

EARBY THROUGH 60 YEARS
COTTON TRADE UPS AND DOWNS
THE MEMORABLE STRIKE OF 1905

(BY JOHN HARTLEY)

After weaving on four looms for Henry Bracewell and Sons, at the Albion Shed, a fresh leaf in my life began in 1895, when the Earby Manufacturing Co. was formed. The mill company added a new section to the weaving shed behind the spinning mill, which was taken over by the new company on the room and power principle. There were seven shareholders, who also were directors and my father (G.P. Hartley) was one of them. There were also Henry Brown, Smith Duxbury, John Parker, Joseph Parker, Hugh Currer Smith and Hargreaves Wallbank (Kelbrook).

Mr. Smith was practically the originator of the company, and was appointed manager, secretary and salesman. For two years previously he had been engaged as the manager and salesman for Mr. John Shaw, a Salterforth manufacturer, and he was well esteemed by the Salterforth people. While he was there, Mr. Smith had an amusing encounter with one of the weavers, who was accustomed to walk out of the shed each afternoon to light the fire and put the kettle on. When she was told that the practice would have to be stopped she exclaimed, "But we allus hev done it, an' we hev a reight to goa out if we like." Ay missis," replied Mr. Smith, "you may hev a reight to go out, but you can't please yourself whether you come back or not!" It was an eye-opener to her. When some of the jobs were allotted in the new firm I was told that I'd to be a beamer. The work was entirely new to me, so it was arranged that I should go to Salterforth for a fortnight to learn beaming with Bill Inman, and the fortnight was extended to a month, owing to delay in getting the new shed ready.

I enjoyed the period of training very much. Bill was a good workman- as good a beamer as could be found anywhere- and he gave me ample scope to become efficient in my new occupation. If we were well forward with the work and "waiting for bobbins", we would walk out into the lane and saunter along the road, my friend having a good smoke at the same time.

Bill was a very patient, philosophical sort of chap, and if I let a bobbin fall through the ends that we were "creeling" he would say with a chuckle, Na' then, lad, tha can th'ends uyp thisel, an' it'll larn tha to be moor careful." Bill was native of Ap'trick (Appletreewick), and the love of the country was in his veins. Often on a weekend, he would venture forth with a gun, and always returned with something stowed away in his capacious coat pockets. Not that he was a poacher, but he was on good terms with farmers, and with the "keepers" on the craven estates. His wife was a winder, and she was a good member at the Salterforth Baptist Chapel. The small sojourn which I had amongst the Salterforth people increased the circle of my friendship, and the experience was a happy interlude in my life.

MEALS WHILST WORKING

When I returned to Earby to take up my new job I laboured for the fitters for a few weeks, at 4d. an hour, and assisted in getting the new looms into the shed. As soon as the winders started I got to work with the "gaiting up" of the beaming frames. When I had got two frames running I was joined by a partner, Thomas Edward Parker, the son of John Parker. I had to "larn" him as well as I could, and at the end of the first week we had three frames running, and the fourth was got into commission the following week.

At that time all the beams for providing warp for the looms had to be made by the two beamers, and this necessitated running during the meal times, along with the tape machine. This procedure continued for five or six years, and some relief was then secured by an occasional set of beams made of coarse counts, which came out of Lancashire. Our working hours were from 6 a.m. to 5-30 p.m., and we got our meals with one or two frames running. We had some compensation, though, in the running hours after we had finished creeling. A set of 20,000 yards would keep the frame running usually for six hours, and creeling the other frame occupied about two hours, so each day we had several hours just tenting the frames.

An additional advantage was secured by the device by which each end was covered by a "pin," and if the end broke the pin dropped between two rollers and stopped the frame. When, as a rule, the work was good, opportunity was afforded for some light study, without neglecting the work, of which I readily availed myself.

We had a good set of winders, twelve in all, and they were keen on their job, and liked to do a bit of "striving." There was quite a family complexion about them, as there were three sisters (Clara, Mary and Emma Steele); a mother and two daughters (Mrs. Eastwood, Gertrude and Rachel), and my two sisters. The winders were fond of singing at their work, especially at Christmas-time. But there was one of them (Mrs Hartley Garnett, who came from Gargrave) to whom singing was her natural element and her favourite song was:-

"The world is very beautiful
And full of joy to me;
The sun shines out in glory
On everything I see."

