

EARBY LONG AGO

END OF BRACEWELL REGIME

NEWCOMERS TO EARBY TEXTILE TRADE

The termination of the Bracewell regime had the immediate effect of bringing cheap land into the market, and opening the way for enterprising villagers.

One of the first to take advantage of the altered conditions was Mr. William Gill, who had taken up residence at "The Grove." Mr. Gill, who was a joiner and builder of first class reputation, had come to Earby about ten years earlier, and his first workshop was in an old house at the bottom of Riley Street, opposite the Wesleyan Day Schools. When the Mechanics Institute, in the old Baptist Chapel, ceased to function, Mr. Gill took over the premises, and had a shop at the end of the block in Red Lion Street for the display of furniture. Early in 1885, Mr. Gill bought a plot of land in Ireland Meadow, where he proceeded to erect a substantial weaving shed of 600 looms, with a two-storey warehouse, which was named Grove Shed.

The first tenants were Messrs. James Clegg and Hy. Parkinson, and they commenced with about 300 looms. The partners in the concern came from the Nelson district, and had previously been connected with the cotton industry. The firm introduced higher grades of cloth than had been previously woven in the district, and the coming of the firm into the village was a great boon to the weavers.

The other part of Grove Shed was taken over by a new firm the three partners being Messrs. James S. Watson, Chas. W. Bailey. and William N. Berry, and the firm were manufacturers of high class coloured goods. Mr. Watson had been weaving manager at Sough Bridge Mill, and Mr. Berry had been associated with the designing department at Dotcliffe Mill, Kelbrook.

About ten years later , important developments took place, when Messrs. Bailey Watson and Berry removed to a new shed, Spring Mill, which had been erected in Stoneybank Lane by Mr. John Bailey. This shed was also enlarged to hold 600 looms, with provision for further extension.

PARTNERSHIP DISSOLVED

In 1903, a dissolution of partnership took place, and Mr. Watson went to the Albion Shed and started the firm of James Watson and Sons. The Spring Mill was divided into two sections, Mr. Berry using one part for the manufacture of coloured goods, the firm being styled W.N. Berry and Sons. Mr. C.W. Bailey, with the association of Mr. Charles Watson and Mr. W.E. Gaunt, established a firm called C.W. Bailey Ltd., and they specialised in high-class sateen goods. About five years ago, the Berry firm removed their looms to a new shed in Foulridge, which is now under the control of Mr. Irving Berry, the surviving son of Mr. W.N. Berry.

Reverting to the Grove Shed, after the removal of one firm to Spring Mill, Messrs. Clegg and

Parkinson went to Nelson. Another new firm was founded by Mr. Robert Nutter, which took over all the loom space in Grove Shed. With him were associated his brothers-in-law, Messrs. Bracewell and William Hartley, but in 1908 they went to Brook Shed and took space for 408 looms. Mr. Bracewell Hartley married the eldest daughter of Mr. Gill, and took up residence at the "Grove." Mr. Nutter also included in the business his son Eli, and his son-in-law, Mr. Fred Shuttleworth, and Mr. Harold G. Wilkinson. Mr. Eli Nutter entered into partnership with another brother-in-law, Mr. James Turner, and they had 260 looms at the Albion Shed and 280 at Sough Bridge Mill. This was later absorbed in R. Nutter and Co.

Grove Shed was extended twice- first by Mr. John Delaney, who succeeded Mr. Gill in the ownership of the mill premises, and about fifteen years ago by Messrs. R. Nutter and Co. Ltd., who attained the proprietorship of the whole plant. Mr. H.G. Wilkinson was the salesman and manager during the principal part of the firms history.

After being stopped for two years, the grove shed was purchased last year Messrs. Nutter Bros., of Barnoldswick, and is now fully engaged.

A NEW COMPANY

When the fortunes of the village were at their lowest ebb, in 1889 (the Grove Shed being the only place of employment running) successful efforts were made to start a new shed company. Mr. John Bailey and members of his family took a leading part in this enterprise, and when a public meeting was held in the Victoria Institute to solicit and organise public support, Mr. Thomas Bailey was elected to the chair, and his son, C.W. Bailey, was appointed secretary, pro.tem. Within a few weeks time, encouraging support was forthcoming, and the contracts were placed for the erection of a shed in a field belonging to Mr. John Bailey, on the opposite side of the road to Victoria Mills, but over the Seal Bridge, at the entrance to the village from the Skipton and Colne highway. The shed was completed and ready for occupation the following year, and the directors arranged with Messrs. Henry Bracewell and Son, of Airebank Mills, Gargrave, to be the first tenants. This firm also re-started Bracewell's original "Old Shed," and removed their looms from Rawtenstall for the furnishing of the new Albion Shed. They were now providing full employment for 1300 looms.

