

Some Stanningley Industries

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This article traces the growth and development of manufacturing industries within or near the Bramley part of Stanningley.

Early years

Stanningley was one of the several parts of Leeds and district renowned for manufacturing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During the nineteenth century Stanningley straddled the Townships of Bramley, Calverley-cum-Farsley, and Pudsey. This article focuses on that part of Stanningley that lay within, or very close to, the Bramley boundary (Figure 1). This area was characterised by its engineering industry.

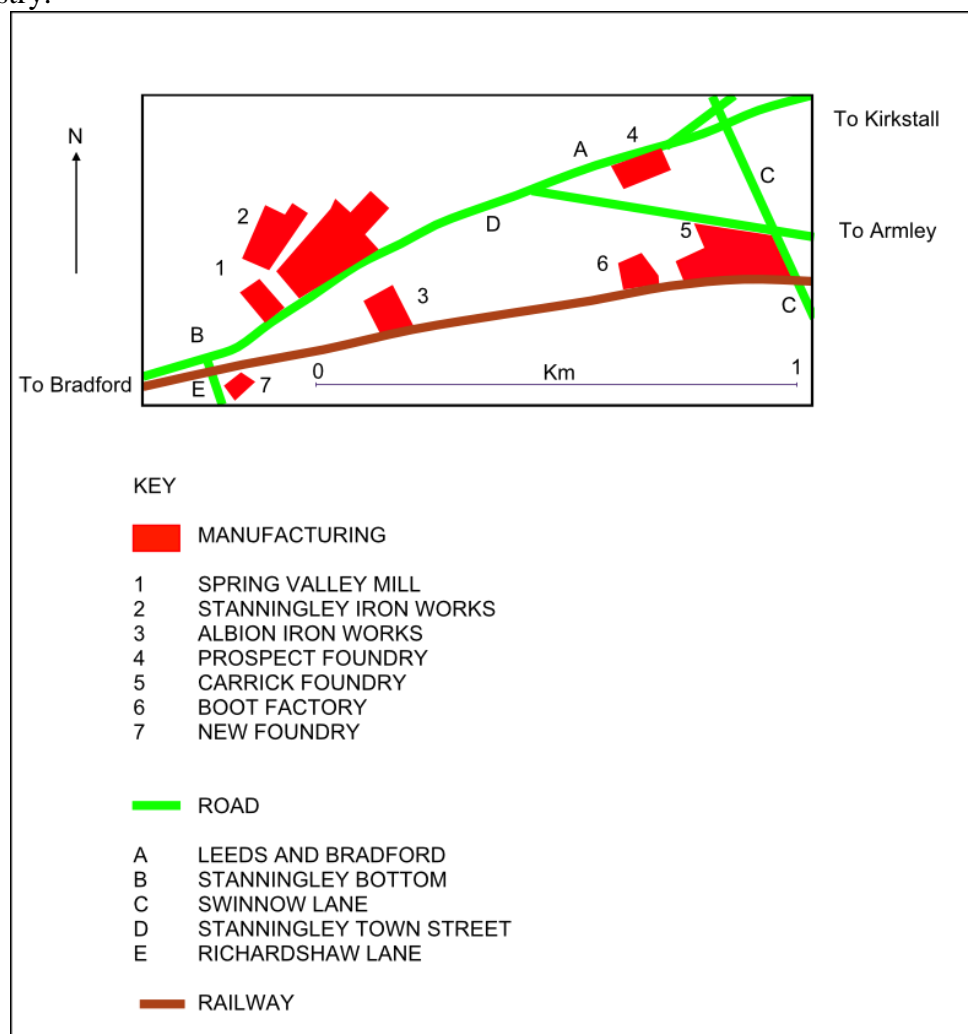


Figure 1 Location map

In 1781, much of the area was moorland, though a few inclosures had been made (Silson 2015). A few buildings bordered the turnpike road that linked Leeds and Bradford. All the remaining moor was inclosed in 1799. Shortly before, Joseph Strickland had erected probably the first steam-powered mill in Bramley (Jenkins 1975; Strong 2008). It was built in the extreme west of the area, and over time was named as Company Mill, Temperance Mill, and finally Spring Valley Mill. When it was first recorded, in 1794, it must have seemed that Stanningley was destined to become yet another West Riding textile village. And indeed in the nearby Pudsey part of Stanningley, other textile mills were built (Strong 2008).

