

8: The Huddersfield trade to 1914

Huddersfield, the principal secondary centre of the teazle commerce in the West Riding from at least 1830 onwards, lies at the south-western end of the clothing district from Leeds. Situated at the confluence of the rivers Colne and Holme, it was one of a number of similar localities in the Pennine area where, from an early time, woollen cloth woven in the upland weaving and farming communities was brought down to be fulled before being sold on in an unfinished state. It was also, by way of Stanedge at the head of the Colne valley, close to the narrowest crossing point in the Pennines, and had links with Saddleworth, the outlying part of the West Riding on the other side of the hills, where up to the middle of the nineteenth century there was still a wider woollen manufacturing area in Lancashire itself.

In the middle ages, Huddersfield was subordinate to the nearby hillside settlement of Almondbury, but in 1671 gained its own market. In the later eighteenth century its importance as a centre of the woollen trade was increased as a result of the building in 1766 of the cloth hall, and, especially, of the completion in 1780 of the Sir John Ramsden Canal, which linked the town via the Calder & Hebble, and Aire & Calder Navigations with Goole and Hull, from where cloth was exported. Although the great part of the Huddersfield woollen trade was concerned with narrow cloths, mostly cheaper, less heavily-finished classes, high quality cassimeres were made locally, while good quality Saddleworth broadcloths and superfine broadcloths came into the town. By the early nineteenth century, Huddersfield had numerous dressing shops where teazles were used by hand, whilst mills in the area led the way in the West Riding in carrying out the raising of high quality superfines on the teazle gigs. The completion of the Huddersfield Canal through to Ashton-under-Lyne gave improved access to Manchester and Liverpool, whilst in the second half of the 1840s Huddersfield's commercial and industrial significance was further advanced by the development of its rail links. By the later 1850s, the woollen production of the Huddersfield district equalled that of the Leeds district, each accounting for around one quarter of the national output, though the cloths of the Huddersfield district were generally of the less heavily-finished classes. During the second half of the nineteenth century, much of the Huddersfield textile industry diversified, but up to 1914, numbers of mills not only around the town, but in the Colne and Holme valleys, and in the closer parts of the heavy woollen district, continued to produce teazle-raised cloths.

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There is little direct information about the teazle supply trade itself in or around Huddersfield before 1830, when the name of the first dealer in the town appeared in a commercial directory. It is evident, though, that by the earlier eighteenth century, there was already a pattern of distribution that extended widely across the area, and did not only involve the cloth dressers in Huddersfield itself. Although much of the domestic production of cloth woven in the hillside hamlets and villages was sold on after fulling, in an unfinished state, a certain amount of cloth finishing was carried out in the places along the sides of the valleys, and supplies of teazles were obtained for this. In 1708, for instance, the property of the lately deceased John Bothomley, cloth maker of Tunstead, Saddleworth, included what was clearly a tiny left-over quantity of teazles itemised amongst 'Sheares for dressing Cloth shear Board Teazles handles & A press', valued together at £1 10s. 0d.¹ The yeoman-clothier, Jonathan Hobson of Wooldale in the Holme valley, whose inventory was recorded in 1734, had what was clearly a larger stock of teazles to hand at the time of his death, 'Tassels' worth £2 12s. 6d., the equivalent of one third or more of a pack of 20,000.²

It is possible that Jonathan Hobson's teazles were purchased in the Leeds market.

Unlike many of the local weavers, Jonathan Hobson was not only weaving, but dyeing, finishing and tentering his cloth, and was clearly engaged in regular business in Leeds, for amongst his property was a 'Brickhouse at Leeds' valued at £20. In addition, his dressing chamber contained numbers of red pieces, so that he appears to have been taking part in a trade which was carried out in the Holme valley up to about 1750, the making of 'Leeds Reds'. These were coarse broadcloths dyed red, slightly finished, for which the teazles were required, and which were then taken to be sold in Leeds to the cloth merchants there.³ The teazles that he had at Wooldale were probably, therefore, West teazles in stavs of 500, bought, probably from a Somerset dealer, at whatever inn or inns the West of England dealers were then using in Leeds, on one of his visits to Leeds at the time of the year when the main trading in the teazle market was under way. He may have had the teazles delivered in the first instance to his 'Brickhouse', and then gradually brought the stavs back on the packhorse or packhorses that he used on his journeys backwards and forwards between Wooldale and Leeds, for his property also included the pack cloths and sacks used on these.

Nevertheless, it may be that the teazles used by clothiers in the Pennine districts, such as Saddleworth, and possibly in Huddersfield too, came from an offshoot of a distribution network going up on the west side of the country. However, after the Ramsden Canal into Huddersfield was opened, teazles coming up from the West of England by water to Leeds, or indeed, Yorkshire teazles, may have been supplied that way to consumers in Huddersfield. Some support for this may come from the fact that in 1789, a Shropshire teazle dealer, Esau Palmer, who was to be found in Leeds, also visited Benjamin and Joshua Ingham at their mill in Lockwood, Huddersfield, previous customers of his, to solicit an order. This was given, for four packs of a particular kind. The route by which the teazles were delivered is not known, though the upshot was that the Inghams refused to accept them as not being up to standard, given the price, and Palmer initiated an action against them at the York Assizes.

