

# DERBYSHIRE MISCELLANY



## The Local History Bulletin of the Derbyshire Archaeological Society

# DERBYSHIRE MISCELLANY

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## CONTENTS

	Page
New evidence that the South Derbyshire village of Twyford was once the site of a Hospitaller Bailiff's house by Joan Davies	50
Derby's Canadian Pioneer - Rev George William Taylor by David Parry	53
Depot Silk Mill in Derby and the Gibson and Ronalds families by Beverley Ronalds	55
A Destructive Fire in Derby at Davenport's silk mill	64
Tracing the 12th century foundation of Becket Well, Derby by Joan D'Arcy	66
Dale Abbey Iron Works	72

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Front Cover: A map by Michael Drayton published in *Polyolbion or Chorographical Description of all the Tracts, Rivers, Mountains, Forests and other Parts of the Renowned Isle of Great Britain*, 1612, enlarged in 1622. Engraver: William Hole.

## TWYFORD OLD HALL



Twyford Old Hall in 1808. (painting in a private collection)



Old Hall Cottage, Twyford, today.(Joan Davies)

Both show the view from the south, ie the River Trent side.  
The front of the house is now on the north side. The west wing was demolished in the 19th century when the Hall became a farmhouse.



## NEW EVIDENCE THAT THE SOUTH DERBYSHIRE VILLAGE OF TWYFORD WAS ONCE THE SITE OF A HOSPITALLER BAILIFF'S HOUSE

(by Joan Davies, joantwy@outlook.com)

*Lease from Ralph de Gourney of Bolton to Thomas fil. Galfridi de Potlok and Margaret his wife, and to one heir of their bodies, of four acres of arable land in Wyllinton, lying in Potlockross, Harpefurlonge, le Morfurlong, le Neld at Staginnebrugge, extending to Findemewey, on Dunstall, etc.*

*Witn. Robert Ferebraz, John de Notyngham, Nicholas de Fynderne, Henry de Camera in Twyford, etc. Dat. Derby "ad Pontechester". 1298.<sup>1</sup>*

This thirteenth century document concerns arable land in Willington and it also adds important new information to the history of the medieval Hospitaller estate in the South Derbyshire parish of Barrow-upon-Trent which then included Twyford, Stenson, Arleston and Sinfin. One of the witnesses is described as Henry of the camera in Twyford. A camera was the term used for a small Hospitaller estate. Unlike larger estates such as Yaveley near Ashbourne, it would not have had a preceptory at its centre but would have been administered by a bailiff. It is most likely that Henry was the bailiff of the camera and his house was in Twyford.

The Hospitaller Order of St John was established in the eleventh century when a group of Benedictine monks set up a hospital in Jerusalem to care for pilgrims who had become ill or were injured on their journey to the Holy Land. In 1113 they adopted the Augustinian rule and were recognized as a new religious order dedicated to St John the Baptist and bound by three rules of poverty, chastity and obedience. They wore a black monastic habit with a white eight pointed cross. Later they took on a military role to protect the Holy Land against attack from the Muslims and became known as the Knights Hospitaller of the Order of St John of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

English kings supported the work of the Hospitallers, granting them exemptions from feudal dues and local taxes. Prominent families in the country made grants of land to the Order enabling it to found preceptories from where its lands could be administered.<sup>3</sup> A Priory and Hospital were built in 1145 at Clerkenwell in London and this became the headquarters of the Order in England.<sup>4</sup>

In Derbyshire Robert de Bagpuize of Barton Bagpuize and Alkmonton,<sup>5</sup> who died c 1166, gave the Hospitallers the church of Barrow-upon-Trent.<sup>6</sup> The twelfth century grant was confirmed by his descendant, John de Bagpuize, in 1288 '*for the health of the souls of himself and his wife Cecilia as well as for the souls of his ancestors and posterity*'. He also confirmed grants of land in Barrow to the Hospitallers.<sup>7</sup>

In 1338 Brother Philip Thame, Grand Prior of England, drew up a full report of the income and expenditure of all the Hospitaller lands in England. A valuation of the Hospitallers' holding in Barrow survives:<sup>8</sup>

*The house with yearly produce of its garden and orchard 3s 2d  
And sales from the dovecote 3s  
And 80 acres of arable land valued at 6d an acre 40s  
And 6 acres of meadow at 2s an acre 12s  
And rent from freeholders 20s 6d  
And the profits of a windmill 20s  
And value of glebe land and church tithes £30  
And Swarkestone Church paid the Order a pension of 10s  
And tithes of corn 6s 8d  
And livestock sales 6s 8d  
Total income 54 marks 2s (£36 2s)*

### *Expenses*

*In respect of the visitation of the Prior of the Order for one day 20s  
For oil for one lamp 12d  
And for the payments to the bailiff and his servant for robes and their necessary things 25s*



*And to the Prior of Tutbury for his yearly pension 60s*  
*And to the Bishop of Carlisle, in rent 13s 4d*  
*And to the Hospital of Alkington 34s*  
*And in payments for parochial communion, as established 40s*  
*And for the repairs of the order's houses 20s*  
*And for food and wages for one cowman and one pigman 30s*  
*And for the visits of the Preceptor from time to time 12s*  
*The total of all the expenses and payments is 19 marks 2s (£12 15s 4d)*  
*The total value - And they pass this on to the Treasurer to discharge the debts, in accordance*  
*with his accounting 35marks (£23 6s 8d)*

This inventory shows that the Hospitaller bailiff was living in a house with a garden and orchard and was administering the Hospitaller's land in the parish but there is no indication of where the bailiff's house was situated. J. Charles Cox in Volume IV, 1879 of *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire* suggested that the residence of the bailiff of the camera could be at Arleston where the foundations of an earlier manor house had been incorporated into the later seventeenth century house.<sup>9</sup> But in *Derbyshire Miscellany* Volume 15, Part 2, Autumn 1998, in her article on Arleston House, Barbara Hutton discounted this theory.<sup>10</sup> Her research documented the descent of the families living there from the thirteenth century. In its long history she found no connection to the Hospitallers as owners or tenants.

The document of 1298 from Jeayes' *Derbyshire Charters* quoted above, gives credence to a local tradition that 'monks' once lived in Twyford Old Hall, but until now there has been no evidence to link the Old Hall or any other house in Twyford with the Hospitallers. After the Dissolution of the monasteries in 1540, the former camera, which by then had become part of the Hospitaller estate at Yeaveley, was divided between Edward, second son of Thomas Beaumont of Thringstone, Leicestershire and Richard Harpur of Swarkestone.<sup>11</sup> George Harpur, who died in 1658,<sup>12</sup> was a younger son of Richard Harpur of Littleover. He built a manor house in Twyford (possibly incorporating an existing building) which later became known as the Old Hall. The Hall continued in Harpur ownership until the death of John Harpur in 1712.<sup>13</sup> The Hall passed by marriage to the Franceys and Ashby families who had no need to live in the house and it was probably tenanted through the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> By the nineteenth century a further marriage brought it to the Bathurst family of Wiltshire who sold it to the Calke Harpurs in 1818.<sup>15</sup> The Hall was much reduced by the Harpurs to a tenanted farmhouse, but an oil painting dated 1808, now in a private collection, shows the Hall as a large manor house before most of it was demolished. The house continued as a farm throughout the nineteenth century but in the twentieth century the farmhouse was divided into two farm labourers' cottages until it was sold by auction in 1959 and became one house, now known as Old Hall Cottage (listed Grade II\* in 1967). The timbers of this house have been dendrodated to 1654 (Nottingham Tree Ring Dating Laboratory, 2007). Whether the original large house incorporated a building earlier than the seventeenth century is difficult to assess from the painting. An inventory of 1672<sup>16</sup> records the present and demolished rooms of the house. Barbara Hutton, of the Vernacular Architecture Group, who did a survey of the house in 1987, pointed out that according to the inventory the hall in the demolished part of the building had no hall chamber indicating a possible open medieval hall: '*I suggest, as a hypothesis only, that there was a medieval open-hall and cross wing manor house to the west of and in line with the present building, extended first to the south of the wing, and later by adding the present house which provided a more up-to-date hall and parlour*'.<sup>17</sup>

The bailiffs house might well have been elsewhere in Twyford, perhaps nearer the church and the important ferry crossing over the Trent. But the site of the Old Hall is on a gravel platform which to this day protects it from the worst winter floods and there is the tradition that the house had a monastic past. Gladwyn Turbutt, the author of *The Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem in Derbyshire History*, commented:

*The wording of the document certainly suggests to me that it was Twyford where the camera bailiff lived. Twyford Old Hall would seem an obvious residence for its bailiff.*<sup>18</sup>

#### **Acknowledgements:**

I am grateful to Dr Irene Brightmer and John Arnold for helpful suggestions and advice and to Dr Janet Spavold for translating the Inventory Expenses from the Latin.

## References

1. I.H. Jeayes, *Derbyshire Charters*, 1906, no 2586: Kerry, xix, 64.
2. Gladwyn Turbutt, *The Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem in Derbyshire History*, pp2-4.
3. Gladwyn Turbutt, *ibid*, p5.
4. The remains of the Priory at Clerkenwell: St John's Gate, and the Priory Church now house the Museum of the Order of St John.
5. Maxwell Craven, *The Derbyshire Country House*, 1991, p28. After the Norman Conquest the manor of Barton was held by the Bagpuize family and their name was added to the settlement. Later the estate passed to Sir Walter Blount and was known as Barton Blount.
6. Gladwyn Turbutt, *op.cit.*, p18.
7. Quoted by J. Charles Cox, *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire*, Vol IV, 1879, p15.
8. Quoted by Gladwyn Turbutt *op. cit.*, pp19 and 45, but originally transcribed by Rev. Lambert B. Larking from a manuscript in the Maltese Record Office published in 1857 by the Camden Society..
9. J. Charles Cox, *op. cit.*, p17.
10. Barbara Hutton, 'Arleston and the Knights Hospitaller of St John of Jerusalem', *Derbyshire Miscellany* Vol 15, Part 2, Autumn 1998, pp31-37.
11. Gladwyn Turbutt, *op.cit.*, pp36-37.
12. The National Archives, PROB 11/289/210, Will of George Harpur of Twyford, 14th March 1658.
13. The National Archives, PROB 11/536/18, Will of John Harpur, 2nd July 1713.
14. Maxwell Craven, *op.cit.*, p214.
15. Derbyshire Record Office, D2375M 193/1, Sir Henry Crewe to purchase an estate from Henry Bathurst's heirs in law, for the sum of £36,588, 24th January 1818.
16. Staffordshire Record Office, B/C/11, Inventory of George Harpur, 6th October 1676.
17. Barbara and Kenneth Hutton, *Derby Buildings Record*, no 3, 1987.
18. Personal Correspondence, December 2018.

