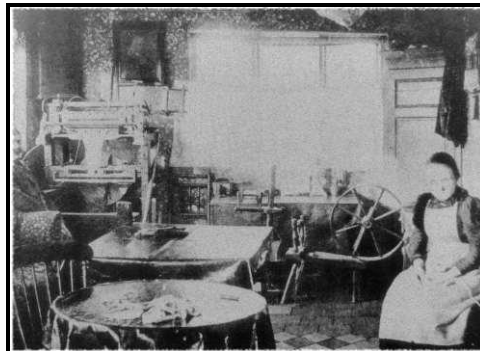


**TRANSCRIPTION OF VANISHED INDUSTRIES
BY H.BUTLER JOHNSON (WRITTEN EARLY
1900s)**



BY SAMUEL T STEWART - MAY 2021

PREFACE

Butler Johnson's "Vanished Industries" written in the early 1900s and which relates to the local area including Coleorton, Swannington, Thringstone & Griffydam is felt by Samuel T Stewart to be an important local history document and therefore worth transcribing and recording on his website. All of the industries referred to in Butler Johnson's document except for the "Tanyard" and "Windmills" etc., described in Swannington have been researched by Samuel T Stewart and they appear as individual free to download and read publications on his website. The transcription has been annotated in blue with details of the relevant publications.

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VANISHED INDUSTRIES BY H. BUTLER JOHNSON

In this age of steam, oil, and electricity, with their consequent mass production, it seems to us worth while to place on record, when some memory of them still survives, various industries and occupations which, now extinct, at one time or another flourished on our countryside.

We shall confine our efforts in this direction to the district in and around Cole Orton. Apart from the fact that we have some acquaintance with its past history, the Cole Orton district is well adapted for this purpose, since, although purely rural, the presence hereabouts of coalmines has from very early times attracted a considerable population among whose units were, as is usual in such places, always to be found those engaged in trades and occupations not directly connected with the main industry of the locality.

The existence of some of these past industries is now only associated by name alone, no memory of them, either oral or written surviving.

One of these is, we believe, to be found in a place name, "The Woolrooms", the designation of a small hamlet situated between Cole Orton and Griffydam, on the western side of what was formerly Thringstone Moor. ([See the publication entitled "A History of the Woolrooms in Worthington Parish" by Samuel T Stewart on the website](#)).

This name, The Woolrooms, would seem to indicate a wool depot or Storehouse having been located at this spot at some former time, probably in the 13th and 14th centuries, when the production of wool for export to Flanders was England's great staple industry.

This view is borne out by the fact that the monks of Garendon Abbey, near Loughborough, owned a Bercary or Sheepfold in the 13th century which must, if we have interpreted one of the surviving charters of the Abbey correctly, have been situated in the mile length of district lying between the Breach (Le Breechad) on the west side of Swannington village and the hamlet of Newbold.

The Woolrooms would come about midway, and as a monastic bercary included not only folds, but also wash pits and all other appendages of a sheep farm, among which would be storehouses, it is not unreasonable to assume that this bercary of the monks must have been situated close by the brook which, now in an attenuated form, runs by the Woolrooms towards Griffydam, This establishment of the monks would from the outset connote one or two dwelling places for those employed amongst the sheep, and these would be added to from time to time until the present hamlet came into being.

Apart from the presence of a bercary, the hamlet would have been a very suitable site for a wool depot six centuries ago, surrounded as it then was by hundreds of acres of common and moorland on which sheep were kept. We need only mention Swannington Common, Long Moor (now Coleorton Moor), Thringstone Moor (now known as Peggs Green), Gelsmoor, Newbold Moor and Worthington Moor, to show the wealth of open spaces at one time in the immediate vicinity of the Woolrooms.

The mention, too, more than once in the Garendon charters of the presence of "flaxlands" in the Cole Orton district points to some trade being done in linen's raw

material in the middle ages. The old name for "The Lont", i.e., an open space, or clearing in the woods, a hamlet on the north side of Coleorton ([now the hamlet of Lount](#)) was linvilfield, and apart from the usually accepted derivation from linn, a pool or lake, we hazard the suggestion that the cultivation of flax at that spot may have given rise to the older name ([it is known that flax was grown in a field in Stoney Lane pre the Second World War](#)).