She had a glorious voice, and if she had been trained she might have been something like Gracie Fields, who was, in her early days, a winder in a cotton mill. We had also in the team one who had been a prize vocalist (Mrs.W. Lowcock, whose maiden name was Annie Turner), who could sing soprano, mezzo-soprano, or contralto, so extensive was her range.

TRIP TO STONEYHURST

On Whit-Monday, 1901, we had a waggonette trip, in which event we included the taklers and twisters along with the winders and beamers, with their husbands and wives. The route of the trip was the "North Round," and our original intention was to include Stoneyhurst College in the places to be visited. For this purpose Thomas Edward Parker and I (who were the organisers) visited father Marchal at Broughton. He received us very graciously, and promised to help us as far as he was in his power. We had a delightful conversation with him for about half an hour, at the close of which he rang his bell and summoned his housekeeper, giving her some instructions. She soon appeared with a tray, on which were two glasses of fresh drawn ale. My friend evidently enjoyed his glass, while I respectfully declined his generosity. Father Marchal apologised for my slight embarrassment, but he buttressed my

temperance principles by citing cases of regrettable intemperance, including some of his own flock at Earby. He later informed us in a most courteous letter, that as the date of our proposed trip was Whit-Monday the college at Stoneyhurst would be closed that day.

The day of the trip at last dawned, and it was an ideal Spring morning. We started from the Lane Ends at six o'clock, and had our breakfast at Gisburn. A sumptuous repast of ham and eggs was provided for us by Mr. and Mrs. Duckworth, after which we resumed our journey. Our next stopping place was Bolton-by-Bowland, and by the kindness of Mr. C.B.E. Wright our party was allowed to visit Bolton Hall and pass through the grounds. We had a short stay at Sawley Abbey, and then passed through the old castle town of Clitheroe, and arrived at Whalley for lunch, which was served in the Assembly Rooms. Owing to the cancellation of our intended visit to Stoneyhurst, we spent the afternoon sauntering around Whalley, and the horses being rested and refreshed, we proceeded to Burnley, where we had tea. The remainder of the journey home, through the cobbled streets of East Lancashire, was rather a tame affair, but the splendid view of Pendle Hill and Pendle Forest was a pleasing sight. We arrived home about nine o'clock. The days outing has remained an outstanding event to us all, as it was the last Whit-Monday holiday we were privileged to celebrate, owing to the change in the holidays.

AS A SHOPKEEPER

Early in the following year, 1902, I embarked upon a new venture, and started in business as a newsagent and stationer. The first shop I occupied was part of premises owned by Messrs. S. Hartley and Son, of Gargrave, painters and house decorators, situated in Colne Road. The whole block of premises were later acquired by Earby Urban District Council and adapted for their offices and council chamber. The following year I took a shop with living accommodation, also in Colne Road, near its junction with New Road, and remained there until 1906.

In the meantime I retained an association with the manufacturing company, and used to do part "sick" beaming. My friend, Bill Inman, had taken over my frames, but neither he nor my old partner had good health, so I was able to "keep my hand in." In 1905 the warehouse manager, Tom N. Parker, retired from the service of the company, and started in business as a cloth agent, and he asked me to apply for his post. I was readily accepted, and I have since had an unbroken association with the company as assistant manager, manager, secretary and salesman.

THE STRIKE OF 1905

The cotton trade entered upon a period of steady unparalleled prosperity in 1905, and advantage was then taken by the Colne and District Weavers' Association to bring the outside districts into line with the principal cotton weaving towns, both as regards the recognition of the union and the adoption of the Uniform List of weavers' wages. Mass meetings and shop meetings were held, and keen canvassing was engaged in by the committee and collectors of the Weavers' Association.

The weavers certainly held the whip hand, as there was then no local association of manufacturers to organise united action in meeting the demands of the operatives, if they were inclined to resist them. The firms were tackled one by one, and as some of them were of the opinion that recognition was bound to come sooner or later, they acceded to the demands made, especially as the Weavers' Union were prepared to allow a deduction of five percent

from the standard list for local disadvantages. The directors of the Earby Manufacturing Co. immediately adopted the new scale of wages along with the other manufacturers, but they, for their own reasons, demurred at "recognising the Union."