## DERBY'S CANADIAN PIONEER - REV. GEORGE WILLIAM TAYLOR

(by David O. Parry)

On a visit to Nanaimo, Victoria Island, in British Columbia, Canada, to perform in two Gilbert and Sullivan operas, I discovered that a well known Canadian scientist and founder of the Pacific Biological Station had been born in Derby in 1854. To discover that Derby had been responsible for two items of Victorian importance, a '*muscular Christian*' minister of religion and the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, seemed to me an interesting coincidence, and I resolved to find out more about the former.

George William Taylor's father, George, and grandfather, William, were silk throwsters and ribbon manufacturers at the Derby Silk Mill which they leased from Derby Corporation. They employed over 100 workers. When George was born in 1854 the family lived in some style at 16, North Parade, with three living-in servants. His father died when he was in his teens and his mother took control of the business. Taylor, and his older sister and younger brother were all educated in Derby. His sister Helen became an author, writing articles for magazines and his brother Edward was a teacher, the first principal of St Margaret's School in Stafford Street when it opened in 1881. Taylor himself trained as a mining engineer, but, finding himself more interested in fossils and shells, he obtained a post as assistant curator at the recently established Derby Museum. A visit to his cousin Ted Williams, in Vancouver Island revealed a wealth of shells, insects and marine life for him to study and on returning to Derby he turned down the job he had been offered as a conchologist at the British Museum and in 1882 packed his bags for Canada. He had with him a letter of introduction from the suffragan Bishop of Derby, a friend of his family, to Bishop Hills, Bishop of Columbia, and although he first tried to make his living farming, and considered becoming a mining engineer until he discovered that a miner in Nanaimo was three times more likely to be killed underground than anywhere else in the British Empire, he was soon persuaded to train for the church. He became the first minister to be ordained in British Columbia rather than in England. In 1884, two years before his ordination, he had published his first paper '*Notes on the Entomology of Vancouver Island*'.

Taylor campaigned for women to have more say in church matters and even organised the building of his church when appointed to a parish in Victoria. In 1885 he had married Elizabeth Williams, daughter of another clergyman and headmistress of Victoria Girls' High School, and they had three sons and a daughter. From 1888-90 he had two parishes in Ottawa and on the journey through Alberta studied the entomology of that province, resulting in another important paper. By now he was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and the Natural History Society of British Columbia. He managed to combine his scientific work with his ministry back in Nanaimo, but in 1895 his wife died after the birth of their third son and he decided to return to England as he did not think he could look after all his children. However, in recognition of his social work among the miners and their families, the Vancouver Coal Company gave him 100 acres of land on Gabriola Island and he moved there, taking over the parish and walking 10 miles to his farthest church. Life was primitive and rough. His daughter Helen wrote, many years later, of the shack they lived in (built by Taylor) and of trapping rabbits and fishing for their food. His eldest son Fred not only helped with his father's research but played the organ in church as well.

A move back to Nanaimo to run three parishes meant a salary of 40 dollars a month and this enabled him to buy some land in Departure Bay where he and his son Ted built a four bedroomed house. He was now recognised in London as a Fellow of the Entomological Society and also as a Fellow of the Zoological Society. His new home by the sea awakened an interest in marine life and he became worried about the expansion of whaling and overfishing of salmon (a million cases of salmon were exported from British Columbia in 1901). Logging caused frequent log jams which interfered with the salmon's spawning. Taylor knew that an Atlantic Biological Research Station had been founded in 1898 on Canada's eastern coast and campaigned for one on the Pacific. The Canadian authorities granted him 15,000 dollars to build one in 1905. His first experiments were done in a tent in winter conditions, but by 1907 he and his son had built the first research institute. It had a workroom, library, store, office, darkroom, dining room and four bedrooms for visiting researchers. Unfortunately years of doing several jobs took their toll and the next year Taylor suffered a heart attack and decided to give up his parishes. He did this with reluctance as he had been a popular minister of whom it was said '*In his parish work he is painstaking, gentle and self-denying, always ready to help, a clear and forceful preacher and an earnest liver who shows in his work that religion is not an accessory to everyday life, but an integral part of it*'. Two years later a stroke left him partly paralysed but he was persuaded to carry on as curator of the institute. However he never regained his full health and he died in 1912.

The institute he founded is now one of the world's outstanding fishery research establishments and occupies a large, modern building at the end of Departure Bay in Nanaimo. Taylor's huge collections (among them 7,000 shells and the world's largest private collection of limpets) and library are still kept there and often referred to. As well as Taylor Bay on Gabriola Island, he had an insect, a mollusc and a sponge named after him.

His conservation interests also extended to exploring Cameron Lake and climbing Mount Arrowsmith and he realised their importance to the new tourist industry just starting in Vancouver Island. For the same reason he suggested that Cathedral Grove, which contains the highest conifers in British Columbia, should be preserved and it is now one of the most visited tourist attractions on the island.

His task in life, he said, was to understand the works of the Creator and unravel the secrets of Nature.

#### NOTES

1. His father George became bankrupt in 1856 and the mill was advertised to let in the *Derby Mercury* dated 20 February 1856. The machinery was to be sold.
2. There is a portrait of George William Taylor in the BC Archives at the Royal British Columbia Museum. <https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/reverend-george-william-taylor-first-pastor-at-st-barnabas-church-victoria-later-became-st-nicholas-wonderworker-ukrainian-catholic-church>
3. George's sister Helen went to Derby School, as did her brothers. See Old Derbeian Society, <https://www.olderbeians.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Helen-Louisa-Taylor-October-2019-1.pdf> which tells the story of her life and also gives a list of her publications.



## DEPOT SILK MILL IN DERBY AND THE GIBSON AND RONALDS FAMILIES

(by Beverley F. Ronalds, University of Western Australia, [beverley.ronalds@gmail.com](mailto:beverley.ronalds@gmail.com))

Jane Steer and Joan D'Arcy have described in *Derbyshire Miscellany* the history of the Depot Silk Mill in Derby and biographical particulars of its long-time owner Ambrose Moore (1788-1873) and his family.<sup>1</sup> Building on this detailed base, the story is here extended to two other interrelated families and their varied fortunes at the mill. The Gibson family was Moore's foundation partner while the Ronalds family was a subsequent occupant. With the Depot Mill being established to throw rather than manufacture silk, the emphasis of the discussion is on the opportunities and pressures in this segment of the silk industry through the period of the involvement of the two families. The quite different views of the Gibsons and Moore regarding the causes of the financial changes they experienced, and their acceptability, are explored. Other more generic business risks independent of the silk sector are also seen to impact on the Ronalds family in particular.

### Introducing the extended Ronalds family at Derby

The extended Ronalds family, although based in London in the nineteenth century, had a variety of links with Derby and contributed to two important industries - silk production and the railways.

Born in Canonbury Place, Islington, Edmund Ronalds (1790-1874) was the second surviving son of Francis Ronalds and Jane nee Field, who were wholesale cheesemongers in Upper Thames Street in the City of London. Ronalds took over the substantial business in 1814 on the retirement of his mother and his older brother (who was the inventor Sir Francis Ronalds)<sup>2</sup> and the firm remained very profitable until the economic slump of 1847-48.<sup>3</sup> Ronalds became a respected member of the business community: he helped run the Cheesemongers' Benevolent Institution,<sup>4</sup> was quite frequently appointed as an assignee for the assets of insolvent traders,<sup>5</sup> and served for two years as Master of the Drapers' Company through which he had been apprenticed.<sup>6</sup> He invested in silk throwing at the Depot Mill in 1852.



Ronalds' youngest sister Maria married railwayman Samuel Carter (1805-1878), seen in Fig 1. In the period 1835-68, he was the solicitor and advisor to the Board of the Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway and its successor the Midland Railway.<sup>7</sup> He held the same role with the London and Birmingham Railway from its inception in 1830.<sup>8</sup> His entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* advises that he had '*unrivalled expertise in parliamentary business and railway policy, being noted in particular for his sound judgement, ability in delicate negotiations, and a combination of shrewdness, intellect, and a strict sense of integrity*'.<sup>9</sup> Carter's description of the rather lacklustre first public meeting in Derby to canvas interest in a railway link with Birmingham is preserved in print: only 12 residents attended.<sup>10</sup> Once the line was sanctioned and began operating in 1839, it facilitated Carter's frequent trips up to the company's headquarters in Derby as well as those of his Ronalds and Gibson relatives in the town.

Alfred Ronalds (1802-1860), Edmund's youngest brother, moved to Staffordshire in 1829 to research his book *The Fly-fisher's Entomology* on the nearby rivers (the book has gone through many editions and is still in print). He lived near Uttoxeter for over a decade and mentions the River Derwent near Derby as well as the Dove in his angling studies.<sup>11</sup>

Fig 1: Samuel Carter. Source: Sir George Grey Special Collections, Auckland Library, New Zealand, NZMS 1235 (hereafter Auckland Library).

Ronalds' aunt Charlotte Field married Thomas Gibson (1777-1863),<sup>12</sup> who became a freeman of the Clothworkers' Company and a silk manufacturer in Spitalfields in London's East End. Like the Ronalds family, they were living in Canonbury Place when their son Thomas Field Gibson (1803-1889) was born.<sup>13</sup> Field Gibson was admitted into the Weavers' Company and joined his father's business at a young age. They helped to establish the Depot Mill in 1822.