The name, the "Tenthouse", of a building in the hamlet of Griffydam affords a hint, and a hint only, of the making of cloth here at some former time; a tenthouse being the shed containing the tenter frame on which the cloth was stretched after being dyed. The modern expression "on tenterhooks" will doubtless be familiar to our readers. ([See the publication entitled "Research into the Trade of Woollen Cloth Weaving in Griffydam" by Samuel T Stewart on the website](#)).

The name "The Tanyard", now applied to a group of houses in the Main Street of Swannington is the sole remaining evidence of the presence of a "tannery" there in the old days. These houses were built about seventy years ago on the site of a disused tannery; the tan pits, so an old resident once informed us, being filled in about this time. When this tannery was closed down is uncertain. It could not have been long before the erection of the cottages, since as late as the year 1846, at any rate, there was one Thomas Wainwright, a tanner by trade, living in Swannington at a house, still standing, adjoining the tannery. On the same premises we understand, a small village school, was carried on by a Mr. James Willcocks. A tannery and a number of small boys would appear to us to be a unique, and at the same time a happy combination. When this tannery first came into being we have failed to discover. Our impression is that it goes very far back in the history of the parish, owing, we have but little doubt, its origins to the near at hand Talbot Wood, over a hundred acres in extent, where an abundant supply of oak bark must have been obtainable. [The process called "Tanning", strictly speaking, only applies to the use of "Tannin" from vegetable products and in England mainly oak bark was used.](#)

A Richard Wainwright was a man of sufficient substance to be chosen as one of the Overseers of the parish in the year 1801, and he, we conjecture, owned the tannery. The large quantity of horn cores which were discovered underlying the surface of the main street of the village in the vicinity of the Tanyard about twenty years ago, indicated to us from the depths at which they lay that at least two centuries must have elapsed since they were deposited there. They formed part of a very old road, nearly a yard below the present surface level, with a deep ditch flanking it on either side. This repairing of the highway in Swannington with the refuse from the Tannery was by no means as singular in the old times as it would appear to be. Horn cores were frequently used for repairing roads and building walls. John Farey, a Derbyshire surveyor, writing a little over a century ago, mentions the "Disgusting Habit" of building fences of horn cores in the vicinity of Tanyards.

Another vanished industry, this time a pleasant, healthy one is to be found in the name of a field, the "Rope Walk", in the parish of Coleorton. Beyond the mere fact of the name, we have, so far, failed to ascertain anything concerning its history. ([Samuel T Stewart has tried to research further information on the Rope Walk without success and if it infers something to do with the making of ropes then that would seem to be a strange thing to contemplate in such a location](#)).

An occupation in the Cole Orton district which came to an end about seventy years ago was the hawking of coal carried on donkey's backs in large leather panniers ([see the publication entitled "The Local Hawking of Coal by Packhorses" by Samuel T Stewart on the website](#)). These donkeys were generally run in droves of fifteen or

twenty, and the burdens they carried, so old residents have informed us, were almost unbelievable, as much as four hundred weights of coal being at times placed in the panniers of one of the little animals, a weight that bent its spine into the form of an inverted arch. The last drove we believe, of these pack animals, nineteen donkeys and one small pony, was that of William Bakewell, who lived in the lane, now named after him, near the Woolrooms. Bakewell, who seems to have been the last man in Coleorton to habitually wear a blue smock frock, was in the habit of fetching his supply of coal from old Lount Pit ([in the Smoile at Lount](#)), and on the way back home through the Woolrooms, the drove of burdened animals always lay down for a much needed rest when they arrived at the bridge, miscalled the Aqueduct, under the Coleorton railway, and, until they had it, refused to pass the spot. Here, the burdens were re-distributed, and the contents of the panniers to some extent lightened, not so much we fear, for humanity's sake, as for the fact that the coal was sold by the pannier, and not by the weight, as the present law requires. For which relief, the donkeys, and not the customer doubtless gave much thanks.

An interesting local industry which was carried on until the closing years of the last century, was the fashioning of "Whetstones", the once famous "Charley Forest Whetstones", from a green coloured, hard hornstone of volcanic origin, obtained from a quarry at Whittle Hill on the Charnwood Forest. This Whittle Hill stone was extremely hard to shape and work, and in the latter days of the industry a softer Turkish raw material was used by the local hone makers. The occupation as far as the Cole Orton district was concerned was not thought to have been of any great antiquity. Our enquiries go to show that it was brought into the locality about the middle of the nineteenth century and would seem to have been confined to the families of Crowson, Hall and Else. John Hall of Rotten Row, was the last, we think, to carry on the trade. These hones, which were held in high esteem in the workshops of Sheffield, Birmingham and Coventry, used to be carried to the afore mentioned towns and sold direct to the workmen. A considerable trade was done in them at one time among the file cutters around Sheffield. In addition to the quarry at Whittle Hill, we understand that a small quarry at Thringstone afforded an excellent material for hone stones ([see the publication entitled "A history of Elverston's Yard" by Samuel T Stewart on the website](#))