In 1811, however, the Huddersfield Canal, connecting the town to the waterways of the west of the Pennines was completed, offering an alternative and more direct route from the West of England and the Severn valley. Huddersfield was not the only place in the Pennine area where local teazle dealers were to become known in the period from the 1820s to the 1840s, the common factor being a water link with the west as well as the east of the Pennines. Rochdale was one of a number of towns in Lancashire where woollens were made and dressed with teazles, by hand and also on gigs. A cloth merchant of the town who died in 1712 had not only two fulling mills but a 'raising milne or gill mill', and in 1737, the shearmen of Rochdale, along with those of Bury, Manchester and other places agitated for the enforcement of the 1551-2 act against gig mills, the use of which was increasing, leading, the shearmen alleged, to their loss of employment, because raising on the gig was cheaper, and also to the damaging of the cloth. In 1825, therefore, a directory happened to note the details of two teazle dealers in Rochdale,⁴ where up to the middle of the nineteenth century, the woollen industry was still more important than the cotton manufacture. One of these dealers, Robert Woolfenden, had his business in the yard of the Reed, one of the main inns on the north side of the town, and the other Thomas Holt, traded out of the Red Lion Yard. In 1841, a teazle dealer, Eli Carter, was also recorded at Uppermill,⁵ the main mill village in Saddleworth, which in the early 1830s, had an annual consumption of more than 21,000,000 teazles. It is more likely that Rochdale, lying west of the Pennines, drew its supplies directly from the West of England, because in the 1820s, it had a canal connection every three days by way of Manchester to Stourport, where the boats met the trows that sailed up and down the Severn and the Gloucester & Berkeley Ship Canal between there and Bristol.⁶ On the other hand, although Saddleworth was also on the west side of the Pennine ridge, on the Huddersfield Canal, the connections of its woollen trade were with the West Riding, to the east, whilst the fact that the Yorkshire teazle count, and not the West of England count was used there, indicates that its teazle

supplies originated in the Leeds market, and that they passed through Huddersfield, which presumably, therefore, also derived its own supplies there.

Although not much very definite, therefore, is known about the mechanism of the supply trade in the teazles serving Huddersfield before 1830, the emergence of dealers in the town may have had the same causes as the appearance of dealers in Leeds, that is, the greater ease of obtaining supplies at a time when consumption, and growing, were at about their peak, and the need for the mills to have reliable, local suppliers, from whom they could order what they wanted as they needed it. Huddersfield was a much smaller town, and many of the dealers there operated from inn yards close to the little commercial centre near Westgate and the cloth hall. The Huddersfield teazle dealers tended to sell other items used in the finishing end of the woollen industry, most usually woad, like the two Rochdale dealers, who also handled indigo, the imported alternative to woad, and sulphur, used in parts of the woollen industry in the area, in a process called stoving, in which it was burned in order to bleach the cloth. But the Huddersfield dealers, like some of those in Leeds, became engaged in quite unrelated activities, selling chandlery goods in an inn yard, undertaking malting and brewing, selling patented self-fastening buttons, and publishing a commercial directory.

Joseph Hick, who was born around 1790, and whose name appeared as a teazle dealer in Huddersfield in 1830, was not only the first known dealer based in the town, but was the founder of a family firm that remained in business until the middle 1890s, outlasting all but one of its numerous competitors along the way. Hick started off in the Green Dragon Yard, Westgate, selling teazles and woad, also household goods as a chandler.⁷ Around 1845, his business moved to the Cherry Tree Yard nearby. By 1851, however, Joseph Hick had died, and his older son, Henry Hick, who was born around 1827, seems to have taken over in his place.

Up until 1842, Joseph Hick was the only known teazle dealer in Huddersfield. In that year Joseph Cliffe began handling teazles at Aspley, which suggests that they were coming in by water, either from the west, along the Huddersfield Canal, or perhaps more probably from the Leeds trade by way of the Ramsden Canal on the east side. Around 1853, Cliffe was selling teazles in the centre of the town at the Market Place, but by then, he had already moved his main operation to Bay Hall, a district on the Halifax side of the town, where in the following decade, up to 1867 or so, he was in business at the Lion Brewery, Birkby, as a maltster and brewer, selling teazles as a sideline. Another teazle dealer or merchant who came into the trade locally not long after Cliffe, was John Briggs, who in 1845 was selling pelts and teazles on Temple Street, Westgate, and whose business a few years later also included woad, Irish moss and waste, in Huddersfield, and also at Milnsbridge, the chief mill town of the Colne Valley, where Briggs lived at Linthwaite.

