

EARL SHILTON BOOT & SHOE TRAIL



CHELSEA ROW

THOS. WHITMORE & SONS LTD.



R LOXLEY & CO.



J LUCAS (RELIANT WORKS)



J WORTHINGTON & CO



BARWELL and EARL SHILTON BOOT AND SHOE TRAIL

In June 2000 members of Earl Shilton and District Local History Society researched this leaflet in association with the Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council, in order to record and commemorate the important role that the Boot and Shoe industry played in the development of the villages of Earl Shilton and Barwell. Only 50 years ago, their streets bustled with women and men on their way to work in the Boot and Shoe factories, and the footwear they made was worn by people around the world from Russia to South Africa. Today none of the larger companies remain. The old factories have been taken over by other industries or even demolished to make way for housing developments. On this trail you are invited to gain a glimpse of their past and ensure that this industrial heritage is not forgotten.

THE HISTORY

Why did the boot and shoe trade develop in our villages? In the 1860's Leicester boot and shoe manufacturers moved part of their production process to the area. Leather uppers were cut and closed in city factories with village outworkers making and finishing the shoes in their homes, barns or garden sheds. Known as 'basket-work', because the goods were brought in baskets. This was the usual method of manufacture until the late 1880's when local factories became the rule.

Many workers also came from Northamptonshire to take advantage of the freedom from restrictive practices. The introduction of new machinery and methods were being strongly resisted in that county causing industrial unrest, but Leicestershire was free from these problems.

The shoe trade led to many carriers setting up in the area to transport the goods and bus companies to bring in the workers from outlying villages.

The earliest factory in the county outside Leicester was started in three cottages on the main road through Earl Shilton. By 1896 there were 12 shoe manufacturers in Earl Shilton and 11 in Barwell.

Hard working conditions

Conditions were hard, hosiery workers who came to work in the shoe trade in the 1880's, had to pay £1 down and worked the first month before receiving wages. Up to 1895 workers had to buy their own rivets and tacks from the factory owners. This led to the growth of independent hardware shops in both villages, offering cheaper materials. As a concession the shoe workers were allowed to send out for ½ pint of beer to drink while they were working.

Boot and Shoe Operatives Union

The hard conditions led to the growth of the Barwell branch of the Boot and Shoe Operatives Union in the early 1880's. There was a lock-out in the industry in 1895 because of resentment over bad factory conditions. During the dispute the Union held meetings at the Coffee House in Barwell High Street and paid lock-out money to the men who were out of work for 10 weeks.

The 20th Century

The area became a major centre of production, manufacturing boots for the army during the 1st World War. At their peak in the early 1950's, the factories of Barwell and Earl Shilton produced over 10 million pairs of shoes per year.

However, in the 1970's foreign competition made shoe production uneconomic. Within 20 years the industry had collapsed leaving the remnants of old factory buildings to mark the industry's passing. The factory was rebuilt in 1970 but sadly, with the influx of cheap imports, closed in 1989. Later used for industrial units – a Moulds compnay and one making football shirts called "Fantastic". Now demolished for housing development.

BOOT AND SHOE FACTORIES OF EARL SHILTON

1. **J.B. Grewcock & Sons Ltd. – Church Street**

Originally founded in New Street as **Grewcock & Wright** by **Joseph Burdett Grewcock and Capt. A. Gidley Wright** in 1904. Established as **J.B. Grewcock & Company** in 1926, specialising in boys & girls medium class goods and women's fashion and comfort shoes. According to the Shoe & Leather Supplement of 1914, their aim was 'Smart, good-wearing stuff'.

Trade mark 'Maureen'. Mr Grewcock was known for constantly smoking a pipe. Now demolished for housing development. **Grewcocks Place**.

2. **T. Whitmore and Sons Ltd - Hill Top**

Founded in 1872 by Thomas Whitmore, of Hill Top House. In White's Directory of 1877, George Whitmore and Samuel Whitmore were registered as boot maker and boot finisher respectively. Samuel's son Thomas began his own business receiving goods for finishing from Leicester firms such as Stead and Simpson.

William Whitmore was also a member of the same family, who was a carrier. He transported the finished goods back to Leicester, by horse and cart every Saturday. Sometimes, an extra horse would be needed to help the carriers' carts to get up the steep hill into Earl Shilton. On his return, he would bring more work for the following week together with payment for the previous work done. Thomas's employees would be at Hill Top waiting for their wages. As would their wives, making sure that they had some money before their husbands spent it in the nearby Roebuck Public House.