Another local industry which endured until the end of the nineteenth century was the making of ornaments of various kinds out of Derbyshire Spar, a marble like gypsum which is found at Chellaston, near Derby, some ten miles from Cole Orton. An ornament, or Gaud of small actual utility was formerly classed as a play thing, and termed a bauble. Hence the small workshops connected with this trade in the Cole Orton district were always, as some readers may remember, called bauble shops; an interesting survival of a word now scarcely used ([see the publication entitled "Over 70 Years of Spar Ornament / Bauble Making in the Local Area" by Samuel T Stewart on the website](#))

The trade was generally carried on in small shops attached to a dwelling house, and at one time had a considerable vogue around Cole Orton. Fragments of white spar, and traces of white dust still mark the sites of such places. Like the Whetstones mentioned above, those engaged in the Spar industry, seemed to have sold their wares direct in the old days, travelling in the summer to various seaside resorts where, until the advent of foreign competition, there was a lucrative demand for such articles. Although half a century ago, we can trace quite a number of people as having been engaged in this work, by the year 1877 only three "bauble shops" remained, that of James Peters, Workhouse Lane, Cole Orton and those of Charles Platts and Leonard Palmer, both in Griffydam. The trade was carried on by all three proprietors some time after 1877, the business of James Peters in Workhouse lane

being transferred to Thringstone where it remained in being until the death of Mr. Peters. One can only surmise of how this industry, which demanded artistic taste and skill, came to be established in a coalfield many miles from the source of the raw material. In the Middle Ages, the image makers, tomb makers, and alabaster workers of Nottingham and Burton-on-Trent were famous throughout England and the continent. Their supplies of alabaster or marble.....hence the term alabastermen.....were obtained from Chellaston and Gotham where gypsum today is extensively mined. We incline to the opinion that our local industry was a minor offshoot of the greater one at Nottingham or Burton-on-Trent; alabaster workers from these towns having drifted into the Cole Orton coal field in times of stress, and established a small trade there. We have been told by a resident in the locality, who had it from his father, that seventy or eighty years ago alabaster workers from other places frequently came to Cole Orton looking for employment. These strangers, it seems, were principally remarkable for the amount of strong ale they could consume.

Another industry, which added to the picturesqueness of the countryside was that of the grinding of corn in the now rarely seen windmill. Windmills appear to have been introduced into England by the Crusaders in the 11th century, who had seen them used in the Near East for the purpose of pumping water, and at one time or another there have been at least six grinding corn mills around Cole Orton, though, as far as we have been able to ascertain, not one in the parish itself.

Of these six, one stood at the north end of Thringstone village near the present Stoneycroft farm, and was owned and worked by a member of the old family of Elverston, who resided near by. This mill, along with a large quantity of corn, was consumed by fire about the year 1780 and was never re-erected. Whether it was a Post or Smock Mill, we have no information. Another windmill, a post mill, stood in the same parish in the field, still known as the Mill Hill Close, opposite the entrance gate to St. George's vicarage, and the site of it can still be clearly traced. This mill, according to local tradition, was over-turned in a gale in the middle of the last century, and the man in charge killed. The mill was then re-erected half a mile away to the west, close to St. George's Church, and forms number two on our list. It was owned and worked by a Mr. Thomas Kirby, and was dismantled soon after his death in the year 1891. A few hundred yards to the south-west of this last mill, a smock mill still remains standing near the bridle road leading from St. George's Hill to Linby Hall. Over forty years has gone by since this venerable object of well - weathered brick was made use of. Once a profit making concern, it has had its day. Let us hope, however, that this picturesque survivor of a past era, the last of its kind within many miles. will long stand untouched by the hand of the spoiler. This mill was built, we were given to understand many years ago by the grandson of its first owner, about the year 1840 to take the place of a smaller edifice of the same type which up to that time had stood in the garden a couple of hundred yards away to the south-east, and was then in a more or less dilapidated condition. When this earlier smock mill was erected we have been unable to discover. That it had stood there for time out of mind was all we were able to gather from our above mentioned informant.

