

## 6: Leeds teazle dealers, agents and merchants to the 1880s

### (a) To 1840

From at least the start of the nineteenth century, alongside the busy but intermittent activity at the inns carried out by the visiting growers and dealers, there was also a local trade made up of teazles dealers and other suppliers in Leeds itself. Overshadowed as it was by the market at the inns, this local commerce developed only slowly, but it nevertheless established a role of its own, and during the 1820s and 1830s, like the primary supply trade in the hands of the visiting dealers, underwent adaptations in response to the changes in the pattern of demand in the Leeds woollen industry. At the time in the 1860s when William Bean sold his old and unsold stocks to Samuel Lambert, and James Bortoft of South Milford opened a store in Leeds as a merchant there, the numbers engaged in it were still modest. However, after further changes from the late 1860s to the 1880s, it was from this section of the commerce that there emerged the small group of merchants who between them were to dominate the Leeds market and much of the West Riding business, the remaining English growing trade and the largest part of the business in teazles in the country as a whole, including imports and exports, into the twentieth century.

Much of what is known about the evolution of this locally-based trade in Leeds comes from the directories, and these, despite their deficiencies as a source, provide the basis for a continuous outline. The earliest reference to a teazle dealer in Leeds in any of the directories occurred in 1800, when a single name was noted, with one recorded again in 1807.<sup>1</sup> None were recorded in the Leeds directory of 1809,<sup>2</sup> or in any others until 1817,<sup>3</sup> when there were two dealers, with two again in 1822,<sup>4</sup> but only one in each of the years 1826 and 1830.<sup>5</sup> It was not until 1834 that there are known to have been as many as three at the same time,<sup>6</sup> with three again in 1839.<sup>7</sup> Altogether, the names of no more than ten individuals engaged in this commerce in Leeds are known during this forty years of rising consumption. Most were noted in one year only. The exceptions, with their dates in the directories, were Samuel Coates, 1800-07, Benjamin Baker and William Rayner, both 1817-22, and George Booth, 1834-47.

It seems fairly certain that these local dealers, like others in the trade in Leeds then and later, were essentially commercial offshoots of the primary supply market at the Leeds inns, buying teazles from the Yorkshire or West of England growers and dealers who came to Leeds, and stocking them in storerooms or warehouses of their own for resale to industrial customers who needed them immediately, in-between the main annual rounds of business at the inns, or the otherwise occasional visits of the dealers and growers. The backgrounds of most of those who became dealers in Leeds are not known, but three at least had a connection either with the teazle market at the inns, or with the woollen trade, or with both. Thomas Beaufoy of Wade Lane, before becoming a teazle merchant, active around 1826, was a cloth worker in the 1820s, an occupation that would have brought him into direct contact with the teazle market at the inns, buying teazles from the visiting growers and dealers for his own use. William Goodall of Woodhouse Lane, who dealt in teazles around 1830, also dealt in woollen cloth. George Dunnell of New Wortley, Leeds, listed in 1834 as a dealer, was probably the George Dunwell who in 1830 was noted as the innkeeper of the Boot and Shoe on Wood Street between Briggate and Vicar Lane, one of the inns frequented by Yorkshire dealers and growers. However, such an association was not a prerequisite. George Booth, the only dealer who would appear to have made a long-term success of the trade, was originally a farmer in the village of Hunslet, a mile and a half or so to the south-east of Leeds on a bend of the Aire, in what was then still a largely rural district. In the second half of the 1830s, he combined dealing in teazles with farming, taking on an additional business as a coal merchant in the early

1840s.

The locations of some of these dealers suggest that several, and in fact, perhaps most, were handling Yorkshire teazles, which by the early nineteenth century seem to have made up the larger part of the supplies, compared with West of England teazles, and which were being sold by dozens of growers and dealers from the Yorkshire growing places in the inns of the older centre. One who may have been handling Yorkshire teazles could have been the first known dealer in Leeds, Samuel Coates, at the time around 1800, when he was based on Lands Lane, then a narrow alleyway behind the top end of Briggate, an area where, in the 1830s, there were several inns which Yorkshire growers and dealers frequented. These included the Ship, the Angel and the Talbot in their yards between Briggate and Lands Lane, the Horse and Trumpet on the Headrow, and the Black Bull, probably the inn of that name on Lands Lane itself, with others on the far side of Briggate. However, by 1807, Coates had moved to Simpson's Fold, where warehouses had been put up in the 1770s at the edge of the riverside on the south bank of the Aire at the navigation terminus, a move which suggests that unusually amongst these early dealers, as far as can be deduced, Coates was specialising in West of England teazles arriving in Leeds by water.

