CHAUNTRY MILLS – EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

Henry Byham – Mat Maker

Signature Henry Byham

MAT MAKING in Long Melford is reported to have died when the skill was introduced to prisons which undercut factory prices and consequently many men were unemployed.



The Mat Makers in this photo laid the foundation for a department that grew to produce coir matting and lettered and patterned mats which were sent all over the world. The mats were entirely hand-loomed and, in view of the physical strength required to operate the looms, the workforce was entirely male.

Henry Byham was born in Long Melford in 1843, the son of a cocoa mat weaver and a horse hair weaver. Out of work in 1885 and with a growing family, he led a group of out of work mat-makers on the long walk from Long Melford to Chauntry Mills in search of work. They asked if they could set up their looms to use the off-cuts from the clothing factory to make rag rugs. The response from the Gurteens was positive, they were found room on site and within a short space of time the company added a mat dept. to their business.

By 1891 Henry, a mat finisher, and his wife Mira, a hair cloth weaver were living in Chater's Yard, 48 High Street, with their 8 children. Chauntry Mills provided employment for the oldest three children. Kate (born 1871) was, like her mother, a hair cloth weaver; James (born 1874) was employed as a mat weaver; Herbert (born 1875) was an office boy in the Hair Factory.

Extension of Messrs. Gurteen's Factory.

For some time past Messrs. D. Gurteen and Sons have had their hands working overtime, the factory being kept open until eight o'clock. This fact alone is sufficient to prove the flourishing state of the business carried on by the firm. In addition to this, however, it may be stated that Messrs. Gurteen are about to extend their already large premises by the erection of a new and commodious building facing the Mill Road, starting from the corner of the Co-operative Society's bakery, and terminating against the factory boiler house, the old hair factory known as the Maltings—formerly in the tenancy of Messrs. Kolle and Son—being demolishing. The new building will be over 100 ft. in length, and 27ft. in width, and will possess four floors. This will not only improve the appearance of Mill-road, but will also be the means of widening the entire road by seven or eight feet, the frontage of the building being in a straight line with the adjoining blocks. The practicability of lighting the new premises with the electric light is also being considered. The work, which will cost over £2,000, will be carried out by Messrs. W. Mason and Son, contractors, who also prepared the plans

In September 1891 it was announced that an extension was planned. By 1892 a new four storey mat factory had been built in Mill Road. It employed 120 men.

The mat factory in Mill Road.



1890 Continued 10

13th Oct. Mat-Makers worked until 9 o'clock

14th — Mat-Makers worked until 9 o'clock

15th — At 12 o'clock Mrs Alex Webb was ordered out of the Cottage which she occupied for misconduct

15th — Mat-Makers worked until 10 o'clock

16th — Mat-Makers worked until 9 o'clock

17th — do do do do do

18th — do do do do do

25th — During the Week ending 25th October, the Mat-Makers worked until 9 o'clock

1st Nov. During the Week ending 1st November – the Mat-Makers worked until 9 o'clock

3rd Nov. At 10.15 P.M. a Fire was discovered in the Tyler Room Mat-Factory, which was extinguished by 12.15 from, and work resumed at 2 o'clock

8th — During the Week ending 8th November, the Mat-Makers worked until 9 o'clock

15th — During the Week ending 15th November, the Mat-Makers worked until 9 o'clock

19th — Mrs D. Gurteen Junr. laid the foundation Stone of the Mat Congregational School at 4 o'clock

21st — The Works of the Factory commenced at 8 o'clock instead of 6 o'

The Mat Makers worked long hours in 1890.

In April 1889, Henry applied to the Bench of the Petty Sessions to have his 13 year old son, Herbert, sent to an Industrial School as he was unable to manage him. Henry was described by Daniel (IV) as being honest and hard working. This obviously helped Herbert as just 2 years later he was employed in the Hair Factory office.

HAVERHILL.

PETTY SESSIONS—MONDAY.

Before Messrs. D. Gurteen, sen. (in the chair), D. Gurteen, jun., and the Rev. T. E. Marshall.

A CANDIDATE FOR AN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL.

Henry Byham, mat-maker, Haverhill, applied to the Bench to send his son Herbert to an industrial school, as he was unable to manage him. He stated that the boy had attended a school in Melford prior to his coming to Haverhill. He had secured situations for the lad in Haverhill, but he had been discharged through being dishonest. The lad wrote to Mr. Newman (in whose employ he was recently) in his father's name requesting him to supply him with a bicycle by paying 5s. per week. He had also borrowed money from various persons in his father's name, which he (the father) had had to repay.

The chairman asked Byham if he knew anything about his son having borrowed the money. Byham said he did not know of the theft until very recently.

Mr. D. Gurteen, jun., said the father was a honest, hard-working man.

The chairman, addressing the boy, said: You must take warning from what we do to-day, for if you go on in the manner you have been you will eventually be sent to gaol.

The Bench decided to send the boy to the union for a few days, and afterwards to an industrial school.

In March 1892 a substantial supper was provided to celebrate the opening of the new factory.

OPENING OF A NEW MAT FACTORY.

On Wednesday evening the members of the firm of Messrs. D. Gurteen and Sons, of Chauntry Mills, entertained the workpeople in the mat-making department—to the number of 120—and several others to a very substantial supper on the occasion of the opening of a new mat factory. The large room on the second floor of the new building was the scene of the gathering, and was tastefully decorated with flags, banners, &c., the general effect being of a most pleasing character.

In December 1895 electric lighting was installed in the Mat Department.

THE ELECTRIC LIGHT AT CHAUNTRY MILLS.—Messrs. D. Gurteen and Sons have entered into a contract with Messrs. Crampton and Co., of Cambridge and Yarmouth, to institute the electric light into the mat department at Chauntry Mills. The light will be generated by a dynamo driven by the present engine. It is expected to be finished early in January.

In 1896 the family moved to 3 Broad Street but by 1901 they had made 22 Broad Street their home. Henry was now a loom fitter.
Mira died in Haverhill in 1921 and Henry died four years later in Long Melford.

Family History HAVERHILL GROUP (Member of the Suffolk Family History Society) · HAVERHILL TOWN COUNCIL · PRO BONO PUBLICO · GURTEEN Since 1784