At its height the firm employed 130 workers and produced 6,000 pairs of shoes per week.

Trademark was 'Gaystyle' boys and girls shoes. From the 1950s 'Maybelle' ladies casual shoes.

Mr Malcolm Whitmore retired from the company in 1993 and the company closed in 1994

3. **J. W. Woolloff and Son - Highfield Mills, Keats Lane**

Originally **Sturgess and Best**, founded by W. H. Sturgess in 1863 in High Street until moved to Keats in 1902. Then became J. W. Woolloff and Son in 1913, specializing in Ladies, Boys and Girls boots and shoes in Glace and Box Kid. The company employed 65 people in 1920 making boots for the Russian Army. Their advert from The Shoe and Leather and Allied Trades News Supplement of December 14th, 1916 says, "The brand 'Dauntless' is associated with goods of a reliable, sound, selling character." The company later closed and the building was used as a wallpaper factory until the Argee hosiery company took it over, making underwear for Marks and Spencers.

4. **R. Ladkin and Son (the Valdetta) - Keats Lane**

Originally a heel manufacturer supplying local factories. Later produced ladies wide fitting quality shoes. Partially destroyed by fire in the mid 1960s and rebuilt. Now demolished for housing development.

5. **A. J. Norton - High Street**

The Father of the Boot and Shoe trade in Earl Shilton as compared to Arthur Geary of Barwell by David Herbert in his biography of **The Life and Times of George Ward**. One of the earliest Boot manufacturers in Earl Shilton, and was also the licensee of The Bowling Green public house. Later lived at house called 'Northleigh'. Alfred James Norton was also a great benefactor and a Rural District Councillor. His son, also Alfred James Norton was a hosiery manufacturer of **Norton & Bradbury**. Bradbury's Yard was the site of the capture of the lioness which escaped from a traveling show on its way through the village. Keats Close is now built around this area. Another possible site of this shoe manufacturer was a building close to the old High Street School, which has since been demolished. The **A.J.Norton Cup** was played for by cricket teams in the South Leicestershire League.

6. **J. Lucas (Reliant Works) - High Street**

Originated in buildings at the rear of the Plough Public House in Church Street as a heel maker. In later years became a wholesaler selling shoes to shops and on markets. Building later became the **Express Window Company** with an added frontage and **Hill Top Motor Cycle Sales** and Repair Shop.

7. **J. Worthington and Co. - West Street**

Founded by J.H. Worthington and A. Bellamy. Employed 40 people in 1920. Used by **Nevetts** hosiery machine parts, then **DTMS** (Driver Training and Management Company).

8. **H. Orton and Sons - Boot Manufacturers - Oxford Street**

Registered in 1917 by Harry Orton for his sons, when Best's bakehouse and stables, adjacent to factory (with horse still in it) was purchased. Manufactured work boots, hobnailed boots and army boots which were completed on site. Employed 120 people in its heyday. Later supplied specialist shoes on a smaller scale, which is much more labour intensive, including golf shoes for Laura Davis. The last shoe factory to close in Earl Shilton in 2004. Now demolished for housing development. (**Orton Place**)

9. **Ladkin Bros - Vicarage Street**

Founded by Ralph Ladkin. Made men's quality leather shoes. Closed in 1989. Apartments now built on site called **Vicarage Court**.

10. **Green, Colver & Cobley - Station Road**

Firm began by Arthur Green of 'Rowandean', Mill Lane, with J. Colver and L. Cobley. Workshop built at back of New Palace Cinema owned by Harry Cooper. Now **Bethel and Bethesda Residential Homes for the Elderly**.

11. **W. Hitch - Station Road Industrial Estate**

Made ladies and girls shoes with many coloured designs.

12. W. H. Cotton and Sons Ltd - Hurst Road

The factory was originally known as **Hurst, Cotton and Hopcroft**.

Established 1898 making Ladies medium and best grade shoes in Glace Kid and Box. Girls shoes Acacia brand, and ladies shoes Plyant, Erl King, Water Lily and Noreen trademarks. Boys shoes were Little Warrior and Minstrel Boy. Also completed considerable contracts for English and Russian Army Boots. Employed 207 workers in 1920, with a capacity of 8,000 pairs a week. The street (Station Road) would be flooded with workers walking or cycling home when work stopped at 6.00pm. William Henry Cotton lived at 'Ivydene', off High Street. Many Garden Parties were held in the grounds. Alderman William Hurst was a Justice of the Peace and the first member elected on the formation of Leicester County Council. (Hurst Road was obviously named after him) The manager at this time was Thomas Bellamy of Elmsleigh, Hinckley Road.