Some of the other dealers of this time were also near enough to the older commercial district where the Yorkshire growers could be encountered at the inns. William Rayner, on Park Lane, around 1817-22, was perhaps a little way out, but Thomas Beaufoy, dealing in teazles on Wade Lane in 1826, and William Goodall on Woodhouse Lane, noted in 1830, were just to the north of the centre. Two others, Benjamin Baker on High Street about 1817-22, and James Smallwood at East Street, listed in 1839, were located on the east side of the town centre where the roads came into Leeds from the Barkston Ash growing villages. Two other dealers were more certain to have been buying and selling Yorkshire teazles, from their locations on the outskirts of Leeds towards the east. These were Richard Pearson of Halton, three miles or so out on the Selby road, and in 1839, Joseph Baker of Stanks, a similar distance out in the direction of Barwick in Elmet. George Dunnell of New Wortley, noted in 1834, assuming that he was the former landlord of the Boot and Shoe on Wood Street, was also probably handling teazles bought through his connections with the growers and dealers.

Another local dealer who may also have been handling Yorkshire teazles was George Booth of Hunslet, lying not to the east of Leeds, but to the south-east, and who was the only person known to have remained in the trade for any length of time, thirteen years or more. Although, at Hunslet, Booth could possibly have been in a position to acquire supplies of West of England teazles arriving in Leeds by water, in 1834, when his name first appeared in the directories, as will be seen, the West of England dealers already had a representative in Leeds. What is more likely is that Booth's trading in teazles was based on supplies from the extensive growing area in Yorkshire south of the Aire, towards and beyond Pontefract, at Purston Jaglin, Darrington, and Snaith, and further south still, at Hemsworth, Kirk Smeaton, Fishlake and Thorne. In 1830, there were no less than six dealers from Darrington in attendance at the inns in Leeds, and one from Purston Jaglin. It is likely that some at least of the production from this growing district came into Leeds from the south-east, through Hunslet itself, and along Hunslet Lane, and that Booth was able to take advantage of this, presumably as a farmer having storage space in the form of a barn or sheds, and wagons or carts of his own for deliveries. It may have been that in the same way, he also became a coal merchant in the 1840s, perhaps drawing on supplies mined in the collieries to the south of Leeds. What may be relevant is that compared with 1830, when seven dealers came from Darrington and Purston Jaglin to the Leeds inns, in 1834, by which time George Booth had become a teazle dealer, there was only one, from Purston Jaglin, and in 1839 there were none from the whole area.

The fleeting nature of the appearances of many of these Leeds dealers in the directories in the early decades of the nineteenth century suggests that dealing in teazles was often

an opportunistic activity, sometimes carried on alongside other interests, perhaps seen as no more than a sideline. The ease of buying Yorkshire teazles may have helped to bring this about, providing opportunities to speculate in an essential commodity, whilst at the same time, the visiting growers and dealers themselves still acted as a powerful competition against local traders. However, the evidence of the 1830s suggests that there was a particular change that was experienced in parts of the local trade in teazles in Leeds. This took the form of a geographical shift in location, not just to the edges of the town centre, but right out of Leeds altogether, as has already been mentioned in passing. The three dealers newly listed in the directory of 1834 were all situated in outlying districts, George Booth at Hunslet, George Dunnell at New Wortley, and Richard Pearson at Halton, whilst in 1839, Joseph Baker was based at Stanks.

It is likely that the cause of this was the change in the pattern of demand in the Leeds woollen industry already noted in connection with the teazle market at the inns. Increasingly, the centre of Leeds was being engulfed by the construction of mills, so that there was less and less reason why teazles had to be moved on wagons into the town centre, with its increasingly congested, narrow and obstructed streets and yards, to be warehoused. This was especially true in the case of dealers whose own stocks were being assembled from the various parts of the Yorkshire growing area beyond Leeds, and who were therefore better situated on the main roads coming into Leeds, along which they could then make their own deliveries to individual mills. For George Booth, this meant Hunslet Lane, and for Richard Pearson and Joseph Baker, York Road. From New Wortley, George Dunnell could make deliveries directly across Wellington bridge to the north side of the Aire, where Bean Ing, and other mills along the river were to be found.