There seems to have been a lack of tact in submitting their demands by the weavers' officials, and also a clash of temperaments. On the one hand there was the feeling, "Now's our chance, and we'll mak' em"; and on the other side, "We won't be made by you." Notices were handed in, and the strike started early in November. About two-thirds of the weavers were involved, and the firm carried on with the rest. A strike of that nature at one firm was not difficult to support by the Weavers' Association, and for the space of four months there was little change in the situation.

The engagement of two youths from Trawden led to an incident, which not only broke the stalemate, but led to exciting and tumultuous scenes. The young men were residing temporarily in Kelbrook, and after they had ceased work they were followed to Kelbrook, through the fields pathway, to their temporary lodgings by a company of weavers who had previously been employed by the firm. The police regarded the case as one of intimidation, and they presented a list of names of some of those who took part, and pressed for police court proceedings with a view to checking street "scenes," which had broken out. Summonses were taken out against six of the men, but the affect was just the opposite of what had been anticipated. The accused men were as inoffensive in character as any men in the village, but the charge against them was sustained as a definite breach of the law, and they were fined £5 each and costs by the Skipton bench of magistrates.

STREETS CLEARED

The police court case was the prelude to a stormy weekend, and the demonstrations continued on the following Monday night, and were accompanied by window smashing in some cases. The outlook was so unpromising that the police were reinforced, and mounted police were called in to disperse the crowds. But the crowds increased, the throwing of a half brick at a mounted constable aroused the police, and the streets were cleared by their combined action.

Then a reaction ensued, and it was felt among the operatives that something should be done to end the dispute. The services of Mr.D.J. Shackleton were secured, and he gave such assurances to the members of the firm that negotiations were entered upon. A meeting was arranged, and took place at the offices of Messrs. Proctor and Proctor, accountants, Burnley, and an agreement was signed by Mr.H.C. Smith (for the company) and Mr. Tom Shaw (for the weavers) which not only settled the strike, but this agreement, for nearly twenty years (until the industrial court was held at Manchester) was the only written document to form the basis of the relations between the Earby manufacturers and the Colne Weavers Association. The assurances given by Mr. Shackleton (afterwards Sir David Shackleton, chief labour advisor to the government) have been fully maintained, and the relations between the parties have since been of the most friendly nature.

One is reminded of an interview which Mr. Shaw had with Mr. Jas. Wilson Green (the district assistant overseer) respecting the assessment of Earby Weavers' Institute premises. Failing to secure his demands, Mr. Shaw threatened resistance, saying, "Do you know that I have behind me the whole of the Northern Counties' Amalgamation?" "And do you know," retorted Mr. Green, "That I have behind me the "everlasting hills of Craven'?"

ANOTHER DISPUTE

Mr. Shaw had many excellent qualities, which carried him to high rank in parliament, but diplomacy was not one of them. One is inclined to wonder whether the strike was an echo of an age-long feud between Lancashire and Yorkshire!

In 1911, the Spring Mill came to a permanent stoppage in consequence of a strike of mule spinners, which was never settled, and the Walden Spinning Co. relinquished their tenancy of the premises.

The Mill Company converted the mill into warehouse accommodation for the adjoining weaving sheds, and the Earby Manufacturing Co. increased their looms from 422 to 684. The result of this transformation was to make the whole block of premises into one of the largest weaving sheds in the district, the firms all being run by one engine. The various firms were as follows with the approximate number of looms :-

Messrs.A.J. Birley Ltd.....	850
Messrs.Chas. Shuttleworth & sons..	580
Messrs. Stockdale & Jones.....	280
Seal Manufacturing CO.....	420
Earby Manufacturing CO.....	680

2,810

In 1913, MR.H.C. Smith, owing to breakdown in health, went to live at Ansdell, near Lytham. He removed to Didsbury five years later, and continued to be active head of the company until 1922. He returned to Earby in 1929, but within a month he passed away. He was well known as one of Earby's distinctive characters in bygone days.