The Gibson family had an earlier association with Derbyshire. Their friend Henry Crabb Robinson put on record that their relative *'patronized Arkwright, to whom he lent a large sum of money'*, and later received considerable financial return.<sup>14</sup> The connection would have been Gibson's aunt Elizabeth Gibson, who married hosier Samuel Need (1718-1781).<sup>15</sup> Need partnered with Jedediah Strutt (1726-1797) in commercialising his ribbed stocking machine, and Need and Strutt then bankrolled the pioneering cotton spinning mills developed by Sir Richard Arkwright (1732-1792). Gibson's father Thomas Gibson Sr (c.1734-c.1806) also participated in these ventures as Gibson and Johnson, bankers, and Gibson and Winter, lacemen, both of Lawrence Lane, Cheapside.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Gibson family at the Depot Mill (1822-1843)**

In April 1822, the defunct Ordnance Depot in Derby was advertised for sale,<sup>1</sup> and it was acquired by Ambrose Moore in partnership with Thomas Gibson. They would have made the purchase quite quickly as it began operating as a silk mill in July 1823 and Moore later explained that it took perhaps a year to set up such a facility.<sup>17</sup> The Depot Mill was a substantial property located on the west side of Normanton Road opposite today's Loudon Street and occupying over an acre. In the course of its conversion, the buildings were largely reconstructed and extended up to six floors (Fig 2). Inside were six large workrooms *'capable of being overlooked thoroughly by one person to each room'*<sup>18</sup> and soon *'all full of machines'*.<sup>1</sup> The machinery was powered by a steam engine and boilers. Coal gas for lighting the mill was also manufactured on site.<sup>19</sup> By 1833 they were employing 280 men, women and children.<sup>1</sup> The overall establishment would have cost the partners at least £10,000 based on typical silk mill costs of the time.<sup>17</sup>

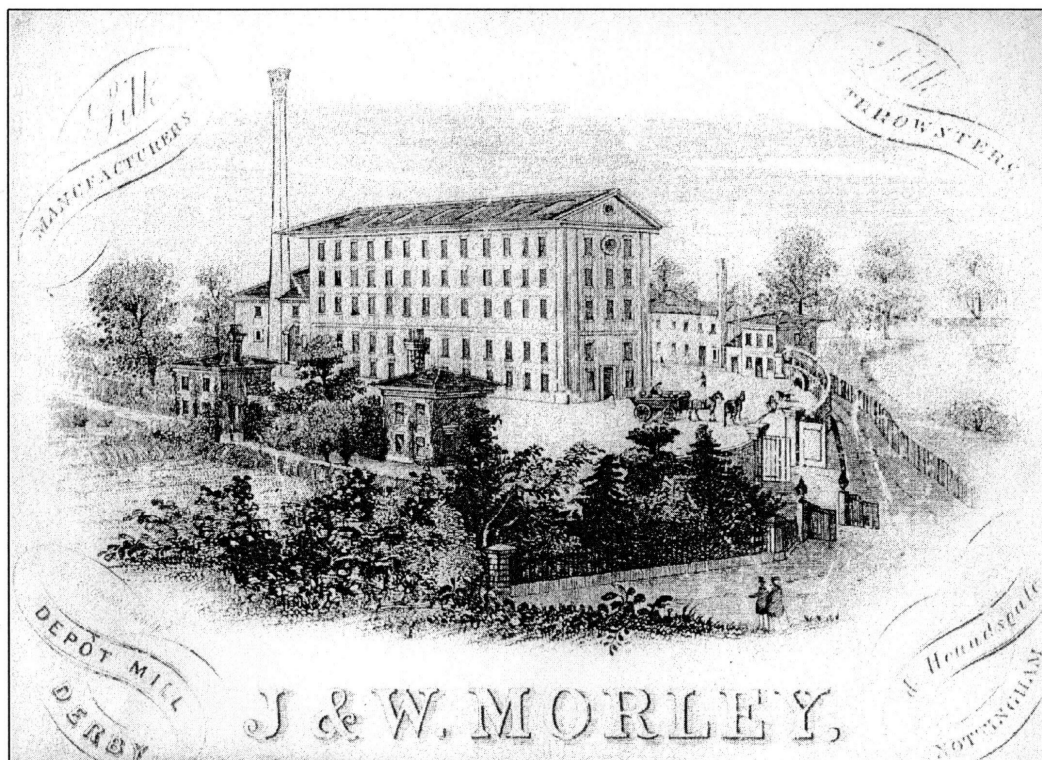


Fig 2: Depot Mill. Source: Derby Local Studies Library, Derby.

There was an early mention of the new mill in the local press in June 1824, although Gibson's name was misrepresented as *'Gisborne'*.<sup>20</sup> An accurate designation of the partners as *'Messrs. Moore and Gibson'* was given in a subsequent news item,<sup>21</sup> and the 1829 Derby directory included the entry *'Moore and Gibson, silk throwsters, Depot factory, Normanton Road'*.<sup>22</sup>

To provide context for a description of Moore and Gibson's business, we begin with some general background on its geographic, economic and industrial basis. The stages in the preparation of silk include 'raw' (reeled from the cocoon); 'thrown' (where it is formed into thread); and 'manufactured' (to become a finished good). From early in the century both Moore and Gibson had a silk manufacturing firm in Spitalfields, the heartland of British silk weaving for many years. The manufacture of quality broad silks was still largely performed manually and Gibson put out thrown silk to hundreds of families in Spitalfields and also in Halstead, Essex, to weave on handlooms in their homes.<sup>23</sup> Silk throwing, in contrast, had long been conducted in Derby as a mechanised activity and the Depot Mill marked Gibson and Moore's entry into this capital-intensive step of the process.<sup>24</sup> Moore later explained the motivations for their expansion as being to take advantage of the current growth in the silk trade in England and to better manage the provision of silk thread to their weavers;<sup>17</sup> Gibson did not sell thrown silk to other manufacturers.<sup>17</sup> They might also have wished to make use of innovative machinery - Gibson's inventor nephew Sir Francis Ronalds conceived an alternative form of a swift machine for winding silk in 1826.<sup>25</sup>

Silk farming was conducted abroad, with Italy being the favoured producer of high quality silk for Spitalfields fabrics. The Italians could export their silk either raw, or after throwing, depending on their relative returns. Influencing this, the British Government could apply differential import duties on raw, thrown and manufactured silk, or even prohibit entry, to encourage or protect particular sectors of the industry at home while generating revenue for the State.

Sweeping changes to the fiscal environment for the silk trade commenced very soon after Gibson and Moore began operations in Derby and they were to have a significant impact on their business. For many years the British had imposed high customs duties on raw and especially thrown silk, and foreign silk products were barred. These measures had served to make silk throwing extremely profitable in England. It was decided in 1824, however, to repeal the raw silk tariff almost entirely and nearly halve the duty on thrown silk. The goal now was to make manufactured silk more competitive in price, so preparing the sector for opening to the French market in 1826.<sup>26</sup> French silk fabrics were widely regarded as the most beautiful in the world.

The steep reduction in raw silk tariffs encouraged the development of numerous new throwing mills in England.<sup>26</sup> What was not anticipated in the industry, however, was that the duty on thrown silk would also continue to decrease rapidly. In the five-year period to 1829, the tariff on organzine (a particular configuration of silk strands that was the product at the Depot Mill), plummeted from 14s 7½d per pound weight to 3s 6d.<sup>23</sup> A consequence of these various events was that the market price for throwing organzine dropped from around 10s per lb, in the era of protection and little competition,<sup>26</sup> to 4s 9d shillings in 1832 according to Thomas Field Gibson.<sup>17</sup> He noted that he was 'sorry to throw for this price' as the financial benefits of throwing his own silk had reduced significantly, but he added that 'the persons who employ hands at lower wages' than he did would find the current market value more rewarding.<sup>17</sup>

These data enable an illuminating computation to be made on profitability. Adopting a weekly output of thrown silk of 1,000lb achieved by a later tenant of the Depot Mill as a guide (as described below), Moore and the Gibsons had probably already recouped their large throwing investment in the first year of operation, even with their higher wages.

Although Moore and the Gibsons were two of the most prominent silk manufacturers in Spitalfields, and were now partners in the throwing sector, they were ideological opposites. These differences played out in the changing fortunes of the Depot Mill. Moore was a Conservative in politics and an Anglican.<sup>1</sup> The Gibsons, like all their family, were Unitarian in faith and politically Whig cum Radical.<sup>12</sup> They fought actively for reforms they believed would bring wide social benefit, including religious tolerance and an expanded electoral franchise. Freeing up trade internationally was a special interest for them as they expected it would strengthen the overall economy even if it risked harming their own business.<sup>13</sup> Gibson was a leader in the establishment of free trade thinking: according to his friend Dr Thomas Sadler in 1869, he was 'one of the earliest among mercantile men who thoroughly mastered and energetically advocated the views of Political Economy, then so obnoxious, now so generally accepted'.<sup>14</sup> Field Gibson devoted much time in the 10-year period 1836-46 to the Anti-Corn Law League that lobbied successfully to abolish tariffs on food staples.<sup>13</sup>

Thomas Gibson was 'an independent and consequential thinker' and brought to these political battles 'a commanding form' and 'courageous tenacity of purpose'.<sup>27</sup> He once told the renowned social reformer Francis Place: 'You are no chicken, nor am I'.<sup>28</sup> Field Gibson was quieter in manner while being 'liberal... with his time, his ripe experience, and his purse' across these causes and doing the 'real business' in an 'actively useful'<sup>29</sup> but



`unobtrusive' manner.<sup>30</sup> Both were assisted by their close relationships with Whig politicians - exemplified by Gibson's surviving invitation to dine at Downing Street with the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, Viscount Althorp, very soon after the Whigs came to power in late 1830.<sup>31</sup>

The divergent philosophies of Moore and the Gibsons are recorded in various Government inquiries. Moore was direct in his language to a Select Committee on the silk trade in 1832. With the lower import duty, `*foreign competition ... has destroyed the English throwster*'. `*I consider it an entire failure*' – `*it is the true policy of this country to protect throwing*'. `*I never should have embarked*' on investment in silk throwing `*if I could have thought it possible*' that the Government would `*have reduced that protection*'.<sup>17</sup>