John Briggs is notable as having been the first teazle merchant in the West Riding known to have been selling foreign teazles, and as according to his directory advertisement of 1853, which refers to them, naming them first, and the English second, they would seem to have formed the more important part of his business in teazles. These foreign, presumably French teazles, could have been brought in by rail, Huddersfield by the end of the 1840s, having connections with Leeds and with Manchester, the latter line passing through Milnsbridge. From the later 1840s into the 1850s, there was a slight but noticeable rise in the numbers of individuals selling teazles in Huddersfield, which may have been the result of the completion of the railway links serving the town, and at least one of these new dealers, Jabez Brook of Sergeants Street, noted in 1857, and in 1861 in the partnership of Brook & Crosland, also specialised in French teazles. However, none of the other dealers who came into the trade appeared in the directories more than one time.

The period around the 1850s and 1860s was more important for the appearance of two merchants who had a longer term significance. One of these was William Hick, another son of Joseph Hick, and the other was Edmund Taylor, whose business, once Hick's had

closed, was the last Huddersfield merchant firm, and ultimately, the last traditional teazle merchants in Yorkshire, and in the country.

When Joseph Hick died, before or in earlier 1851, his older son, Henry Hick, appears to have stepped in to take over, but he was referred to himself as a teazle merchant in the directories on only one occasion, in 1853, after which there is a bit of a gap in what is known about the Hick family connection with the trade. It was not until 1857 that Joseph Hick's second son, William Hick, who was then about twenty-two years old, had opened a business as a teazle merchant in the White Swan Yard, Kirkgate, above the parish church. He remained in this location until 1873-75, when, probably as a result of rebuilding on the site, he moved farther down to 37 Kirkgate, below the parish church, with a rear access on the Beast Market, below the Boy and Barrel. By that time he had taken up a sideline, promoting a patent self-fastening button and solitaire. By 1877, he too, although selling English teazles, seems to have begun to specialise more in French. He remained in business on Kirkgate until sometime between 1894 and 1897, when the Hick teazle interest in Huddersfield finally came to an end.

The Huddersfield teazle merchants Edmund Taylor (Teazle) Ltd., as they became, were founded in 1849.⁸ The significance of the date, and the origins of the business are, however, slightly obscure. In an interview in *The Huddersfield Examiner* in October 1949, one hundred years later, the then managing director, W. G. Ledger, the son-in-law of one of the partners who had bought the concern in 1915, when the original family connection had ended, said or implied, that the founder was Edmund Taylor of Dundas Street, who had in due course handed the business on to his sons and then his grandson, George Taylor. Although the name, and any details about their father are unknown, the brothers referred to were clearly James Taylor, who was born in Huddersfield sometime around 1817, and his younger brother Edmund Taylor, also of Huddersfield, who was born around 1822. By at least 1843, James Taylor would appear to have been married, and by 1851, he was in business as a butter and poultry dealer. Edmund Taylor, who never married, was then lodging with his brother James and his family. Their father had died by then, and may in fact have already been dead by 1841. James Taylor continued in business as a shopkeeper, grocer and victualler, beerseller and provision merchant down to the time, probably in the 1870s, when he died, and there is no report of him ever having been involved in dealing in teazles. This small shopkeeping enterprise may, therefore, have been the original business started in 1849. In 1851, Edmund Taylor was working in unknown circumstances as a warehouseman, probably for his brother. It was not until 1861 that he was first recorded as being in business himself as a teazle merchant. He was presumably the 'Edward' Taylor, noted for the first time in 1863 in the directories as a teazle dealer, in the Wellington Yard, Westgate.⁹ In 1881, he was still lodging with his sister-in-law, by then widowed. In the years just before 1887, he transferred his teazle warehousing from the Wellington Yard to Dundas Street, running up the hillside close to the cloth hall, where in 1887, he occupied space at a number of different properties. The main address of the firm was nos 14 and 16 Dundas Street, the latter being at the very top corner of Dundas Street, where in 1887, teazles were stored in the basement, with storage for teazles also at no 14. Below Sergeantson Street, he also in 1887 occupied a fine four-storeyed stone warehouse, using floors in this for storing waste and wool, the ancillary commodities of the teazle merchant's trade. It is likely that in making this move, which involved a considerable expansion of his activities, Edmund Taylor was assisted by the involvement of George l'Anson or Janson Taylor, referred to by W. G. Ledger, who was the son of his brother James. George Janson Taylor seems to have kept up his father's business as a fruiterer and grocer after the latter's death, but by 1891 was himself working as a teazle merchant, clearly at Dundas Street, in his uncle's business. After Edmund Taylor's death sometime around the middle 1890s, George Janson Taylor continued to run the concern at Dundas Street up to 1915. At the start of the 1970s, although the warehouse block at the top of Dundas Street had disappeared, that below Sergeantson

Street remained. It was then still possible to read the painted over name of 'Edmund Taylor Teazle Merchant' on one of the stone slabs framing the entrance, and to see on the stone course above the ground floor windows the remains of two inscriptions, one in gold letters, the other in white, one a replacement of the other, carrying the name again, and announcing the nature of the business in English and foreign teazles done within.