However, the industrial future of the area near Stanningley Town Street lay in engineering. This industry started when John Rogers from Bradford built a small foundry just east of Company Mill just before 1827 (WRRD 1827). Unfortunately Rogers soon died and his widow, Elizabeth, sold the foundry to Charles Haley, Jonas Haley, George Taylor and Joseph Butler in 1830 (WRRD 1830). Jonas soon left the partnership probably to continue to work an existing foundry (Parson and White 1830). In 1838 Haley's business was said to be in the Pudsey part of Stanningley (White 1838). In 1834, the three remaining partners of Stanningley Iron Works appointed a young man, only twenty-four years old and called Joseph Pitts, as a book-keeper (Grace's Guide 2017).

The Joseph Pitts Years

Pitts was born in Bowling (Census 1861). From an early age, he had to combine studying with paid work as his parents were poor (Grace's Guide 2017). Through his abilities and effort, he became a schoolmaster, working in Horsforth immediately before joining Butler, Haley and Taylor at Stanningley Iron Works. Butler, Haley and Taylor were ambitious and sought to expand into an adjacent easterly field known as West Stones. This plot had been inclosed in the eighteenth century to provide additional income to support the Perpetual Curate of Bramley (Talbot 1949; WRRD 1873a). The Reverend Thomas Furbank, the Perpetual Curate of Bramley in 1836, agreed to exchange West Stones for an enclosure in Eccleshill.

Shortly after, in 1838, Joseph Butler became the sole owner of Stanningley Iron Works but both Joseph Butler and Joseph Pitts were running the business (WRRD 1838, 1841.). Joseph Butler and his family, including his son John, lived at Pog Farm, Stanningley where Joseph farmed (Census 1841). Joseph Butler and co. was also the owner of a Stanningley stone quarry and a wharf on the Leeds and Liverpool canal at Kirkstall for many years up to at least 1871 (White 1853; Assessment 1871).

The two Josephs (Pitts and Butler) increased the size of the works eastwards to create Old Foundry, and slightly up Richardshaw Lane they built New Foundry (Overseers 1843; Ordnance Survey 1847). Already Pitts was making his mark, and the two Josephs began to specialise their products. In particular one or other realised that the railway network was expanding at an enormous rate. The 1840s have been long recognised as a period of railway mania. The firm foresaw a huge demand for bridges and other railway structures and aimed to gain as large a slice of the market as possible. It may have been Pitts that looked to the future. It was Pitts who secured the orders for by 1851 he was a commercial traveller for the firm (Census 1851; White 1853). As an example of their early work they constructed a bridge to carry the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway over Wakefield Road at Bradford in 1850

(Bradford Observer 1850). Later they built the roof and the pillars supporting the roof for York Railway Station, which may still be seen today (Plate 1).



Plate1 York Railway Station, 1981

It is not known when Joseph Butler's son John started work at Stanningley Iron Works, but in the 1851 Census he is described as an iron founder engineer. Joseph Butler retired in 1851 (Grace's Guide 2017). He must have been impressed with Pitts' work for Pitts acquired equal partnership with John Butler. In 1853 Butler was described as a clerk whilst Pitts was described as a traveller (White 1853). This suggests that Butler was an administrator seeing to the running of the firm and possibly appointing staff but Pitts had the key responsibility for ensuring the firm stayed in business by securing orders and by developing new products. To some extent an increase in the number of employees supports the view that Pitts played a crucial role in the success of the firm. In 1851 Joseph Butler employed 160 persons (Census 1851). Ten years later 520 persons were employed by Butler and Pitts (Census 1861). But then the picture is less clear as Pearson and Booth state between 1860 and 1890, 800 people were employed (Pearson and Booth 1938). Rateable values are an indication of the growth of a business. The rateable values for Stanningley Iron Works show a huge increase in the years Pitts worked there, but a declining rate after his death in 1870 (Figure 2).