The factory buildings were then used by **Bohms** and **Fine Jersey Ltd**, making knitted jersey fabric and 'Crimplene'. Later used by **Elle Hosiery Ltd**. Now demolished for housing development known as **Cotton Mews**.

13. J. W. Watts (Empire Works) - New Street

Originally **A. V. Hopcroft Ltd**, the Empire Works was built in 1913 to his own specifications and requirements. The factory were the sole makers of 'Lyntona' and 'Silver Leaf' brand, and specialized in the production of stylish ladies footwear in Glace Kid, which were well known in both the home and export markets. The owner was one of the pioneers of the Glace Kid trade in the Hinckley district. The firm exported 'Fine footwear for ladies' to South Africa. (Mr Albert Victor Hopcroft having paid several visits to South Africa in the interests of his firm) Since the First World War, a portion of the factory was contracted to make Russian Cossack Boots for the British Government. Mr J.W.Watts was the factory manager who later took over the firm in his own name. Building was later taken over by **Elle Hosiery Ltd**. Since demolished for housing development.

14. W. H. Abbott - New Street/Byron Street

Firm established by William Hodgson Abbott of 44 Hinckley Road in buildings once occupied by **Grewcock & Wright**. Burned down and site taken over by Acorn Timber Co until 1970s. Houses now on site (on corner opposite Chip Shop)

15. E. Pinchess and Co Ltd - Highfield Street (Churchill Works)

Originally formed by A. Bannister in the 1890s. From 1916-1936 was known as **Bannister, Pinchess & Brown**, then as E.Pinchess & Co Ltd until its closure. Employed 145 people in 1920. Prior to 1936 the trademark was Beacon brand, which according to the Shoe and Leather News was a guarantee of Quality and Style. They produced Ladies and Girls Medium grade shoes, and also Glace and Box Boots and Shoes. After that date 'Utility Shoes' was their Trademark. Building has a covered shelter at side which was built during the Second World War. Currently used as industrial units and a dance studio. **The Suffolk Pointe Shoe Co. Ltd** in Unit 6, became the only new shoe making factory. which opened in 2000. First opened in the old factory of T.Whitmore & Sons Ltd. Hill Top. Makers of hand made quality Pointe Ballet Shoes. Mark Suffolk. designed fitted shoes for Company dancers worldwide. Close collaboration with Canada's National Ballet School enabled him to design His first shoe '**The Suffolk Solo**'.

16. E. Pinchess Ltd. - Rossendale Road

Formerly owned by Edgar Pinchess and then by Eatoughs Ltd. Made moulded soles to the uppers. Then taken over by Breconshire Hosiery, which has since closed in 2006. The last hosiery factory in Earl Shilton.

17. Eatoughs Ltd - Rossendale Road

Formerly used by Eatoughs as the clicking and machine rooms plus the leather store and offices. Now converted to apartments.

18. W. Bird & Co.

Established in 1882 by William Bird, and the Excelsior Works was built in 1900. Produced 300 dozen pairs per week for ladies, girls and boys of a medium grade quality in box hide and glace kid. The brand name was 'Charmian' and dealt with the wholesale trade. In 1907 the firm was made into a limited company with William Bird and A. Armson (Directors) and F. Henson as Manager. Founder originally lived in Chelsea Row – cottages on Hinckley Road.

Building later used by **Bird and Yeoman** hosiery, then **Pex Socks**. Now demolished for new housing development, **Bird Close and Yeoman Road**

19. Eatoughs Ltd. – New Street

Founded in 1919 by Oliver Eatough who previously owned a slipper factory in the Rossendale Valley, Lancashire. Made children's slippers and sandals. Although there was electric power the shafts and belts were driven by a gas engine. The first pair of slippers were produced in April 1919 at a very competitive price and the company boomed. Other factories were opened in Syston, Burton-on-Trent and Coalville, and by 1933 employees numbered 1000.

In 1934 all 1000 employees were taken to Blackpool to celebrate Mr and Mrs Eatough's Golden Wedding. In 1936 Eatough's pioneered the installation of 'Music while you work' - the first in the shoe trade to do so.