Field Gibson had already presented a contrary opinion to the same committee. Asked initially about trade at Spitalfields, he replied: `*I think the reduction of duties on raw and thrown silk has had a very beneficial effect*'. `*We have been enabled to manufacture goods at a much cheaper rate and have brought them within a much larger range of customers*'.<sup>17</sup>

Turning to the silk preparation phase, Field Gibson explained that `*the competition of the English mills governs the price of throwing*' now, rather than import tariffs. His reasoning was that only a small fraction of thrown silk used in Britain was from abroad and these imports had remained reasonably steady. Lower duties on the other hand `*increased the returns*' to the silk industry because the market grew - more people `*buy the cheaper articles*' and employment is increased. Questioned about an optimum tariff for thrown silk, he replied: `*I have to speak both as a manufacturer and throwster; as a manufacturer I should like to say the duty entirely off, as a throwster I should wish it on*'. He settled on a compromise of a further reduction to 2s per lb for organzine.<sup>17</sup> He must have believed that a well run modern mill could generate reasonable returns at that time with just a small level of protection. In fact the tariff remained at 3s 6d while he and Moore were operating at the Depot Mill but was entirely repealed in 1845.<sup>26</sup>

There were further Government inquiries at the end of the decade, and by now free trade thinking was more widely understood and embraced.<sup>26</sup> Field Gibson's perspective in 1840 was: `*I regard all protections as injurious to the community*'; `*if the Legislature were willing to adopt a system of free trade in every article of commerce, I am, as a silk manufacturer, quite prepared to take my chance in the risk of such a scheme*'. The admission of French silks had in his view been advantageous to Spitalfields: `*competition has very much excited to exertion*' and `*has enabled us to make some improvement in the manufacture*'.<sup>32</sup>

Moore's opinion however remained unchanged. He emphasised that he was not just thinking selfishly for throwsters, because tariffs on thrown silk were also `*beneficial to the manufacturers, as they attract to our market the raw silks of Italy*' by which the manufacturer `*can much better select the silk which will suit his manufacture, than he can after the silk is thrown*', and he has `*the opportunity ... of having it thrown ... to suit the particular purposes required*'. `*The remission of the import duty upon foreign thrown silk must, therefore, upon every known principle of commerce, diminish the supply to this country of raw silk from Italy*'.<sup>23</sup> The Commissioners conducting the inquiry did not concur with his views and cited two decades of import data for raw and thrown silk in their support.

Moore and the Gibsons decided to end their silk throwing operation around this time. Thomas Gibson had long retired and Moore already held several board directorships in other sectors.<sup>1</sup> Field Gibson was also withdrawing from business. He had no son to inherit the firm and already had sufficient wealth to support the many community activities he wished to pursue - his personal estate was valued at over £77,000 at his death. In the 1841 census, Moore described himself as a silk manufacturer (but not a throwster) and the Gibsons were both `*of independent means*'. Depot Mill was offered for lease that year `*with immediate possession*', and `*completely fitted with Machinery*' suited to `*a very extensive Throwing business*'.<sup>33</sup> Their partnership appears to have been dissolved when it was let and their throwing machinery was auctioned off in 1843<sup>19</sup> - Gibson and Moore were both still listed as freeholders in Derby (but residing in London) in an 1842 directory,<sup>34</sup> but in the 1843 tithe apportionment Moore indicated that he was the sole owner of the mill.<sup>35</sup>

In the words of their obituaries, the Gibsons had `*genuine philanthropy of character*<sup>30</sup> and `*liberal beneficence*',<sup>27</sup> and in their retirement they continued to lead initiatives aimed at improving education and living conditions for working people.<sup>36</sup> Wishing to offer the opportunity for weavers to acquire new skills, Gibson had founded an early Mechanics' Institution in Spitalfields in 1825.<sup>37</sup> (The Derby Mechanics' Institution was formed the same year by the Strutt family.)<sup>38</sup> Sixteen years later Field Gibson spearheaded the establishment of the Spitalfields School of Design.<sup>39</sup> This was the first of numerous schools of design around the country affiliated

with the Government School of Design in central London on which he also served. He was a founding director of a pioneering housing association created to build sanitary and affordable housing for working people in London and further afield; one of the later developments was named after him in remembrance of his extended contributions.<sup>13</sup> The Gibsons also contributed to causes in Derby: Gibson gave £20 in 1824 towards building a non-sectarian school for the town, where the principal sponsors were Strutt's sons.<sup>40</sup>

Field Gibson was one of Prince Albert's Royal Commissioners for the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace in 1851. He remained a Commissioner for the rest of his life, where he worked to extend into the manufacturing districts *'the influence of Science and Art upon productive industry'*<sup>41</sup> encouraged by the Exhibition. As he explained to Earl Granville: *'it is scarcely possible to overestimate the importance of securing the active and hearty cooperation of the great manufacturing towns as a main element in the successful prosecution of the plan'*, which *'may in many cases be best effected in the localities where these operations are carried on'*.<sup>42</sup> The Derby School of Art was founded in 1853<sup>43</sup> and railwayman Samuel Carter paid for a School of Art to be built in Coventry.<sup>8</sup>

Both of the Gibsons died in their mid-eighties after long retirements. Gibson lived his last years in Clarence Terrace overlooking Regent's Park in London. Field Gibson and his second wife Eliza nee Cogan died in Fitzjohn's Avenue, Hampstead, north London, close to where his only daughter and her family resided.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Ronalds family at the Depot Mill (1852-1853)**

One of the subsequent tenancies Moore arranged for the Depot Mill was a seven-year lease from September 1849 with an annual rent of £300.<sup>1</sup> The tenants were William Parkin Morley (1820-1889) and John Paterson Morley (1820-1860), twin sons of Mary Ann nee Black and Sampson Morley. They had formerly been silk manufacturers in Leek.<sup>44</sup> The Morleys needed to purchase considerable machinery for the mill as the previous lessees had put all their equipment up for sale six months earlier.<sup>45</sup> By 1852 this new machinery and the Morleys' stock was insured to a value of £3,500.<sup>46</sup> The 1851 census indicates that their staff complement was similar to that of Moore and Gibson, and they could turn off up to 1,000 lbs of silk a week.<sup>18</sup> The Morleys also advertised a business in Houndsgate, Nottingham (Fig 2).



Fig 3: Edmund Ronalds. Source: Auckland Library.

Despite or perhaps because of this scale of investment, the Morleys' business was *'in difficulties'* from the beginning and in 1852 an employee *'remembered Mr. Ronalds coming with a gentleman and looking over the stock, books, and premises'*.<sup>46</sup> This was Edmund Ronalds and he was probably accompanied by his cousin Thomas Field Gibson to provide advice on the mill. Ronalds' mother had died that year leaving a significant inheritance and the family's cheesemonger property had been sold.<sup>2</sup> Apparently having up to £10,000 to invest, Ronalds (Fig 3) wished to establish his 18-year old son Hugh Ronalds (1833-1911) in business.

Ronalds' version of subsequent events is given in press coverage of an 1853 court case.<sup>46</sup> The family first leased a home in Green-hill, Derby.<sup>47</sup> He signed a mortgage deed with the Morleys in May 1852, where he lent them an initial £3,000 and subsequent advances as requested, and Hugh began to involve himself in the business. A staff member noted that their *'trade was flat before, but much brisker after, Mr. Ronalds' coming'*.<sup>46</sup> There was an option for Ronalds to go into partnership with the Morleys after four months but he declined this option and so the Morleys needed to repay the loans at the end of six months to prevent control of their business passing to Ronalds.



Fig 4: William Parkin Morley.  
Source: John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland, Australia, 89-1-2.

Just days before the six-month deadline of 15 November 1852, the *Gazette* printed the *'evil' news that the Morleys had dissolved their own partnership*'.<sup>48</sup> They then divulged to Ronalds that he was just *'one of the creditors'*.<sup>46</sup> It soon became apparent that William Morley was also in another partnership of *'Crape Manufacturers'* in Bedfordshire and it too was dissolved in January 1853 with one of the partners becoming an insolvent debtor.<sup>49</sup> According to Ronalds' lawyer, they had taken his *'money and made it fly'*.<sup>46</sup> It seems that Ronalds was virtually bankrupted; a cousin wrote that *'he must be much reduced in circumstances as two of his daughters have been obliged to go out as Governesses'*.<sup>50</sup>

Ronalds ran the operation for just six weeks before deciding to quit. In early January 1853 the mill was advertised to let *'and may be entered upon immediately'*. The *'Machinery of the best description, and principally new'* was put up for sale;<sup>18</sup> the auction was to continue daily *'until the whole is disposed of'*.<sup>51</sup> The equipment included *'several fancy trimming looms, and thirty-three crape looms'* as well as the throwing machinery, indicating that some weaving had also been undertaken.<sup>52</sup> Ronalds and his wife Eliza nee Anderson additionally auctioned their *'very elegant'* home furniture and fittings in Green-hill.<sup>47</sup> They also moved out of their large property at Canonbury Place, Islington, and went to live with their eldest son, who was professor of chemistry at Queens College, Galway.<sup>3</sup>

It is not entirely clear how Ronalds exposed himself to such large financial losses. He was a confident and decisive businessman; his brother Sir Francis advised him as early as 1819: *'You are always in such a violent hurry, take things more coolly and you will accomplish matters much better'*.<sup>53</sup> It seems that in his enthusiasm he had failed to conduct a sufficiently comprehensive appraisal of the true state of the business and the integrity and trustworthiness of his potential partners before making his financial advances. Hugh's daughter later wrote of her grandparents Edmund and Eliza: *'My Father used to say that Grandfather was no sort of business man himself but nothing ever went wrong when he took Grandmother's advice'. 'Grandmother never trusted' the Morleys 'nor did she approve of the partnership'*.<sup>54</sup>

Hugh relived this early experience forever after. Initially he enquired of his father: *'I should like to hear all about the Mill business, what the machinery fetched? How the Morleys behaved? And all about it'*.<sup>55</sup> Then an update: *'I was very much grieved to hear of the bad accounts of the mills'*.<sup>56</sup> He continued to write about *'those thieves the Morleys'*:<sup>57</sup> *'can nothing be done with them? If they are in business in London ... you surely can make them pay interest for the money they owe you and so keep the debt alive'*.<sup>58</sup> It turns out that William (Fig 4), who was the *'noisy and boisterous'* Morley twin,<sup>46</sup> had gone to Ireland and he died in Queensland, Australia. John apparently now went by his middle name and later passed away in Derbyshire.<sup>59</sup>

Hugh and two of his brothers, all under the age of 21, had migrated in February 1853 to the Colony of New Zealand to try and support themselves there; they received seed funding from Samuel Carter and other uncles. The initial intention was for the whole family to join them once they were settled as Eliza wished *'to fly from all society'* to escape her embarrassment.<sup>60</sup> She died soon afterwards however, and Edmund Ronalds lived his last years in London at Ashburton Cottages in Highgate.