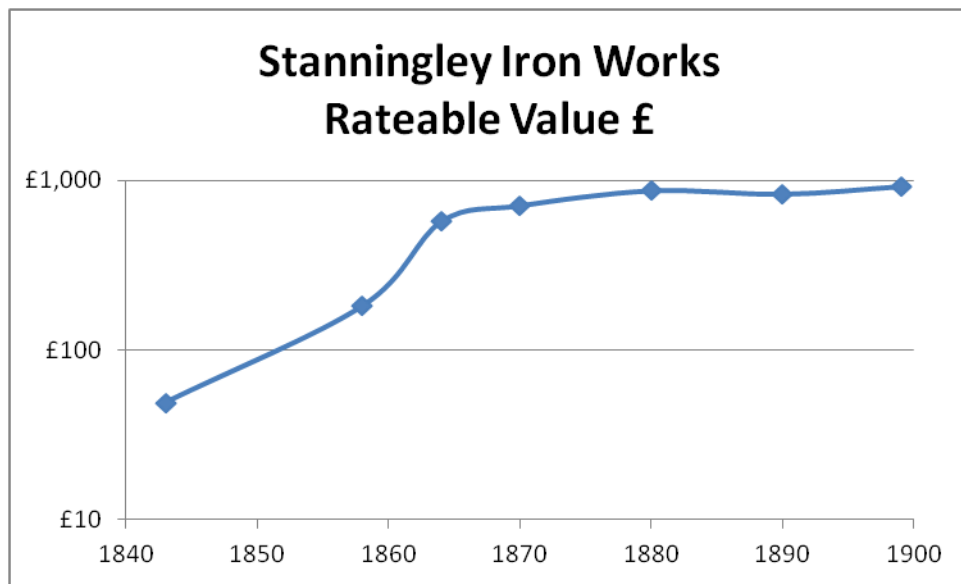


Figure 2 Rateable values for Stanningley Iron Works (Sources: various Overseers Rate Books and Assessment Rate Books for Bramley)

These values illustrate how important Pitts was to the firm. They illustrate how the firm experienced great expansion in the years between 1843 and 1864, a declining rate of expansion from 1864 to 1880, and then almost no expansion at all. Further evidence that it was Pitts who was the mainstay of the firm is provided in an obituary written just after he had died. Pitts was described in an Institution of Civil Engineers obituary as “for several years before his death, (he was) the leading partner in the firm- a firm which, in his lifetime, rose from comparative obscurity to be one of the principal manufacturers of iron bridges for railways” (Grace’s Guide 2017).

Pitts, then, was crucial to the firm’s success. This may have given rise to some ill-feeling or envy on the part of John Butler. In 1851, the partners were both living in Stanningley (Census 1851). By 1861, Pitts was living in Farsley (Census 1861). His house is not named in the census, but his Will names it as West Field, and says lately erected (Will of Joseph Pitts 1870). Pitts also built the house (WRRD 1873 b). It was a large house with a pleasure garden, a coach house and a cottage. It was near the south end of Farsley, built on a greenfield site and was then still near many fields. The house was away from the smoke and dust of Stanningley’s factories. Moreover with prevailing westerly winds, fumes from Stanningley’s works were blown away from West Field. After Joseph’s death, Matthew Pitts sold the house to Israel Roberts. The house has since been demolished but is plotted on the 1893 and 1906 Ordnance Survey maps.

John Butler in 1861 was living in Stanningley up Richardshaw Lane. He cannot have been best pleased at Pitts move. By 1871, he had built and was living in West Royd a large house with a large garden (Census 1871 Plate3) West Royd was very near West Field. And royd is, of course, another name for a field.



Plate 2 West Royd, built by John Butler of Stanningley (Courtesy of Pippa Hale)

Stanningley Iron Works from 1870

After the death of Joseph Pitts in 1870, John Butler owned and occupied Stanningley Iron Works (Assessment 1871). In 1872, John Butler (and co.) purchased from John Appleby a field on the south side of Stanningley Town Street and opposite Stanningley Iron Works (Kitsons 1907). A railway siding was then constructed from the Great Northern Railway through the field across Stanningley Town Street and then into the Works. This siding was well used until the mid-twentieth century. As a boy in the 1940s, when I saw a man stopping road traffic by waving a red flag I would rush to the crossing to see the saddle tank engine and its load entering or leaving the Works (Plate 3).

