

## Introduction

The trade which supplies fullers' teazles for raising the nap on woollen cloths, knitwear and certain other fabrics during the finishing stages of production, is one of the oldest auxiliaries of the woollen industry in the West Riding of Yorkshire, with a history which fairly certainly goes back well into the medieval period. Its greatest importance, however, has been in the period starting in the eighteenth century, when as a result of changes in the woollen trade, the consumption of teazles in the West Riding underwent an immense expansion. From having been a comparatively minor consumer of teazles around the start of the century, Yorkshire had become perhaps, by the peak of demand around 1840, the chief consuming market for teazles in the country, with a vast production of cloths of many kinds, including some of the finest, dressed to some extent or other with teazles. The supply trade itself was made up of many dozens of growers and dealers bringing teazles from most of the major English growing districts, including a new one established in Yorkshire itself in the eighteenth century. It was during this period also that the West Riding made its significant contribution to the technology of teazle raising, in the form of the adaptation known as the Yorkshire gig, which became the standard type of stem teazle raising machine used in the woollen industry. During the long decline which set in through the second half of the nineteenth century, Yorkshire emerged as the chief surviving consuming district in the United Kingdom, and by 1914 had acquired commercial control of much of the national business in teazles, including what was then left of the English growing trade.

During the rest of the twentieth century up to the 1960s, Yorkshire itself continued to be the place where the main demand was located, and it remained the principal commercial centre of the trade in the country. As a result of this, at the end of the twentieth century, it was in the Huddersfield district that the last firm of traditional teazle merchants was to be found, still doing a tiny residual business in English and foreign teazles with a handful of customers at home and abroad, and in 2011, the last firm in the country known to be handling teazles is in the West Riding.

Since the time of its expansion in the eighteenth century, the West Riding teazle commerce has undergone changes not only in its size and relative importance, but also in its structure, organisation, methods, and pattern of supply and demand. The aim of the present account is to trace the development of these changes and to record something of the crafts and skills upon which the trade depended.