They also produced slippers to be attached to electrically heated flying suits for 2nd World War bomber crews. Over 100,000 pairs of these were issued to the RAF and the USAF Industrial clogs were also produced for women workers in the munitions factories - leather footwear being unsuitable. These were later produced for refugees in Europe.

In 1957 Eatoughs produced the first British made children's all plastic sandals, which were washable and retailed at 6/11. 'Plastisha' was advertised nationally and on TV.

Ladies fashion shoes were produced and the company exported extensively.

In 1967 the Duchess of Kent visited the factory, the first member of the Royal Family to do so.

20. R. Loxley & Co.

Early Boot and Shoe factory founded by Messrs Ralph, David and John Loxley. Eatoughs acquired the building in 1916 and it later became **Vesty's Box** factory supplying shoe boxes to the local factories. 19 people were employed in the former shoe factory. Also **Earl Shilton Printers** was set up in the front of the building supplying both shoe box labels and hosiery inserts. Now converted into apartments called **The Caprice Building**.

21. E. Pinchess Ltd - New Street

Building taken over by Breconshire Hosiery. Closed in 2006. The last hosiery factory in Earl Shilton.

22. A. Abbott - New Street

Founded in 1880 by Abraham Abbott. Makers of women's medium grade walking shoes, 'Foot Flairs' and 'Highland Queen' brands. For the duration of the Second World War the building was taken over by the Ministry of Supply. Closed in 1970s. Now converted into apartments.

23. Chelsea Row - Hinckley Road

Interesting framework knitters cottages built around 1860, with five light arched window opening to ground floor work room. Early workshops for 'basket-work' outwork for the Boot and Shoe trade in rear yard. The forerunner of the factory. One of the cottages was owned by William Bird, who started shoe making in his workshop, then had the factory built on Hinckley Road.

24. Gidley Wright - Heath Lane

Original company started jointly with Joseph Grewcock in New Street in 1904. Captain A. Gidley Wright of the 11th Leicestershire Regiment, was one of the first in the District to volunteer for Active Service. In the Battle of the Somme he was unfortunate to lose his left eye completely. Small factory was burned down in 1932. Bungalows built on right hand side of Heath Lane on factory site.

Other names appear in directories but no details are known about them: J. Wightman (Almeys Lane), A. Jacques (High St), H. Bray (Wood St), J. Bailey (Shed in garden off Byron St), J. Grant (High St), G. W. Clarke & Co (Station Road), Richard Rowley, James Pawley, James Chandler, Joseph Breward (possibly Breward, Son & Taylor, New St), James Carr, John Rowton, Samuel Smith, Thomas Almey, John Freer Gee, Mrs Felce, Colver and Kirk. (Rear of Post Office Row). Waters Boot and Shoe Repair Shop was along the High Street in Post Office Row (houses in front of Church Hall) and Maxwells Grindery Shop (rivets and accessories for the shoe trade) was in the row of houses originally owned by L. Grant and in later years used as a cobblers workshop by Dennis Bown. (Former Mayor of Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council and County Councillor).

EARL SHILTON BOOT AND SHOE TRAIL MAP

The map shows a trail route starting at Church Street and ending at Heath Lane. It includes 24 numbered locations, each with a corresponding photograph. A legend indicates that buildings 1, 15, and 21 no longer exist. A list of names for each location is provided in a separate box.

THESE BUILDINGS NO LONGER EXIST

- 1. J. B. GREWCOCK & SONS LTD.
- 2. T. WHITMORE & SONS LTD.
- 3. J. W. WOOLLOFF & SON
- 4. R. LADKIN & SON (THE VALDETTA)
- 5. A. J. NORTON
- 6. J. LUCAS (RELIANT WORKS)
- 7. J. WORTHINGTON & CO.
- 8. H. ORTON & SONS - BOOT MANUFACTURERS
- 9. LADKIN BROS.
- 10. GREEN, COLVER & COBLEY
- 11. W. HITCH
- 12. W. H. COTTON & SONS LTD.
- 13. J. W. WATTS (EMPIRE WORKS)
- 14. W. H. ABBOTT
- 15. E. PINCHESS & CO. LTD.
- 16. E. PINCHESS LTD.
- 17. EATOUGH'S LTD.
- 18. W. BIRD & CO.
- 19. EATOUGH'S LTD.
- 20. R. LOXLEY & CO.
- 21. E. PINCHESS LTD.
- 22. A. ABBOTT
- 23. CHELSEA ROW
- 24. GIDLEY WRIGHT

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