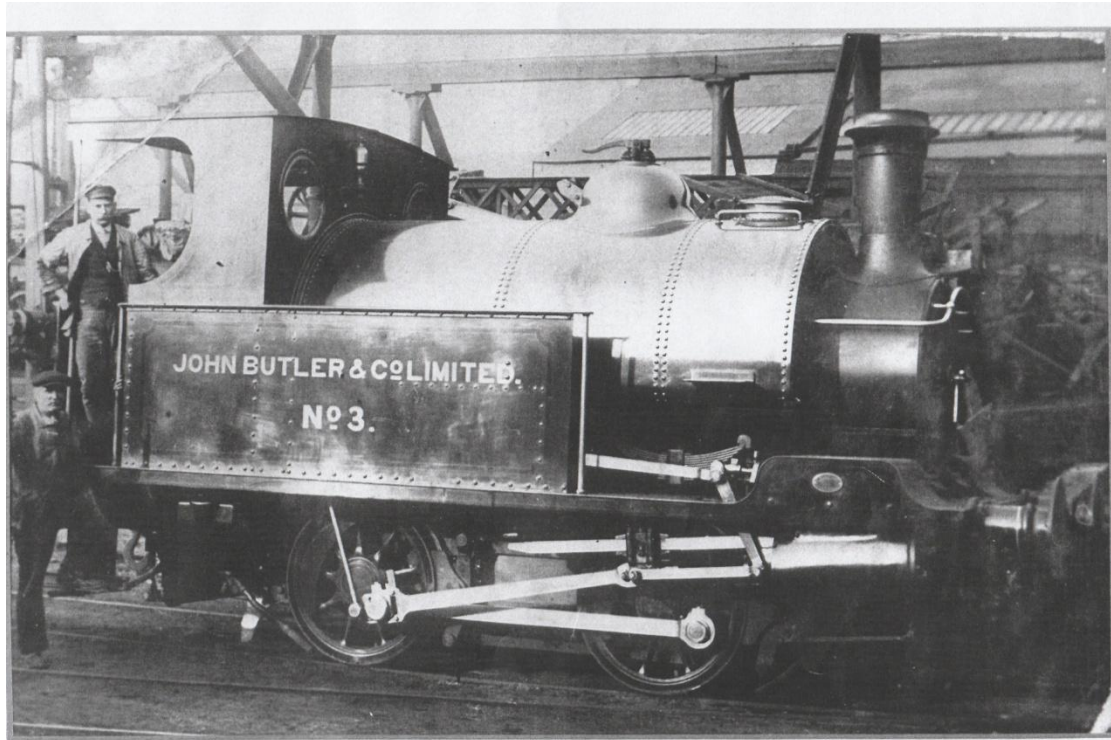


Plate 3 Stanningley Iron Works' saddle tank engine (Courtesy of Alan and Audrey Tate)

The siding had been removed probably by the early 1970s – R F Winder had erected an extension to their works on this site by 1981. Clearly the siding was advantageous to Stanningley Iron Works, but whether it was essential to the firm's success is another matter. Carrick Iron Foundry was adjacent to the main railway line but a siding was never built. Yet the foundry lasted about as long as Stanningley Iron Works, not closing until 1992 (Silson 2018).

John Butler kept Stanningley Iron Works in business until his death in 1884. But expansion initially declined and then ceased in 1880 (Figure 2). Even the expansion just across the Township boundary into Farsley and to the east was probably planned by Joseph Pitts for the partners had bought the land before Pitts died (WRRD 1873 a). The glory days when Pitts was a partner were finished. To be fair, Butler took over the works when the boom in British railway expansion was almost over. However, in the eighties and early nineties Matthew Pitts was successfully building bridges on the opposite side of Stanningley Town Street. And Butler does not appear to have sought to invent new products. The firm did begin to construct cranes in 1880, but many other local firms such as Booths, and Smiths at Rodley and Isles at Swinnow were already making cranes, so Butler was competing with firms that already had markets. After Butler's death, when his sons William and Samuel were in control, Stanningley Iron Works went bankrupt in 1896 (Kitsons 1907). The Kitsons who had been mortgagees for the firm then acquired Stanningley Iron Works. In 1907, the Kitsons who had an involvement in Stanningley Iron Works were: Albert, Frederick, Herbert and Sir James. The Kitsons were well known as locomotive builders in Leeds. The founder of the Leeds business was James Kitson who at one period lived in Elmet(e) Hall Roundhay (Silson 2009). Anne Wilkinson has given an account of some of the other Kitsons (Wilkinson 2014). However successful the Kitsons were in Leeds, the best that can be said of them in Stanningley

was they kept the business ticking over. The plans of the works show no major changes between 1893, 1906 and 1933. Nothing like the expansion that occurred during Joseph Pitts part ownership was to ever occur again. A 1903 anonymous writer supports the view that Kitsons had little interest in Stanningley Iron Works. The 1903 writer stated: “there are those who say that if the Kitson family (who control the Stanningley Ironworks) had been poorer people and had to depend upon what they earned a bit more, it would have been all the better for business of every kind in the town.” (Bramley 1903). Of course the works flourished during the Great War. Upwards of a thousand people was then employed making steel-plated trench covers and shell noses (Pearson and Booth 1938). But with the Armistice, the works sank back to their pre-war torpor. And in 1925 were again out of business.