This outward move was probably directly responsible for another feature of the Leeds commerce in the 1830s, which was that according to the directory lists of the 1830s, at least three of these four out-of-town dealers themselves attended at the inns in the older commercial district, along with the dealers and growers from the Yorkshire growing villages. In 1834, George Dunnell, or Denham, as he was called here, was at the Spotted Cow, the most popular of the inns in that year amongst the Yorkshire dealers, whilst Richard Pearson visited the London Tavern, and in 1839, Joseph Baker waited at the Black Swan, where in that year the largest single body of Yorkshire dealers could be seen. The reason for this was probably that although logistically there were advantages in having storage outside the town, the commercial centre of the business, where buyers and sellers met, and deals were struck, was still the town itself, and in particular the inns around Briggate and Vicar Lane. It was clearly essential, therefore, for the out-of-town dealers also to put in an appearance in order to find customers. This indicates the continued vitality of the market at the inns, even at a time when its decline was under way, and also points to the adaptability of the small group of traders who aimed to provide an alternative to it.

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This handful of dealers engaged in the small, but slowly expanding and evolving local trade in Leeds up to about 1840, were not, however, the only members of the teazle commerce in the town during the whole of the period. In the 1820s and 1830s, alongside the names of the teazle dealers and merchants, the directories also gave details of a small number of individuals described as agents for teazles, sometimes designated by the term '(comss)'. In 1826, there were two of these commission agents doing business in Leeds, with two agents again in both 1830 and 1834, and then one only, up to 1837. Altogether, only four individuals were involved, the only one who was recorded more than once being George Pearson of North Street, 1826-37.

There is reason to believe that these agents were appointed by the dealers and growers from Yorkshire or the West of England to represent their interests in Leeds during the times when they themselves were unable to be there. Their appearance can be seen as

an attempt by the dealers and growers to bridge the gaps between the more or less distant growing places, and the consuming market amongst the woollen mills and cloth dressing shops of Leeds and the West Riding; and between the intermittent visits of the growers and dealers, and the continuous and still rising level of demand from the woollen industry for the enormous requirements of teasles of all the various kinds that were needed to keep the operations of the mills going throughout the year. The appointment of the agents gave both sides in the trade a structure and a mechanism that was absent from the more chancy pattern of business done through the inns. The emergence of the agents, like that of the dealers in Leeds, can probably be seen to some degree as a counterpart to the already noted rapid decline in regular attendances at the inns, during the part of its course that occurred through the 1830s, particularly on the part of the Yorkshire dealers, who being nearer, were better able to respond to the changing pattern of consumption. The role of the agents in all probability included the taking and transmitting to their clients of immediate orders at a time when large amounts could be required by individual mills at any time. However, it may have been that some of the agents had teasles deposited with them, or at the least, as in one case, perhaps had teasles under their charge.

The four agents, from the nature of the case, must all have had some kind of a fairly direct relationship with either Yorkshire or West of England growers and dealers coming to Leeds. George Pearson, one of the two commission agents of 1826, had previously been a cloth dresser, and was most likely from his location on North Street, above the top end of Vicar Lane, to have been a representative of Yorkshire dealers. Nothing specific can be inferred, though, about James Haigh, the other commission agent for teasles noted in 1826. His address, Vine Street, a little way down Hunslet Lane could have been convenient for business with West of England dealers at the Aire & Calder docks. However, William Sharp, who described himself in 1830 as a teazle and woad agent, from his address at Hayes Court, Vicar Lane, was probably involved in the business on behalf of Yorkshire dealers. Most certain of all, though, in this respect is the fourth agent, William Dawson, who was identified in 1834, for Dawson was none other than the innkeeper of the New Cross Inn on Meadow Lane, where in that same year, thirty-three Somerset and three Gloucestershire dealers, and one from Yorkshire, were in attendance. It may have been Dawson's role to transmit new orders to his clients in the West of England, and perhaps also to handle the disposal of any unsold stocks left in storage locally when the dealers had returned to Somerset and Gloucestershire.<sup>8</sup>

After 1834, there were no more references in the directories to agents in the immediately following period, and it is hard to say how successful their appointment was for the visiting dealers, especially those from the West of England, who were probably in the most need of representation in Leeds. As has been seen, only one of the four agents, George Pearson, was listed in the directories more than once, and he was sometimes described as a merchant as well as an agent. He himself, like William Dawson, in any case was not dependant on his role as an agent, as in the 1830s, he ran his premises on North Street as a lodging house.

### **(b) The first merchant firms**

The years 1839-42 saw the appearance of two new teazle dealers in Leeds, bringing the known total to three, the third being George Booth of Hunslet, whose thirteen years or more in the trade up to 1847 or so, perhaps indicate an increasing degree of stability. Of the two new dealers, though, one, within a relatively short time, had dropped out. This was Thomas Parfitt, the landlord of the Golden Fleece on High Street, to the east of Vicar Lane, who was probably handling Yorkshire teasles as a sideline, from his inn yard. By 1845, however, Parfitt had given up his business in teasles and reverted to his original occupation as licensed victualler of the Golden Fleece.