Fig 5: Hugh Ronalds, Source: Auckland Library.

Hugh at length enjoyed business and personal success (Fig 5). Returning to Britain in 1861, he became a partner in the Bonnington Chemical Company in Edinburgh that his chemist brother was now running and married into the renowned Greg cotton-spinning family.<sup>3</sup> His wife Bertha was the daughter of Samuel Greg Jr (1804-1876) who managed the family's cotton mill at Bollington. Hugh spent his later years in Hereford as a nurseryman and naturalist.<sup>61</sup> His public and philanthropic work included spearheading the development of a new hospital and serving as a district councillor. Like his great uncle Thomas Gibson before him, he was also a Justice of the Peace and chaired the area's Board of Guardians administering the Poor Law, which he performed with 'patience and courtesy' and 'the greatest sympathy' for many years.<sup>62</sup>

In March 1854, and again in June 1856, the Depot Mill was offered for sale or lease without silk machinery.<sup>63</sup> This process continued from time to time until it was finally sold by Moore's executors in 1884.<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusion

When Ambrose Moore and Thomas Gibson built their silk mill in 1823 it was highly remunerative, but their early boom did not last, and profitability deteriorated further for later tenants. The reasons behind this differed for the Ronalds and Gibson families. The Ronalds family suffered primarily from an age-old issue of faulty management of business risk, choosing associates who seemed to have hidden their considerable debts. With the Gibsons and Moore, the Depot Mill became a microcosm of the diversity of opinions on responsible economic policy prevailing in the first half of the nineteenth century. Moore laid the blame for reduced profits squarely on the reduction of the protective tariff for silk throwing and argued that it should be reinstated to prevent imports. The Gibsons however considered the major cause to be increased competition in England, as many new mills had been built due to the low tariff on raw silk and general expansion of the silk industry; this was something that the market would correct to give adequate but not disproportionate returns. The Gibsons promoted free trade and open markets and these ideas began to hold increasing sway as the century progressed. Depot Mill thus exemplifies through its owners how very similarly situated industrialists in a particular sector can hold fundamentally different beliefs. It also illustrates both the short-term disturbances and long-term consequences that can follow from Government triggers in encouraging or inhibiting particular industries and the employment they offer.

### Acknowledgement

The author thanks staff at the various archives in Britain, New Zealand, Australia and Canada cited in this article for their assistance.

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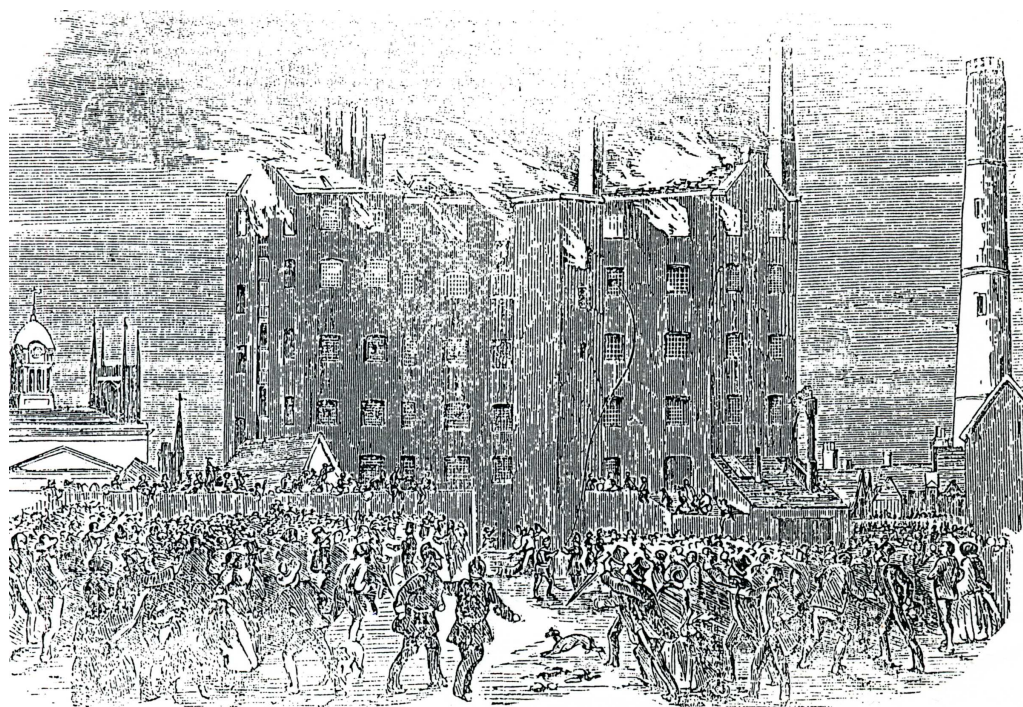
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## A DESTRUCTIVE FIRE IN DERBY AT DAVENPORT'S SILK MILL



DESTRUCTIVE FIRE AT DAVENPORT'S SILK-MILL, DERBY.

On Wednesday evening (last week), at about a quarter past six o'clock in the evening, flames were seen to issue from the roof of the extensive silk manufactory of Mr. Joseph Davenport, in Albert-street, near the cornmarket, Derby. The alarm was given to the inmates of the mill, who were proceeding with their work, unconscious of the progress of the fire. The persons upon the spot commenced removing the silk from the storey above which the fire was raging, and which soon spread along the whole roof of the mill. A considerable time expired before any water was procured to play upon the flames - the extreme height of the building (six stories), and the delay in getting the hose ready, allowing time for the flames to make such rapid progress, that all chance of saving the top storey was gone before the water was brought effectually into play on the building. It appears that all the floors in the mill are fire-proof; being made of brick, and arched over; knowledge of which caused a number of daring men to ascend to the top storey of the mill, for the purpose of saving the silk, and also for conducting the water to those parts where the fire had gained the greatest heat; when about seven o'clock the roof fell in, and the weight of it falling on the first ceiling, caused it to fall into the top room, burying under it the persons who were so praiseworthy exerting themselves. The attention of the crowd was now directed to trying to rescue the sufferers, if they were alive; for this purpose ladders were joined together, but owing to the extreme height of the mill, a long time ensued before they could be raised to the top storey. In the meantime a poor fellow was seen at one of the top windows in the midst of the flames. He got one of his legs out of the window and then the other; he next forced his body through, and at last hung suspended from the window-sill by his hands. A shriek from the crowd announced that he had thrown himself down; and he came to the bottom, a distance of seventy feet, with tremendous force. His fall was broken by a bale of cotton that lay in the yard, from which he rebounded on his back to the stones beneath. He was immediately conveyed to the Infirmary, where he was attended by Mr. H. F. Gisborne. His name is Joseph Mead, twenty-two years of age. He was burnt all over his back, and dreadfully injured.

Amongst those who were in the top storey at the time the roof fell in was Mr. Thorpe, of the firm of Eyre and Thorpe, silk-throwsters, Full-street. He escaped by tying a handkerchief round his mouth to prevent suffocation; making his way to the window at the Tennant-street end, where a ladder being raised, he broke through the window, and came down without the assistance of any one, amidst the cheers of those below. Another young man was in the room; but, not daring to jump down, he walked through the room in the midst of the flames, and was taken down stairs; but was frightfully burnt.

The fire was subdued between eight and nine o'clock, without penetrating any of the lower stories; but a great quantity of silk and machinery was damaged by the body of water that was sent on to the building. Mr. Davenport's stock in the top room was insured for £500. The mill, which was erected in the year 1790, is the property of Messrs. Strutt, Belper. It is not insured. The damage to the stock and building is estimated at £2000.

The origin of the fire is not clearly known; but it is supposed that, the mill chimney being on fire, and the top window being open, a spark got into the building and ignited the cotton.

The exertions of the inhabitants were most praiseworthy; and till nine o'clock Captain Jones arrived with a body of enrolled pensioners, and kept the space round the mill. The only regret was that they had so bad a supply of water, and that it was ill conveyed to the building.

*London Illustrated News*, 23 June, 1853

## NOTES

1. The mill was built by William Strutt in 1792-3, not 1790 as stated above. The mill was demolished in the 1860s. (R,J,M, Sutherland, ed, *Structural Iron 1750-1850*. 1988, Chap 2 includes a plan, Google Books)
2. There was also a long report in the *Derby Mercury* about this fire on 20 July 1853. Whilst the information about the fire was basically the same, it contained some interesting information about the building,

*The Mill is situated between Albert Street and the New Market. The fire broke out in the Cockpit in the roof near the West End.*

*The mill is one of the earliest built, with arched floors and paved with bricks, it is six stories high with a room in the roof. The rooms are 113ft. by 28ft. on the inside, and on the south side there is a kind of transept 27ft. by 23ft, as high as the main building. The fire originated in the wooden roof, the whole of which has been destroyed. This roof was constructed of nine Queen trusses, and had a bell-tower at the west end. The work must have been well done, for the arches of the roof did not fall till the upper parts of the trusses were burnt away. This mill differs in the construction of its floors from modern fireproof buildings, the arches being formed of pot cylinders, about 7 inches long and 3 inches in diameter, forming an arch of great strength, and of comparatively little weight. The girders instead of cast iron are of Baltic fir, cased with iron.*

*Little or no damage has been done to the walls of the building beyond those parts connected with the roof, and the roof may, we understand be replaced at a cost of £780 to £800. ... Mr Davenport was insured in the Imperial Fire Office, agent, Mr Fuller, Derby.*

The reporter also commented that there had been problems with the water supply because the hose was too short to reach the large main in the Market Place so the smaller one in Albert Street had to be used. The flow of water had also been affected by people standing on the leather pipe. He thought that 'owners of lofty and extensive buildings should protect themselves with private hydrants and fire pipes.' and made some suggestions for a possible system.