George Cohen (600 Group) became owners in 1929. Initially Cohen’s intended to use the works purely for storage; for this purpose only seven people were employed (Pearson and Booth 1938). The firm then changed its mind and 350 people were employed in 1938 making a large variety of steel goods. Also, a great deal of equipment such as cranes and excavators were loaned to local authorities. Another World War broke out in 1939, and once more Stanningley Iron Works prospered by making munitions (Naylor 2008). When peace returned in 1945, the fortunes of the works again came to rest on producing a variety of products (Plate 4).

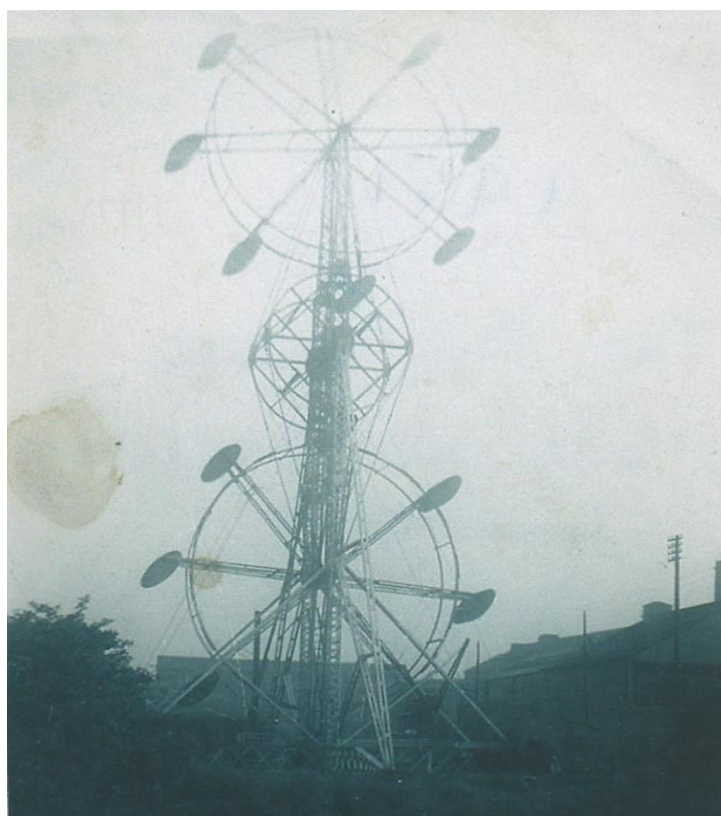


Plate 4 A big wheel made at the post-war Stanningley Iron Works (Courtesy Ian Johnstone)

By the nineteen nineties, the firm was no longer able to trade, and the works closed. A public footpath from Stanningley to Farsley was in existence in 1847 (Ordnance Survey 1847). As the works grew, instead of the footpath being diverted, new buildings were erected over the footpath so one walked through a short tunnel

when using the footpath. After the works closed, it was still possible to walk through the tunnel till about the end of the twentieth century. Meanwhile the eastern parts of the works had been demolished and replaced by houses. Now, virtually nothing of the works remains.