If Thomas Parfitt was another opportunist, speculative, short-term dealer of a kind already seen in Leeds, William Cornock of Park Lane, the other teazle dealer whose name

appeared for the first time in 1842, was a portend of the future. Although the term 'merchant' had been used before, and 'dealer' remained current for another decade and a half or so, William Cornock can be regarded as the first of the true teazle merchants who came to characterise the Leeds teazle market. Although several of these future merchants also at times had other lines of business, all were fundamentally teazle specialists. They remained in the trade over long periods, making it a lifetime's work. Many founded, or belonged to family firms, which in a number of cases went on to the next generation, and the generation after that. Several, perhaps all, had, to start with or at other times, connections with particular parts of the supply trade in English, and then also foreign, teazles, some of them coming out of the growing trade itself. One reason for the establishment of the merchant firms, apart from the rise in the numbers of mills needing teazles, in Leeds, and more widely, in the manufacturing districts, was the development from 1834 onwards of railway connections, in the form initially of a series of yards and stations around the east, south and south-west sides of Leeds, giving access to the growing districts, the towns of the clothing district, and the Yorkshire ports, through which foreign teazles were to come.

William Cornock was born in about 1802 at Dursley in Gloucestershire. He had moved to Leeds by 1822, when his son Thomas Bruce was born, though the circumstances of the move are not known. The fact that in the 1840s and 1850s, Cornock seems to have specialised in West of England teazles, makes it tempting to assume that he or his family had been engaged in growing or dealing in teazles in Gloucestershire, and moved to Leeds in the furtherance of their business. However, Dursley was not as far as is known, a teazle-growing locality. No Cornocks are named amongst the small number of Gloucestershire dealers whose attendances at the Leeds inns were noted in the 1830s. What seems more likely is that like some other dealers both before and after, William Cornock came into buying and selling teazles from his engagement in the woollen industry, for in 1839, he was a handle setter, and in 1841, described himself as a cloth dresser. As a result, although it was said in 1875 that the Cornock firm was established in 1799,<sup>9</sup> it is not known whether this was in Gloucestershire or in Leeds, who was responsible, or what its original purpose may have been.

Also working in Park Lane at the start of the 1840s was William Cornock's wife Eliza Cornock, who was a milliner and straw hat and bonnet maker, though after 1842, no more was heard of Eliza Cornock's hats.<sup>10</sup> It is pretty certain that, in addition, already at work alongside Cornock himself was his son, Thomas Bruce Cornock, who in 1842 was twenty, and whose support was probably a factor in enabling Cornock to move into the new business of buying and selling teazles. Thomas Bruce Cornock was clearly involved in that, because in or around 1847, the year of his marriage to Mary Burgess, at the age of about twenty-five, he went into business on his own as a teazle dealer on Lower Brunswick Street, off North Street. Whatever the reason for this departure, by 1851, he was back with his father, in partnership this time, as William Cornock & Son, the warehousing, having moved twice in the interval, then being at Wine Street, a narrow side street off Infirmary Street, where William and Eliza Cornock also lived.

In 1857, William Cornock having died or retired, Thomas Bruce Cornock was running the firm from Wine Street under his own name, moving again in 1861 to St Paul's Street. Thomas Bruce Cornock was in this period not only managing what was probably the principle firm of teazle merchants in Leeds, but was heavily engaged in public life. At the start of the 1870s, he was a town councillor for the North Ward, a captain in the 2<sup>nd</sup> West Yorkshire Engineer Volunteers, and a guardian of the Leeds Union.<sup>11</sup> In 1873, however, at the age of fifty-one, he died, and the fortunes of the business began to falter, his son, and eventual successor, Tom Arthur B. Cornock then still only being twelve or thirteen years old. In addition, there was at the time an extraordinary degree of competition in the Leeds-based commerce, especially in the import trade in French teazles that Thomas Bruce Cornock had made his own main line. For a time his widow, Louisa Maria, whom he had

married in 1859, following the death of Mary Cornock in 1858, and who was the mother of Tom, ran the firm under the name of Thomas Bruce Cornock & Co. In 1875, though, she married again, to Edward P. Watkins, and the company changed its name once more, to Watkins & Co.<sup>12</sup> It was still in business in early 1876, but there are indications that it may have ceased its activities around the summer of that year,<sup>13</sup> and it subsequently disappeared from the directory trade listings for a time. It came to light again in 1881 and 1882, as Thomas Bruce Cornock & Co. again, selling teazles and cotton, under the management of Tom Cornock. After 1882, there were no further references.