3. Joseph Lancelot Davenport (1808-1866) was a silk manufacturer. The 1861 Census records that he lived at Wilderslowe, 3 Osmaston Road, Derby (later the School of Nursing at the Derbyshire Royal Infirmary) with his wife, Mildred, 9 children aged between 15 and 1 years, and 6 servants. 2 visitors and a niece were also staying there. (for Wilderslowe see <https://www.derbycivicsociety.co.uk/doc/summer-newletter-2016.pdf>; M. Craven, 'Great Taste and Much Experience in Building: Richard Leaper Amateur Architect', *Georgian Group Journal* XVIII, 2010., pp152-178, esp. pp166-167.)

Joseph Davenport exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851. The Official Catalogue lists his exhibits as Silk-throwing machinery, for the conversion of raw silk into threads, made at Derby, by Mr. William Abell. Engine for winding and cleaning.

Mill for spinning or twisting one or more threads.

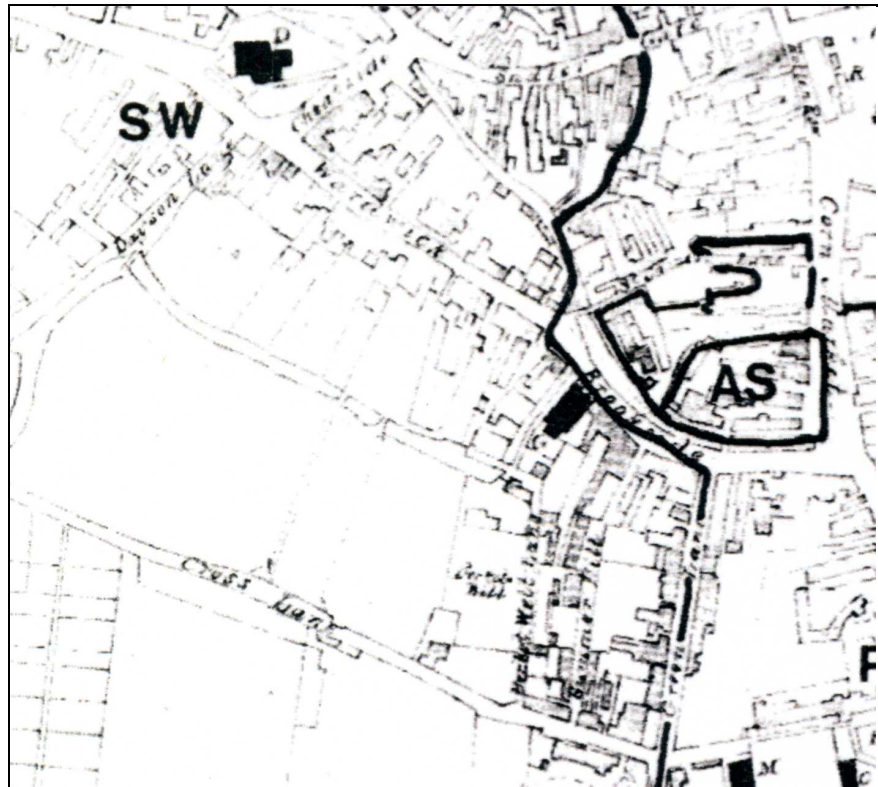
Frame for doubling or uniting on one bobbin two or more threads, either before or after the process of spinning.

Machine for reeling the thrown thread into skeins.

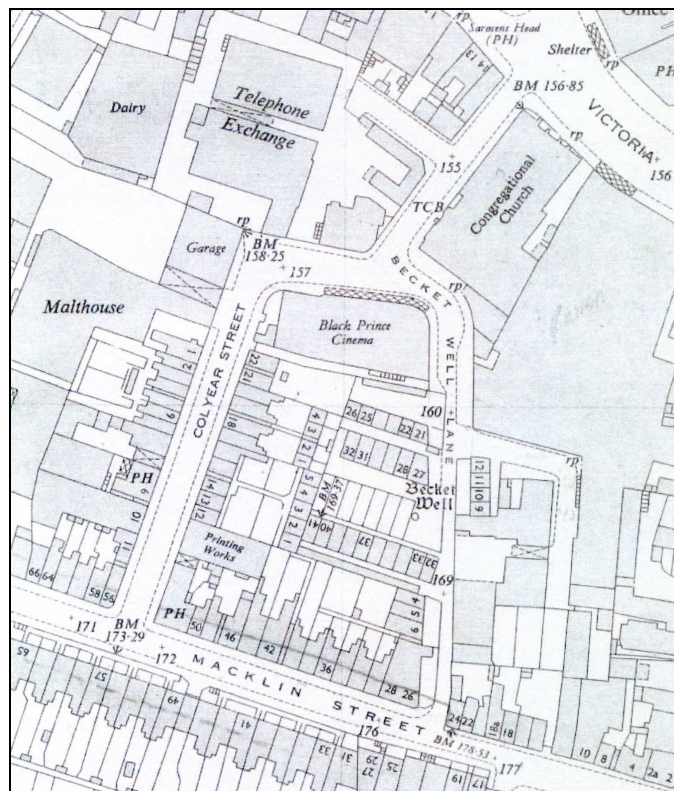
"Dramming" apparatus, for ascertaining the relative thickness of the silken threads.

[https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/1851\\_Great\\_Exhibition:\\_Official\\_Catalogue:\\_Class\\_VI.:\\_Joseph\\_L.\\_Davenport](https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/1851_Great_Exhibition:_Official_Catalogue:_Class_VI.:_Joseph_L._Davenport)





Map 1. Site of Becket Well in c1820-1830 (shown in open ground to the west of Becket Well Lane) (Derby Local Studies Library. Map shows parish boundaries. SW: St Werburgh, AS: All Saints.)



Map 2. Site of Becket Well in 1951 (OS map, Derby Local Studies Library).

## THE 12TH CENTURY FOUNDATION OF BECKET WELL, DERBY

(by Joan D'Arcy, Stone House Prebend, Old Chester Road, Derby, DE1 3SA)

Becket Well was once a notable local landmark in the City of Derby, readily recognisable by its quaint stone conical cap. It stood within an area of rising ground to the south of the City's ancient core and separated from it by a wide tributary of the River Derwent known as the Markeaton Brook, now culverted under Victoria Street. This area was known from the 13th century until modern times as the Newlands.

The well survived above ground until the 1960s when it was effectively destroyed as part of a scheme to create a modern shopping precinct called Duckworth Square. The conical cap was removed in 1961, the whole site levelled, covered with concrete and the land around the well built on. The site can now only be identified from maps; it is marked in open ground on the c1820-30 map showing the parish boundaries in Derby (Map 1) and on the 1951 OS map (Map 2).



Fig. 1, Becket Well. Terraced houses can be seen in the background.  
(W.A. Richardson, *Citizen's Derby*, 1949, facing p48)

What remains below ground, which is an unknown quantity, lies underneath the concrete on the eastern boundary of the precinct which was razed to the ground in 2004. The well was destroyed even though awarded a grade II listing. The HERS entry reads as follows:

*19. Becket Well (site of) Becket Well Lane. (MDR4517).*

*Probably 13th century well, with covering built 1652. This well has a conical covering built in 1652. The lower masonry is probably 13th century. It had been demolished and built over by 1966. In Derby before the end of the 17th century everyone relied on wells, private and public, like Becket Well — Becket from the Norman French bouget, meaning bucket, not from the famous archbishop. Sorocold also improved Becket Well, reached from below an earlier 17th century stone pyramid.*

The listing description above which is taken in part from an article by George Bailey entitled 'Becket's Well, Derby' published in the *Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Journal* in 1890, is not altogether accurate.<sup>1</sup> It describes an investigation carried out in 1889 by Bailey, John Keys, John Ward and other eminent scholars of that time, all members of the Derbyshire Archaeological Society. Under Keys' supervision the well was cleaned out and the area around it excavated by Derby Corporation workmen. Bailey then made a measured plan drawing (Fig. 2) and two sketches to show its construction and stonework (Figs. 3 and 4) These were accompanied by a detailed description with measurements.

The plan and drawings together show that the structure was an engineered 'reservoir' or chamber well into which the water flowed by gravitation from rising ground to the west, an area known as Abbey Barns. The water would



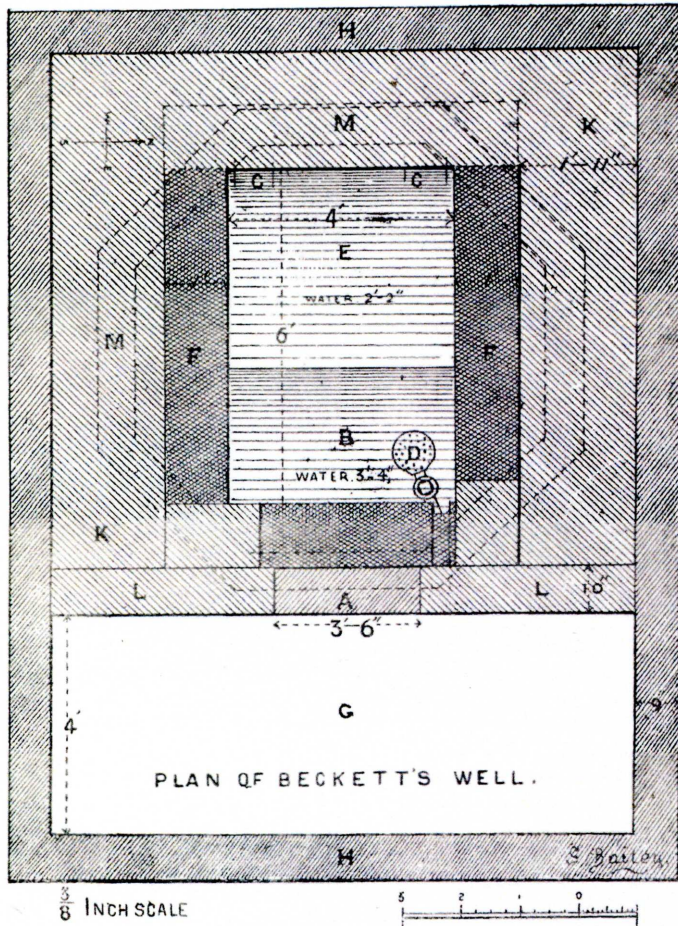


Fig 2 : Measured plan of Becket Well by George Bailey, drawn in 1889. He marks a small open court in front of the well [G] and the remains of a modern brick surrounding wall [H]

Fig 3: Drawing of well basin by George Bailey to show variation in stonework and different building styles.