Matthew Pitts and Albion Iron Works

In the mid-1860s Butler and Pitts were employing a man called Thomas Gardom Binner as foreman of the boiler-making section of Stanningley Iron Works (Leeds Mercury 1864; Leeds Times 1865). Binner had been born in Huntingdon, brought up by two sisters in Hunslet, and became a boilermaker by 1851 (Census 1851). Binner was indicted for wounding Alfred Foster in Bradford in 1865 (Bradford Observer 1865; Leeds Intelligencer 1865; Leeds Times 1865). Yet in 1871, Binner was in partnership with William Fowler, stone merchants and brick manufacturers in Stanningley (Leeds Times 1871). Thomas Binner was living in New Street in Farsley about this time (Porter 1872a). Whilst in 1871, Matthew Pitts was resident at West View, near Bradford Road, Farsley (Census 1871). A year later, Matthew Pitts and Thomas Binner were in partnership as engineers in Bradford Road (Porter 1872b). Yet in 1875, they were stated to be partners at Albion Iron Works (White 1875). Albion Iron Works had been erected in a field adjacent to the Great Northern Railway, and just to the south of Stanningley Town Street directly opposite Stanningley Iron Works, that were owned, in 1873, by John Butler (Figure 1). Matthew Pitts had bought the field in which Albion Iron Works were built in the 1870s. Pitts and Binner dissolved their partnership in 1878 (Leeds Intelligencer 1878; Leeds Mercury 1878). Pitts remained at Albion Works as a builder of bridges and in 1881 employed fifty men (Census 1881). Binner died in 1895 as a boiler-maker in Halifax (Register of deaths 1895).

This information about Pitts and Binner is, so far as can be ascertained, accurate. But it raises several interesting questions. These include: why did Pitts and Binner form a partnership? Why was this partnership dissolved? And why did the partners relocate from Farsley to Stanningley? I shall make some attempt to answer these questions, but with the proviso that my suggestions must be regarded as tentative.

The partnership might have formed because Pitts and Binner lived close to each other in Farsley, and they could have become friends; perhaps Pitts thought Binner had been badly treated when he was accused of grievous bodily harm. The most likely possibility though is that Binner was desperate to return to boiler making, it seems to have been his life's work, and Pitts needed the practical experience that Binner brought to the firm. Conversely, the partnership was dissolved because Pitts was obsessed with bridge building, whilst Binner was equally determined to make boilers. The third question is the most important. Up to now the only evidence that the partners first located in Bradford Road is provided in Porter's Directory. There is always the possibility the compiler put Bradford Road when the compiler should have said Stanningley Town Street. However, let us assume the entry is correct. It is not known in which part of Bradford Road the firm was located. This makes it impossible to estimate the disadvantages of the site, which might have encouraged the firm to move. We can be almost certain that as Matthew was a beneficiary in Joseph's Will he had capital to acquire a greenfield site. But why this one in particular? It was certainly a good site as it was adjacent to the main railway line and sidings could be and were built connecting the works and the main line. But even by 1893 there were

many other fields by the Great Northern Railway still available for building (Ordnance Survey 1893). Indeed in 1897 Bonners bought such a field in order to build their boot factory. It is possible that in the early 1870s the field chosen by Pitts was the only one then up for sale, but this seems unlikely. By specialising in bridge building, Pitts seem to have been laying down a gauntlet to John Butler, and by siting his works directly opposite those of Butler, Pitts is ensuring Butler is reminded of the competition every working day. Furthermore, Pitts lived in West View, near Butler's West Royd as long as Butler was alive. It almost seems Pitts was visually telling Butler that even at home, Pitts would watch him. It was only after Butler had died that Pitts removed to The Warrel's, now known as Warrel's House, almost on Upper Town Street Bramley (Yorkshire Evening Post 1896).

And if this interpretation is correct, why had Matthew Pitts such a deep-seated antagonism towards John Butler? The most likely explanation is that John Butler bought Joseph Pitts' shares (following his death) at a price well below their true value.

Whatever the truth of the matter, Pitts was a successful bridge builder, employing fifty men in 1881 doing a great deal of work in Eastern England and virtually up to the time of his death. (Census 1881; Stamford Mercury 1893; Lincolnshire Chronicle 1895).

Pitts died in 1896 (Leeds Mercury 1896; Yorkshire Evening Post 1896). The Albion Works of Matthew Pitts (Bridge Builder) were up for sale in the London Evening Standard 1897. However, it was not until 1904 that Samuel Butler, one of John Butler's sons, bought the premises (Pearson and Booth 1938).

Albion Works 1904- 1961

Albion Works remained in the Butler family until 1961. Bridges continued to be built. However, the bulk of the work seems to have been repairing bridges (Directors Minute Book 1933-1955). As in other local firms the two world wars stimulated production. In the Great War almost all the plating for British tanks was made at Albion Works (Pearson and Booth 1938). The metal was tested by firing guns at some of the metal in a nearby-disused quarry. In the Second World War, munitions were again made including tank parts and bulletproof plating (Naylor 2008; Director's Minute Book).

