

St Laurence Lodge and the Cloth Industry

Pudsey has a long history of involvement with wool and textiles. For centuries, spinning and weaving were cottage industries in the town. The invention of the "flying shuttle" in 1733 and the "spinning jenny" in 1767 allowed much faster production of yarn and cloth. The introduction of steam power at the end of the 18th century now meant that production started to move into purpose built mills, with the first mill in Pudsey built in about 1792.

Eventually, over 30 mills were in operation in the town, all steam powered. As early as 1834, the town was described as "... one of the dirtiest and most unpleasant in the district". There was a local saying that the pigeons flew backwards to keep the soot out their eyes.

Most mills had a varied history. Fires were frequent and many businesses came and went, often collapsing as the national economy went into decline.

It is not surprising that the early history of St. Laurence Lodge was closely tied to the clothing industry. The official Lodge history contains much detail about the early days but does not dwell on the professions of its members. This paper will provide some additional material.

The Founders of the Lodge named on the Petition were:

John Symonds	Supt. of Police
Charles Cromack	Law Student
Robert Love	Physician & Surgeon
J W Taylor	Schoolmaster
J Edward Hinings	Draper
Joshua Hill	Builder
John Sewart	Inspector of Police
Joseph Nicholas Lee	Clerk in Holy Orders
John Cromack	Pawnbroker
M Banks Newell	Solicitor
Hugh Kershaw	Physician & Surgeon

Seven of the Founders came from Airedale Lodge no 387, meeting in Shipley. Curiously, there were no Petitioners connected with the cloth trade but that rapidly changed.

From the Consecration in 1889 to 1920, there were 24 joining members and initiates clearly tied to the clothing trade, plus several tanners and leatherworkers.

Here is some background to some of these members.

William Henry Banks

Initiated 1890, Worshipful Master in 1895.

The family firm was started by William's grandfather, later passing to his two sons James and Joseph, then called Messr. J & J Banks. Joseph died early but James continued to develop the

business and, unusually, had a paternal relationship with his workers. His son, William, was married in 1886 which the workers celebrated with a “substantial meat tea”.

James died in 1899. During his long life, he had not only restored the fortunes of the firm, but also played a very active role in the life of the town: civic, religious and political life.

The mill and its cloth manufacture now passed to William, being particular noted for its production of cloth for uniforms and for railway carriages.

Sadly, William was more interested in being a gentleman farmer than an industrialist. He eventually retired to his estate near Tadcaster, with the mill suffering from lack of investment and management. He died there in about 1920

Oliver A Jowett

Joined the Lodge in 1895 from Imperial George Lodge No. 78 in West Lancashire. Worshipful Master in 1905.

Oliver was born in Cleckheaton. How he came to be in Lancashire is not clear, but by 1891 he was a woollen and worsted manufacturer in Apperley Bridge. He then transferred his business to Valley Mill in Pudsey. Eventually, the business was merged with another manufacturer and no more is heard of Oliver.

George Andrew Jones

Initiated 1890.

George was born in 1839, the youngest of eight children. His parents kept a grocer's shop in Fartown, earning enough to have George privately educated. However his father died prematurely and George was sent to work at the Bankhouse worsted mill.

George, however, continued to study at Bradford Mechanics Institute and in 1866, set up a partnership with his brother William, later bringing in brother John to the firm of Messrs G A Jones & Co. making worsted material.

George moved into Hill Top House, in Fartown, eventually finishing with no less than 15 children and several servants. He too was a paternalistic employer, supporting his workers in hard times. However, he lived beyond his means and the firm went bankrupt in 1904. The family moved into rented accommodation in Fulneck, where George died in 1905.

Frederick Haley Jones

Initiated 1890

Frederick was one of the sons of George Jones and worked in the family firm. When it went bankrupt, he set up . with one of his brothers, a new worsted manufacturing business, but this was not successful and eventually taken over by another firm.

Nothing is known of Frederick's later history.

Elliot H Walker

Initiated 1895

Union Mill, built in 1827 in Valley Road had a chequered history. It was taken over in 1885 by Matthew Walker, grandfather of Elliot. When he died in 1909, the business passed to his son Ernest. Some years later, Elliot and his brother Herbert came into the business. It continued to thrive and its cloth manufacturing business eventually outgrew the mill. The business then moved to near Wakefield.

William Croft Forrest

Initiated 1912

William was a successful and wealthy cloth manufacturer in and around Pudsey. He established his first business initially in Yeadon and later Rawdon. In 1885 he purchased Prospect Mill in Cemetery Road. He built a large house near the mill and continued to invest in the business. Convinced that the other manufacturers were not forward thinking, he expanded the mill and installed a new and powerful mill engine.

He also took active part in civic life, serving as town mayor for seven years. In 1918 he moved to live in Roundhay, being knighted the following year for services to the Borough of Pudsey. He was also honoured with being made Pudsey's first freeman. Curiously, his son, Walter, who was also a partner in the business was elected as MP for Pontefract in 1918 and eventually also knighted in 1935. His major achievement was playing a large part in defeating a 1921 Bill which would have absorbed Pudsey, Calverley and Farsley into Leeds and Bradford.

William died in 1928 and Walter in 1939; both are buried in Pudsey cemetery.

This paper is partly based on "Pudsey's Mills" by Ruth Strong, published by Pudsey and District Civic Society.