The last mill in our series survives in the name alone, the Windmill Close, (plot 319 on the O/S map) facing the eastern entrance to School Lane on Fone Hill in the parish of Swannington. Beyond the bare fact that a manor map of the year 1755 assigns this name to the field, we know nothing. It is, however, quite good evidence of the presence of a windmill here at some former time. A 14th century Garendon Charter makes mention of a mill in Swannington, and this may possibly be the one indicated. On the other hand, this 14th century record may have reference to a water mill which we incline to believe once stood at the north end of Swannington near the present Calcutta Pumping Station, and whose dam was later on in the 17th century

utilised to work a waterwheel engine at a small coal mine there. The advent at the same spot about 1720 of one of the newly-invented "Newcomen Fire Engines" seems to have caused its primitive forerunner to be done away with; the dam evidently being pierced at the same time to allow Pollard Brook to resume its natural course. Save for the necessary culvert, the dam remained untouched until the opening of the Calcutta Colliery about the year 1850 by Mr. William Worswick when it was utilised to carry for a part of its course the short branch line leading from the foot of Swannington incline to the new coalmine. In order to effect this, a row of fine elm trees growing along its surface had to be cut down, and, judging by present appearance, the embankment heightened a few feet. The onward curve of the dam towards the south, made so, we presume, to render it stronger against the weight of the pent up water of the brook, affords today a not uninteresting specimen of the work of the old time engineers. In connection with the latter, it must be borne in mind that two centuries ago, the Talbot Wood, then about one hundred acres in extent, grew right down to the eastern bank of the brook, and this would cause the average flow of water to be on a much greater scale than it is at this present time.

The making of nails for local use would once be reckoned among the minor industries in the Cole Orton district. The last to carry on this trade was, we believe, one Thomas Marsden who nearly fifty years ago lived in the Woolroom ([this was in fact Charlie Marson, the maternal great grandfather of Samuel T Stewart. Please see the publication on the website entitled "Charlie Marson the Coleorton Master Nailmaker \(b.1816 Macclesfield - d.1902 Coleorton\) and his family. He actually died at his nailshop in the Woolrooms whilst living in the thatched cottage in Stoney Lane, Cole Orton. See also "James and Charles Marson - Nailmakers in Gelsmoor". Not a relative of Charlie Marson.](#))

An industry, that is now only known by tradition, once flourished in and around Coleorton. This was the making of hats, the headquarters of the trade being at Ashby de la Zouche ([see the publication on the website by Samuel T Stewart entitled "A History of Elverston's Yard"](#)).

As regards the Cole Orton branch of it, the business of hatmaking seems to have centred around Elverston's Yard, ([Rotten Row](#)), members of that family being engaged in it over a long series of years. One of the family, James Elverston, who died in 1823, was a maker of both silk and beaver hats which were taken on horse back round the countryside and sold to residents. James Elverston would seem to have seen the best days of the hat making industry. The Rev. J. Curtis, the Leicestershire historian, writing in the year 1831, records that the trade was then dying out at Ashby and Cole Orton.

Hat making however, in a simpler form lived on at Coleorton until the 1870s. This was the fashioning of the poke bonnets then affected by the Victorian generation of the fair sex. One of the last, if not the last, to carry on the trade was an old lady of the name of Betty Cooper whom some still alive will remember travelling the countryside carrying the cardboard boxes containing her wares slung over her shoulder. She lived, we are informed, in a cottage nearly opposite to the old Primitive Methodist Chapel in Cole Orton village.

Hand loom weaving though carried on extensively in Whitwick and Thringstone during the 18th and 19th centuries does not seem to have ever attained any real foothold in the old Cole Orton coalfield. There were, we have heard, a few silk weavers working in Cole Orton about a century ago, but we have not been able to come across any information concerning them. We imagine the trade to have been confined to a few isolated instances, and should be glad to know more concerning it.

(see the publications entitled "A History of Woolcombing, Yarn Spinning and Framework Knitting in Local Villages" and "Research into the Trade of Woollen Cloth Weaving at Griffydam" by Samuel T Stewart on the website)

The latter brings us to the end of our story. We have no doubt that some of our readers will be able to supplement various details we have given, and maybe correct them. But it must be remembered that when dealing with the subject of these past trades and occupations printed records are the exception, and not the rule. One has to rely for the most part on oral tradition, and oral tradition generally requires very careful sifting before any reliable conclusions can be arrived at. We have verified everything to the best of our ability, but, of course, absolute correctness in every detail cannot be vouched for.

THE END