The firm was criticised during the 1950s for not completing orders on time (Director's Minute Book). In 1961, the firm went bankrupt (The London Gazette, 1961).

Albion/Belgrave Works after 1961

At this point, it is necessary to return to the fag end of Victorian times. Then Rowland Frederick Winder established a firm of electrical engineers and contractors near the centre of Leeds (Yorkshire Post 1981). By 1909, Winder was located on Cross Belgrave Street (Kelly's 1909). The firm installed one of the first AC supplies in Leeds (Yorkshire Post 1981). In 1912, they bought an electric motor which had driven a big wheel in a London exhibition, and thereby started an important part of their business: the re-conditioning of electrical plant.

Winder diversified in 1938 by opening a property business.

Three things coincided in 1961. The firm wanted to expand. Space was not easily to be found at Cross Belgrave Street. Furthermore, in 1951, an inner ring road

was planned which would cut Cross Belgrave Street; work commenced on the ring road in 1967 (Thornton 2013). Winders would have to move. As we have seen Albion Iron Works had become vacant in 1961, and so Winder re-located to these Stanningley premises.

An official opening was delayed by twenty years (Barrett 1963; Yorkshire Evening Post 1981). The opening ceremony coincided with an expansion of the works on to land where Butler's long siding had been laid. The Mayor of Bradford and the Mayor of Leeds attended the ceremony. Not everyone was pleased. The owner of a café on the opposite side of Stanningley Town Street asserted that two hundred customers had been lost because of temporary no-parking outside the café. Diversification continued with a new venture into commercial property, and into the early computer industry.

The business again re-located but this time only moved a short distance to the Grangefield Industrial Estate. The firm is now called Winder Power. They moved in 2008, and Albion Works was then unoccupied before being demolished. It now forms the site of Lidl Retail Park, which has been named Belgrave after the engineering works.

Isles, Sloan and Davidson, Bonners

As with so many other Bramley businesses, the founder (or his parents) came from outside the Township. Isles only came the short distance from Farsley (WRRD 1871). Even after the foundry was built, Job Isles continued to live at Prospect House Farsley; the foundry was also named Prospect. William Sloan and William Davidson were two Scots who had set up in business on Kirkstall Road (Kelly's 1899). Whilst it is uncertain why Isles came to Farsley, Sloan and Davidson almost certainly re-located because space for expansion was lacking in the crowded zone on Kirkstall Road near the River Aire, but there was an empty mill on Swinnow Lane, Bramley. Sloan and Davidson bought this empty mill called Swinnow Moor Mill, which had been built by Joshua Wood, a Bramley cloth manufacture in 1835. Robinson's Directory 1903/04 catches the firm in the process of moving, as there is one address on Kirkstall Road and another address, immediately below, given as Swinnow Mill. Kelly's Directory 1904 shows the move had been completed, as there is now no mention of Swinnow Mill, instead the works are named as Carrick Foundry. Hamilton and Lonsdale Bonner were born in Bramley, but their father, Benjamin, had come to Bramley from the Lake District (Census 1851).

Isles is also an example of how in the very early days of a firm often there would be several partners, but then quite quickly, only one or two partners would remain. In this case, the founders were, as well as Isles, Benjamin Johnson (a Bramley millwright) and Thomas Whitham (a Rodley blacksmith) (WRRD 1871). By the end of 1874 it was solely owned by Isles (WRRD 1873c; 1874). Just as Butlers had built houses for some of their workers, so Isles had built nearby houses in the Conistons. One day, four children were on their way to school when one of Isles foundry walls gave way and fell upon them. Two girls were killed including one from Coniston Mount (Lancaster Gazette 1891; Manchester Times 1891).

As with so many other businesses Isles and Bonners profited from the Great War. Isles made bombs and Bonners, like all the other Leeds Boot manufactures, concentrated production on boots for the armed forces (Pearson and Booth 1938; Plate 5).

B. Bonner & Sons

Boot Manufacturers

STANNINGLEY, LEEDS



Mr. HAMILTON BONNER

WE regret the inconvenience caused to our numerous customers by the extraordinary demands of the Government on our productive resources. When the War is over our manufactures will, as before, consist of

MEN'S FINE BOOTS

FOR

SHOOTING, FISHING, GOLFING,
FARMING, AND DIGGERS' WEAR

These will all bear our Registered Trade Mark,

The **B.B.** Brand

The output of Military Footwear for the British and Allied Governments, since the beginning of the War, has represented practically the whole of our production.