Mr. Henry Bracewell was assisted by his nephew, Mr. Walter Hopwood Bracewell, and son of Mr. C. Bracewell, and his grandson, Mr. H.K. Bracewell, who was the son of Mr. Arthur Bracewell, Knowles House, Gargrave. The firm brought their weaving shed manager, Mr. Thos. Driver, from Rawtenstall, and he was succeeded by Mr. James Hartley, both of whom were very highly respected.

This firm ceased operations in 1903, and another serious stoppage ensued, which lasted for several months. During the following year there was a welcome improvement in the cotton trade, and the Albion Shed was restarted under new conditions, the loom space being allocated to three firms- Messrs A.J. Birley Ltd., 396 looms; and Messrs. J.S. Watson and Sons, 396 looms; and Messrs. Nutter and Turner, 264 looms.

The Earby Shed Co. embarked upon another successful enterprise in 1907, when a new shed was erected off the New Road, on land belonging to the Green End estate. The shed was built to accommodate 1,632 looms, the tenants being as follows: Messrs. T.H. Hartley and sons

Ltd., Messrs. B. and W. Hartley Ltd., New Road Manufacturing Co. Ltd., with 408 looms each; Mr. Joseph Foulds, 204 looms, and Oaks Manufacturing Co.Ltd.,204 looms. The directors of the Shed Co. at the opening of the Brook Shed were Messrs. W.N. Berry (chairman), C.W. Bailey (secretary), W. Wilkinson, George Proctor, James Lindley, E. Ormerod and James Brown. Mr. Brown had been chairman of the company for nearly 20 years, and to him was given the honour of starting the engine.

BOON TO SHAREHOLDERS

This shed has had a very prosperous career, and has been a great boon to the shareholders and the people who have been provided with employment there. The present tenants are Messrs. B. and W. Hartley Ltd., Messrs J.S. WatSon and Sons, Becksid Manufacturing Co. Ltd., (Watson and Co., Nelson), Oaks Manufacturing Co. Ltd. (Messrs. Normanton's, Nelson). Mr. Edmund Greenwood was originally the principal partner in the Oaks Manufacturing Co., and he was later associated with the Seal Manufacturing Co. Ltd., Victoria Mill. For several years he was also a yarn agent, and later a cloth agent in Manchester.

The Sough Bridge Mill, between Earby and Kelbrook, is considered to be within the Earby area. This shed was taken over from the Bracewells by Messrs. Nathan Smallpage and Sons of Burnley. They were a firm of the highest standing in the trade, and were pioneers in the coloured section of the industry. Mr. Smallpage was a brother of Mr. Samuel Smallpage, who had married Miss Bracewell, of Green End.

Mr. Nathan Smallpage's sons, Nathan, James and Richard, had the management of the business at Sough and Dotcliffe, and are well remembered by many who were employed by them 40 years ago. Mr. Richard Smallpage married Miss Clara Barritt, of White House, Earby, the youngest daughter of Mr. Christopher Barritt, and sister of Mrs. A.J. Birley. The Smallpage family retired from the manufacturing side of the business many years ago, but the cloth business at Manchester is still carried on under the old name.

A new room and power company was formed to take over the Sough Bridge Mill, and the name adopted was the "Kelbrook Bridge Mill Co. Ltd." The style of business carried on by the Smallpage firm was continued by a new manufacturing company, and the principal partners were Messrs J. Longworth, J.S. Pickles, Jos. Roberts, and James Smith, who had been in employment of the old firm. Mr. Pickles is the only one now living, and children of the former partners are now assisting in the present conduct of the business. The name of the firm is Kelbrook Bridge Manufacturing Co. Ltd.

The Sough Bridge shed was extended 30 years ago by the new buildings company, and the enlarged section is now in the occupation of Messrs. R. Nutter and Co.(Kelbrook) Ltd. with Mr. H.G. Wilkinson as managing director.

Dotcliffe Mill, at Kelbrook, was originally a small mill for spinning and weaving run by a water wheel, and there is still a large dam above the mill premises. After being taken over by the Smallpage firm, a new weaving shed was built, and provision made for dyeing the yarn for coloured goods. Mr. J.J. Duckworth, of Nelson, became the owner of the mill 20 years ago, and he enlarged the shed to hold over 500 looms. Mr. Duckworth introduced the manufacture of high-class goods, and the business became very prosperous.

A few years ago , Mr. Duckworth removed many of his looms to Nelson, where he had other interests, and a new company was formed called the Springbank Manufacturing Co. Ltd., to continue the occupation of the premises. Mr. T. Proctor is the managing director of the present firm, but Mr. Duckworth is still associated with the business. Mr. Duckworth resides at Elslack Hall, in the centre of the village, and Mr. Proctor has also taken up residence in Elslack.