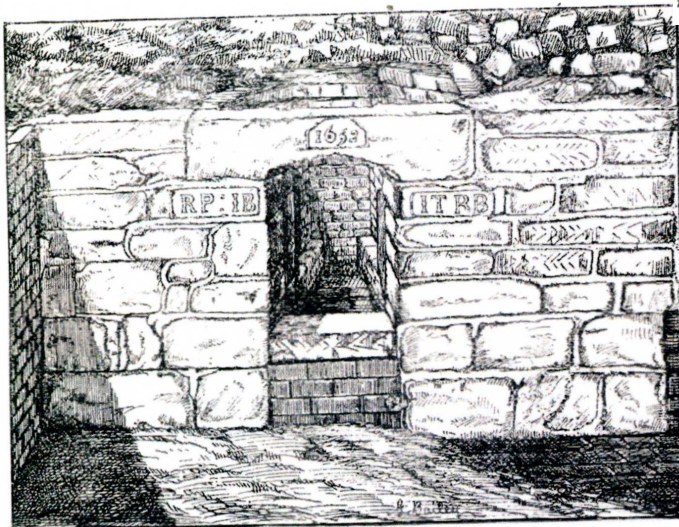
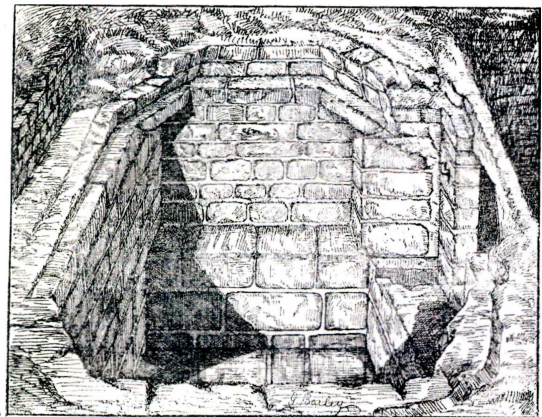


Fig 4 : Drawing of the well to show the upper restoration work, with date and initials.

have been carried in conduits, most likely wooden pipes, running underground and conveyed to the chamber where it was collected for distribution. Bailey's plan shows two water inlets, marked C, but observed that over time one had been blocked off. There was a single outlet on the north east corner, marked O and shown as a chute. The excavators found that the chamber was on two levels. In the upper chamber the depth from the top of the upper wall to a seat or ledge was 4ft, and from the ledge to the floor and the inlet another 4ft 8ins. From here to the lower chamber and the outlet was another 5ft 10ins, giving an estimated total depth of 14ft 6ins. At the deep end there was still 3ft 4ins of water. The entrance being so far below ground suggested that it was originally approached by a flight of steps. The depth of the well gives the author hope that some part still survives below ground.<sup>2</sup>

Revd Charles Kerry also examined the well and concluded from the tool markings on the stonework at its base that it had been constructed before 1250. The upper part of the well however gave clear evidence that it had been reconstructed or repaired in the mid 17th century, soon after the end of the English Civil War as it carried a date stone for 1652. (see Fig. 4) To either side of the date stone two sets of initials had been carved; RP IB and IT RB. The initials IB and RB almost certainly stand for John and Robert Brookhouse, members of a family of tanners who had held land at the well for generations.<sup>3</sup>

The listing description, which was revoked after its destruction, referred to Becket Well as a bucket well but it is demonstrably not the case. In his study of *The Place-names of Derbyshire*, Cameron states that the documented forms of the name, which occur only from the 16th century, are too late for any etymology to be useful.<sup>4</sup> In spite of this it has been suggested in several places that Becket is a corruption of the French word *'bouget'*, meaning a leather bottle, depicted in heraldry as a yoke with two leather bottles. It is quite likely that leather bottles were used to collect water but it is not a satisfactory interpretation and does not explain why it was regarded for centuries as a holy well. William Woolley, in his *History of Derbyshire*, written c1712, describes it as such:

*Passing on over a little brook (that now joins the great one), over a bridge at Becket Lane End, which hath its name from a curious well or fountain, formerly esteemed a holy well (dedicated to Sir Thomas Becket), that comes out of the Newland ...*<sup>5</sup>

The little brook to which Woolley refers, and which today is culverted under Bramble Street, is the Bramble Brook which flows eastward from Curzon Street through the Newlands into the Markeaton Brook where it was once crossed by a footbridge.

Writing in 1890, George Bailey was certain that they had uncovered a holy, or curative, well. He referred this to the Journal editor, Revd J. Charles Cox who entirely concurred, writing:

*The ingenious theory that Becket Well was only Bucket Well must of course be instantly dismissed in face of the evidence quoted by Mr. Bailey from sixteenth century documents; to say nothing of the fact that this water was emphatically not a bucket well, but a mere turncock reservoir.*<sup>6</sup>

Bailey's documentary evidence came from All Saints parish records which included rentals of land held by the parish. In 1510 an entry referred to a garden close to the well: *'John Ward holdeth a gardyn at begette Welle, and payeth yerely xiiid'*. A later entry for 1577 again records the garden *'beinge nyghe beckett well adjoininge to a lyle brooke one on the south and est parte and the land of Thomas Brookhouse of the west parte and the land of Charles Ward of the north part.'*<sup>7</sup>

Evidence that the well was indeed dedicated to St Thomas Becket is compelling once the idea of a bucket well is put to one side.<sup>8</sup> The function of a medieval holy well was to provide a cure, either through drinking or bathing in the *'blessed'* water. To facilitate bathing, a bench was provided and an undressing area. A stone canopy was often raised over the well for protection and in many cases a small chapel was attached or adjacent. There were once many such wells across the length and breadth of Britain, attracting the sick and handicapped and pilgrims.

Wells dedicated to St Thomas a Becket have their origins in the Archbishop's murder in Canterbury Cathedral on 29 December 1170. As rumours of miracles around his body circulated, he was canonised on 21 February 1173 and became a cult figure, everywhere hailed as a martyr, and from his death until the fifteenth century when the cult began to wane, he was the most venerated saint in Britain. Shrines, crosses and wells appeared in towns across the land even though these places had otherwise no association with him. Small metal phials of water holding a tincture of his blood were widely circulated and were deemed to have curative powers.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1170s many letters reporting miracles connected to St Thomas were sent to the monks of Canterbury. A corpus of 703 letters, *Materials for the History of St Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, was compiled and amongst them is letter 551 from Abbot Albinus of the Augustinian foundation of Darley Abbey, near Derby. In his letter, addressed to Odo, prior of Christ Church Canterbury, he reported a miraculous transformation into blood of '*some water of the Blessed martyr Thomas*' contained in a phial which had been brought by an unnamed knight from Canterbury to Stafford.<sup>10</sup> Albinus, or Albin, the founding father of Darley Abbey, is known through documents he witnessed from 1151-1176 but the date of his death is not established.<sup>11</sup> He was noted for his great piety as described in the Cartulary of Dale Abbey, a small Premonstratensian Abbey four miles east of Derby:

*About this time flourished Albinus, first Abbot of Darley, shining forth with so great a token of a holy and honest conversation, that the interior of the cloister and the corner of the church may be perceived to this day to be redolent with the fragrance of the religion of such a father.*<sup>12</sup>

We know of one Becket relic that found its way to Derby. In c1160 the small Nunnery of Kingsmead had been founded in Derby by Abbot Albinus and placed under his care and protection by Walter Durdent, Bishop of Coventry. In 1536 the Nunnery was dissolved after a Visitation by royal commissioners Thomas Legh and Thomas Layton. They could find no fault in the nuns' behaviour but recorded one superstitious article. This was a piece of the shirt worn by St Thomas which was regarded as an object of veneration by pregnant women.<sup>13</sup>

On 12 July 1174, Henry II did penance for his role in the murder amid a furore of anger within the Christian world, no more so perhaps than within monastic communities. In the same year Durdent's successor as Bishop of Coventry, Richard Peche (c1160-1180), founded an Augustinian Priory dedicated to St Thomas the Martyr (as Becket became known), close to Stafford. Abbot Albinus was closely involved as its first canons came from Darley Abbey.<sup>14</sup> Was the precious phial of holy water presented to the Priory on its foundation? Bishop Peche eventually retired to St Thomas's and was buried there.