WHOLESALE & EXPORT



Mr. LONSDALE BONNER

Plate 5 An advertisement for Bonners

Of the three firms, Bonners was the first to go out of business. In peacetime, Ireland had become their main market. But in the 1920s the Irish government introduced huge tariffs. The firm closed as a result in 1930. Job Isles died in 1919. His third wife, Gertrude, then ran the business, which changed from crane making to engineering for

Leyland buses (Graces Guide 2018). Isles probably closed in the 1960s; it is now houses. Sloan and Davidson lasted longest not closing until 1992; it is now a fire station (Silson 2018).

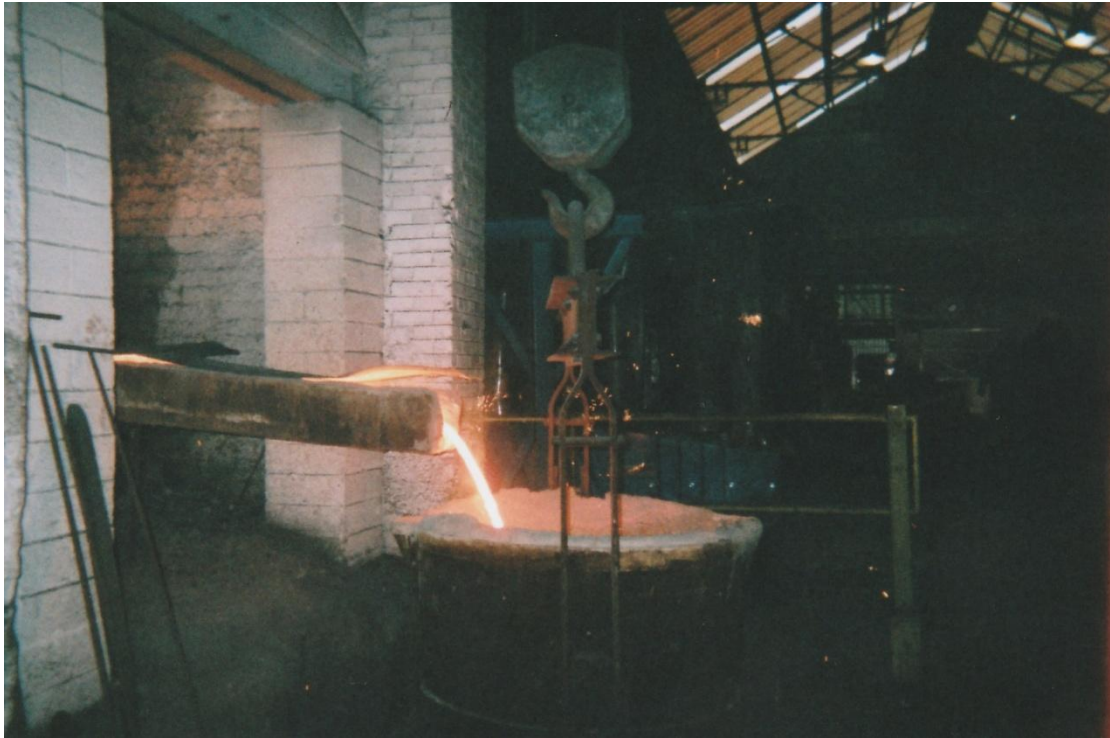


Plates 6 and 7 Sloan and Davidson, 1994; before demolition

It is interesting to note that in 1901, Sloan and Davidson were making rainwater pipes and gutters (Robinson 1901/02). When Sloan and Davidson ceased trading, their order book for guttering and drainpipes was acquired by Hargreaves of Halifax and this firm still makes these products today. Some of Sloan and Davidson's employees were

also set on by Hargreaves.(Silson 2018). The firm also does speciality work including iron casting for amongst others, sculptors. *Bridge*, Pippa Hale's statue, which makes the entrance to Lidl Retail Park so attractive, was cast at Hargreaves.





Plates 8 and 9 Hargreaves Iron Founders from the outside and inside, 2018. The process has hardly changed in two centuries, so the Butlers, and Pitts would at once feel at home if they were able to return

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