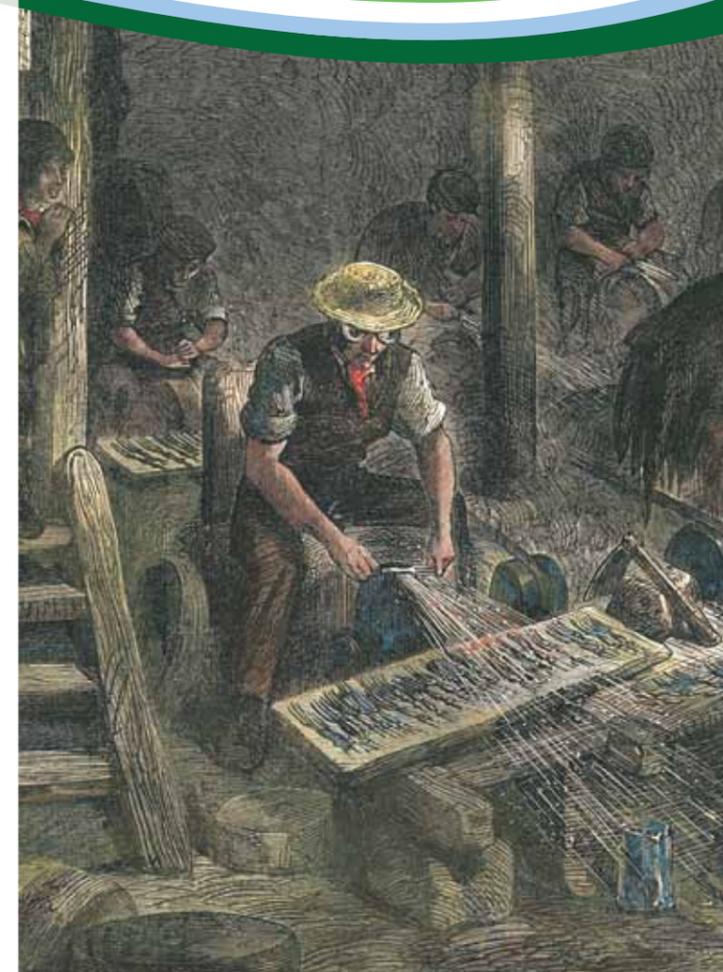
5. BUTTERTHWAITE DAM

The first documentary record is for 1794 when a Mr Rawson had a grinding mill here with seven troughs. From 1859 until the 1890s the mill belonged to the Hallam Brothers and was known as Butterthwaite Steel Wire and Pin Works. Their principal products were hackle pins (sharp steel wires for combing hemp, wool, cotton, jute and linen) for the textile industry, fish hooks, sewing and machine needles, knitting needles, hair pins, meat skewers, bicycle spokes and umbrella frames. The high regard with which the firm was held is reflected in their award of gold medals at trade exhibitions in Paris and Melbourne.

It was later called the Gibraltar Steel Works and in the 1930s 'stout paper bags' were being made there by A. J. Allen.



Discover Ecclesfield's Working Past



A MISCELLANY OF PRODUCTS

Early industry between Nether Lane and Butterthwaite Dam mainly occupied water-powered sites. The range of products was extensive – flour, stove grates, kitchen ranges, machine tools, files, gimlets, paper, forks and even hackle pins for the textile industry. And the engineering and foundry work has continued more recently with such famous names as Stanley Tools, makers of the Stanley knife, and the still flourishing Firth Rixson, suppliers to the aeronautical and power generation industries. In 1997 Firth Rixson took over Barworth Flockton, an engineering firm that established its Johnson Lane site in the late 1950s.

This leaflet is one of three published by Ecclesfield Conservation Group to reveal Ecclesfield's industrial past. Leaflet 1 covers the village core and leaflet 2 the area from Whitley to Smithy Wood.

1. THE NORFOLK FOUNDRY SITE

This is the site occupied by Morrison's supermarket since 1997. In the entrance foyer there are paintings depicting the history of the site.

The first record of industry on the site is from 1635 when it was occupied by a water-powered corn mill. The mill was variously called Nether Corn Mill, Carr Mill and Old Corn Mill. By the late 1840s the mill was owned by Edmund Green and by 1855 John Green had opened a foundry near the corn mill.



He manufactured stoves for ships' galleys and portable cooking ranges for emigrants who undertook the long treks by covered wagon across North America. The corn mill probably stopped operating about this time, but the water-wheel continued to provide power for the foundry until the 1920s. By 1862, a relative, William Green, had gained control of the foundry and he named it the Norfolk Foundry.

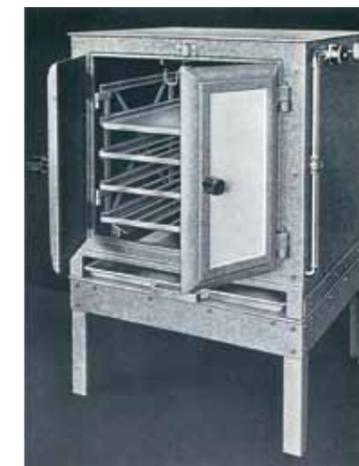


An advertisement of 1889 shows that Green's manufactured all kinds of stove grates and kitchen ranges, hot plates, confectioners' ovens, dog grates, fenders and over-mantels. The photograph on the left is a Green's kitchen range in the manager's house at Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet in Sheffield. They also made machine tools such as hydraulic hammers and presses and sluice and lock gate castings. In the two world wars the firm supplied galley equipment for the Royal Navy and catering equipment for the Army and the RAF.



Pictured above, from the 1937 catalogue, is a wall cooking range designed for hotels and restaurants. The ranges could be manufactured in any combination or arrangement of ovens and hot plates.

The single gas oven to the right was finished in grey enamel with white enamelled door panels and Bakelite handles.

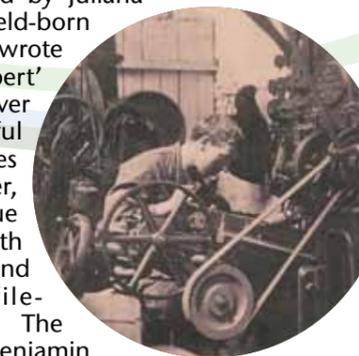


In 1969 Brightside Engineering Holdings in Ecclesfield bought that part of Green's which manufactured commercial and marine catering equipment. They subsequently merged with Moorwood Vulcan. William Green and Co (Ecclesfield) Ltd continued with their engineering interests until the 1980s.

2. EXCELSIOR FILE WORKS

By the late 1870s David Parker, who originally had workshops at Wallet End, had moved to the Excelsior Works on Station Road where the firm remained for almost a century.

In 1879 Parker's were still making hand-cut files. In that year they were visited by Juliana Ewing, the Ecclesfield-born children's writer, who wrote that Parker 'was expert' adding that she 'never saw such beautiful work and it still defies machinery'. However, he could not continue to compete with machine-cut files and installed Shardlow file-cutting machines. The photograph shows Benjamin Greaves working at a Shardlow machine.



For at least a century from the mid-1850s another file-making company, Bedford's, occupied the Union Works on the Common. A directory of 1902 said that the firm manufactured files and horse and shoe rasps.

William Ridge also ran a small firm at Floodgate on Cross Hill manufacturing a variety of tools as shown in the business card below. It was established in 1786 and was still operating in the 20th century.