We also find Albinus actively participating in the founding of the Premonstratensian Abbey of Beauchief, a daughter house of Welbeck, sometime between 1173 and 1176. This north Derbyshire Abbey was jointly dedicated to St Mary and St Thomas the Martyr and Albinus headed the list of witnesses to the foundation charter.<sup>15</sup>

There is also slight evidence that a chapel dedicated to St Thomas Becket was once attached to the Well. Both Stephen Glover and Robert Simpson refer to such a chapel. In his *History of Derby*, published in 1826, Simpson placed it '*near to the spot on which the Independent chapel now stands*'; a site now occupied by a United Reform chapel on Victoria Street, close to the junction of the Bramble Brook and the Markeaton Brook<sup>16</sup> Simpson added that '*the last remains of the chapel were pulled down a few years back*'. Rev J. C. Cox, as editor of Bailey's article of 1890, added a comment that he had searched extensively and fruitlessly for documentary evidence of the chapel's existence but the same was true of St. Anne's well and chapel in Buxton which certainly exists but has left no known records, possibly because it had no endowment of lands.<sup>17</sup>

In the context of Abbot Albinus and Darley Abbey, the siting of the well within the Newlands is significant. The Newlands was a large acreage of open land lying to the west of St Peter's church and to the south of the Markeaton Brook, extending from present day Green Lane to the boundary of Littleover. In the late 1170s, this land with its meadow, arable and pasture, was gifted to Darley Abbey by Peter de Sandiacre in return for everlasting prayers for his soul and those of his family.<sup>17</sup> He made this gift on his retirement into monastic life, presumably at Darley, to end his days there. It remained in the Abbey's possession until its Dissolution in 1538. The canons developed the area, creating tofts or houses with garden plots, many with appurtenances and some with edifices, to form a new suburb.<sup>18</sup>

The Newlands had been granted to Darley Abbey sometime before 1179 so a date between the St Thomas's canonisation in 1173 and the death of Albinus sometime after 1176 is suggested for the construction of the well. Monastic houses were noted for their knowledge of water management and had the necessary skill to engineer the flow of water to the basin. Moreover, given that the well was constructed on their land and conduited across their fields it seems most likely that the Abbey was responsible for bringing water through the Newlands to Becket Well. The source of the water at the Abbey Barns, a grange attached to Darley Abbey, later became, briefly in 1733, the site of a Spa built by Dr William Chauncey. After his death in 1736 it became a private residence before being established as an inn in 1832. It is now known as the Old Spa Inn on Abbey Street.<sup>19</sup>

Cox also suggested that Becket Well lay on a pilgrimage route and instanced a lost well in Normanton Road, which he called the Pilgrim's well. John Keys went even further and described it in fanciful prose in his entertaining *Sketches of Old Derby*.<sup>20</sup> That it was on the Pilgrimage route from York to Canterbury is certainly feasible; the thoroughfare Becket Well Lane, shown on John Speed's map of Derby of 1611, diverts from the London Road to lead directly to the Well and then on to a bridging point of the Markeaton Brook. A few steps further would take a pilgrim past a small Cluniac hospital dedicated to St James the Great and then back onto the London Road, travelling north. The route north would pass by St Alkmund's church and the shrine of Saxon St Alkmund with its associated well and thence to Darley Abbey. An alternative route east could be taken by turning right at St. Alkmund's to cross the River Derwent at St Mary's Bridge.

After the Reformation the well must have been damaged or fallen into disuse as restoration work was discovered in 1889 which carried a date 1652. At some time, perhaps as part of this restoration, the quaint conical slate cap with air vents was placed over it. Again, at some time the well passed into the hands of the Borough and became an essential part of Derby's water supply, feeding water to a conduit and pump in the Market Place. Although George Sorocold has been suggested as the engineer, this perhaps preceded Sorocold's system of 1698 which was based upon pumping water from the River Derwent. In 1889 an old turn cock and handle were found, presumably part of the system, allowing the flow of water to be turned on or off as desired. These were handed to Derby Museum.

Over time, other changes were made, both to its appearance and its setting. The steps which had once led to the lower chamber were removed. The quaint conical slate cap with air vents was placed over it. In the early nineteenth century it was flanked by two rows of terraced houses but given a small discrete enclosed space. A wall was built around it to support what was described as a 'covered shed'. The shed had been removed by 1889 but part of the wall remained. In other words it had been badly treated. In 1889 there was a proposal to improve the entrance and surround it with a new brick wall and palisade but this was met with criticism.<sup>21</sup>

By the 1960s the well had long become redundant as a part of a town water supply and stood in an area deemed suitable for development. It gained a little protection from having been listed but had its venerable history denied by being described as a 'bucket' well. There seems to have been little endeavour to save it. Only the developer on site took an interest and carried the conical cap to a house in Poyser Lane, Kirk Langley where it became, and still is, a garden feature.

In conclusion, nothing can be absolutely proved about the origins of Becket Well but it is the author's premise that it took its name from St Thomas Becket and was constructed soon after Becket's death by Abbot Albinus and monks of Darley Abbey. It was regarded for centuries as a holy well with curative powers, a belief lingering on in local usage; an article in a local newspaper written in 1889 stated that the well water was still resorted to for 'bad eyes', a particular cure linked to St Thomas.<sup>22</sup>

### Postscript

This article had its origins in an objection to a planning application in 2019 for the redevelopment of Duckworth Square. Unfortunately it was not possible at that time to persuade Derby City Council and the would be developer to carry out an excavation in advance of planning consent to ascertain whether the well still existed below ground. A site visit was undertaken on 18 September 2019 and it was estimated that during ground levelling only c2 metres depth of earth were removed at the point where the well lies, so the greater part of the well may still survive.

### References

1. George Bailey, 'Becket's Well, Derby', *The Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Journal* (DANHJ), Vol 12, 1890, pp43-53.
2. *Ibid*, DANHJ, Vol 12, pp48-50.
3. D. G. Edwards, ed., *Derbyshire Hearth Tax Assessments 1662-1670*, Derbyshire Record Society, 1982, p90 under St Werburgh's parish; Thomas, Widow, Francis and John Brookhouse are all named. Brookhouses can be found in Derby as tanners and sometimes bailiffs from the 16th century.
4. K. Cameron, *Place Names of Derbyshire*, Vol 2, 1959, p447.
5. C. Glover and P. Riden eds, *William Woolley's History of Derbyshire*, Derbyshire Record Society, 1981, p33.
6. DANHJ, Vol 12, p53.
7. DANHJ, Vol 12, p50-51.



8. The name `Becket' used without the epithet of Saint worries some historians but it is not so unusual. A well on the north side of Derby dedicated to St Alkmund, a Saxon saint, is sometimes colloquially referred to as `Alkmund's' well#. Further afield, in Olford near Sevenoaks in Kent a well dedicated to St Thomas Becket is sometimes shortened to Becket Well.
9. R.C. Finucane, *Miracles & Pilgrims*, 1977, p160.
10. E.A. Abbott, *The Life of St Thomas. His death and Miracles*, Vol 2, 1898, no 551, pp189-190; also recorded by R.R. Darlington, *Darley Abbey Cartulary*, Vol 1, pii.
11. D. Knowles ed, *The Heads of Religious Houses: England & Wales 940-1216*, 1972, pp161-2.
12. W. St John Hope, `Chronicle of the Abbey of St Mary de Parco Stanley, or Dale, Derbyshire', *DANHJ* Vol 5, 1883, pp22-23.
13. W. Page, ed., *Victoria County History, Derbyshire*, Vol 2, pp43-44.
14. *Victoria County History, Staffordshire*, Vol 3, pt17, p260.
15. D. Hay et al, eds, *A Monastic Community in Local Society: The BeauchiefAbbey Cartulary*, 2013, intro, p3; p46. Apart from one other dedication of a religious house in Kent, these two abbeys are the only ones in England dedicated to St Thomas Becket.
16. R. Simpson, *History of Derby* 1826, p308; C.A. Graeme Webster trans., *The Glover NoteBooks*, 2017, p259.
17. *DANHJ*, Vol 12, p52.
18. R.R. Darlington ed, *Darley Abbey Cartulary*, Vol 1, 1945, Al, p66; J. Steer, 'The Medieval Holdings of Burton Abbey in Derby', Part 1, *Derbyshire Miscellany*, Vol. 11, Part 6, 1988.
19. Discover Derby. <http://www.derbyshire-peakdistrict.co.uk/derbypubsspa.htm>
20. *DANHJ*, Vol 12, p53; J. Keys, *Sketches of Old Derby*, 1892, pp90-91.
21. *DANHJ*, Vol 12, p49-50.
22. `A Peep at Old Derby', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 28 August 1889.

### DALE ABBEY IRON-WORKS in the County of Derby

To be Sold at Auction at the Hen and Chicken Inn and Hotel, in New-street, Birmingham, on Monday the 16th day of May next, precisely at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

**ALL** those capital and extensive Works and the Premises known by the name of **DALE ABBEY IRON-WORKS**, comprising upwards of 107 Acres of rich Arable, Meadow and Pasture Land, with a handsome newly erected Dwelling: a most delightful Eminence, excellent Pleasure and Kitchen Gardens, Orchard, Coach-house, 2 Stables and other conveniences, the whole held under a Lease in which 19 years were unexpired at Michaelmas last, subject to an annual Rent of £90. 11s. 6d, and a Land Tax of £8. 6s. 0d.

The Works consist of 2 Blast Furnaces, (one of them erected about 2 years ago,) 3 Casting Houses with spacious Foundry annexed, an Engine-House, Bridge-Houses, Smith's and Carpenter's Shops, Clerk's House, several adjoining Tenements for Workmen and other suitable Apartments, together with an adjoining Pool which affords an incessant supply of Water for the use of the Fire Engine even in the driest season. Also conveniently detached is an Accompting House, with another range of Workmen's Tenements, a large and convenient stable with Workmen's Houses attached, and other accommodations.

The Works have been established for several years, and are now in full employ; the Royalty for getting Ironstone and Coal extends over about 3000 acres, and is held upon Terms highly beneficial, viz. at the rate of 8s per Ton on the Iron made, or £22. 10s per Month for each Furnace while in blast at the option of the Landlord; with power to use Coal upon any part of the Estate without charge, and to sell Coal on payment of a royalty of 6d per Ton.

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The Purchaser of the Lease to pay an immediate deposit of Twenty Pounds per cent, in part of purchase, and also to take all the Machinery, Utensils, and Implements, (Inheritable Fixtures excepted,) together with the Stock of all kinds on hand, by valuation, for payment of which, and of the residue of the Purchase Money, a liberal time will be allowed on approved Security.

*Derby Mercury*, 31 March 1803