The self-confidence and vigour that enabled Thomas Bruce Cornock to go into competition with his father in his mid-twenties, and that took him into civic life in Leeds, were probably also responsible for a number of innovations that he seems to have introduced into his work as a teazle merchant. One of these was the promotion of the firm by means of a series of advertisements placed in the advertising sections of a number of directories relating to Leeds and the West Riding.<sup>14</sup> The first of these advertisements, of which he must have been the instigator, at the time he joined his father in partnership as W. Cornock & Son, appeared in a Leeds directory of 1851, and over the years, another six were placed in West Riding or clothing district directories, the last being put in, in 1875, by his successors, after his own death. These not only helped to publicise the firm more widely, but the details in the five of these advertisements that survive, and that have been seen, make it possible to trace the development of the commercial policy of the firm, including what seems to have been another of Thomas Bruce Cornock's innovations, the introduction of French teazles.

It seems likely from this whole series of short advertisements, 1851-75, that when William Cornock began handling teazles, his main interest through the 1840s and into the 1850s up to the time he died or left the business, was in West of England teazles. He may, therefore, have been the first dealer in Leeds since Samuel Coates, around 1807, to have specialised in these, and this may also have made commercial sense at the time, fitting in with the needs of the West of England dealers selling teazles in Leeds to find an outlet. As a result, it would seem, although William Cornock & Son's advertisement of 1851 simply said, 'Consumers will find a large stock of Teazles always on hand', their 1853 advertisement headlined West of England teazles, as did Thomas Bruce Cornock's own first advertisement of 1857, when he had just taken over the firm. In that advertisement, however, in a phrase that was to become general throughout the business, Thomas Bruce Cornock described himself as an English and foreign teazle merchant, and over the following years, he brought French teazles to the fore. In this, Thomas Bruce Cornock was perhaps in his own turn, the first in the Leeds market to see the opportunities for doing business in French teazles, maybe foreseeing the demand for these cheaper kinds in the finishing of the cheaper woollen cloths made in the mills of the clothing district. Therefore, although according to the advertisements of 1861 and 1875, the firm continued to keep an important stock of West of England teazles, the French, which were named first in both of these, would appear to have become the leading line. In addition, in 1870, in a further indication of this, Thomas Bruce Cornock added the descriptor 'foreign' to his main directory entry.

In addition to French and West of England, the firm also sold teazles 'of every other description', and down to 1876, these included Yorkshire. It was in connection with these that around the late 1850s, at about the time when he took over from his father, Thomas Bruce Cornock undertook another innovation in the trade. Perhaps finding, even by 1857, that supplies of Yorkshire teazles were becoming harder to obtain, as William Bean seems to have found in the following decade, or perhaps because they were a new line that Thomas Bruce Cornock wished to stock, in about 1857, the Cornock firm opened its own depot at Sherburn in the Barkston Ash growing area. This branch, seemingly intended to be a point where available quantities of teazles could be brought in, seems to have been run for a time at the start of the 1860s by Thomas Bruce Cornock himself. The teazles may

have been sent into Leeds by rail from Milford Junction. This operation seems to have ended after 1861, perhaps because Thomas Bruce Cornock needed to concentrate his business in Leeds.<sup>15</sup> However, the move from Leeds into the growing area, in the previous period, foreshadowed the later procedure in the years of decline in the future, when it was to be the merchants who would go down to Somerset to see the growers there, rather than the other way round. In any case, the firm was still selling Yorkshire teazles in 1876.<sup>16</sup>

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The alterations in the character of the Leeds teazle commerce was foreshadowed in the 1840s, not only by the careers of William and Thomas Bruce Cornock, but also by that of another dealer, Samuel Lambert. Although very little is known about Lambert, it was fairly certainly he who bought William Bean's old and unsaleable stocks in 1866. He had no other outside business interests and remained active as a teazle merchant over a long period, stretching from about 1845 to the start of the 1870s. Lambert seems to have run his business from his residence, which was on Portland Street for many years, his warehousing being, according to a reference of 1857, in the centre of Leeds at 44 Call Lane, in the yard of the Three Legs of Man.<sup>17</sup> It was probably to this inn yard that Bean sent his three consignments of teazles in April 1866, some of them perhaps from no farther away than the Aire & Calder's warehouses, or from the South Market, a short way off.