

Chapter Thirteen

Scythemakers

John's Will¹

Benjamin's son John(2) also became a scythemaker in the parish of Norton, Derbyshire, and left a will. It is printed in full overleaf._

Waterfall Brook running through Norton and Bolehill, where he was brought up, may have been unreliable. He moved about two miles to the Sheaf River itself and took a forty-two year lease on Walk Mill. A note in the Norton Parish records says that as a scythe grinder, John was at Walk Mill in 1746. Because of his will we have more information on him. It is something of a surprise; although John had five natural children by his second wife Margaret, his will only mentions his loving wife and John's stepson Thomas Slack. John was very ill at the time and Margaret and Thoma were going to have to keep the family.

The clerk who wrote the document followed the form at the time. English kings still claimed the French throne until 1801. With the exception of Calais, English kings had not been kings of France since Henry lost the last vestige of Guienne in 1451! At the front of the will the clerk had appended the outcome of the Consistory Court hearing :

At Chesterfield the 6th May 1756, Let a Probate be granted to Margaret Tyzack the Executrix, A Power being reserved for T homas Slack the Executor to ask at Pleasure. Signed John Fletcher

1 LJRO B/C/11 Published with the permission of Lichfield Joint Record Office

John's Will 1755

In the name of God Amen I John Tyzack of Abbeydale in the Parish Norton and County of Derby Sythe Grinder being weak in body but of perfect memory do Constitute and appoint this my last Will and Testament in form and manner following. That is to say I give and bequeath unto Margaret my Loving Wife, and Thomas Slack her son, All my Goods and Chattles of all kinds as well quick† as dead, Household Goods and Wheel Gain s and pirticularly the Remander or tirm of Years yet to come of a Lease of forty two years of the House Land and Grinding Wheel where I now dwell together with the falls of two Spring Woods, and all other Apurtainances thereto belonging as mentioned in the sd Lease held from and under John Brelsford of Eckinton, Which said Margret Tyzack my loving Wife and Thomas Slack her son I do hereby Constitute and Apoint Executrix and Executor of this my last Will and Testament.

In Witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this twentyninth day of March in the twenty eight year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Second King of Inland Scotland France and Ireland and in the year of our Lord God 1755.*

Witnesses **Thomas Greaves** (signs)
 Samuel Crook (signs)

Beneath that is the cryptic comment,

She being sworn before me. Signed **Thos. White Snr.**

† The expression quick just means alive.

An Inventory of the Goods and Chattels of **John Tyzack** deceased in
Abbeydale in the parish of Norton and County of Derby

	£	s	d
Purse	0	:10	:0
Range and Grate and other things belonging to them	0	:10	:0
2 Smoothing Irons	0	:1	:0
Lond Settle	0	:2	:6
Warming pan & frying pan	0	:3	:0
Dressor & pewter Case	0	:4	:0
Pewter	0	:10	:0
A Clock	1	:0	:0
5 Chairs	0	:2	:0
1 Table 1 form 1 Buffit	0	:2	:0
In the Parlour are one hung Bed and one Trundle Bed and Bedding belonging to them	2	:0	:0
An Oval Table	0	:6	:0
One Chest	0	:1	:0
5 Chairs	0	:2	:6
1 Washing Tub	0	:1	:0
1 Sadle 1 pilgeon	0	:4	:0
In the Chamber over the House are 1 Bed	2	:0	:0
1 Trundle Bed & furniture	0	:15	:0
1 Chest 1 Box	0	:2	:0
5 Chairs	0	:2	:6
1 Little Table & Box	0	:1	:0
2 Wheels	0	:4	:0
1 form & Cradle	0	:1	:0
In the Chamber over the Parlour one Trundle Bed	0	:5	:0
3 Forms	0	:2	:0
1 Strick 1 peck Kneating Tub	0	:5	:0
In the Seller All the Brewing Vessels	0	:2	:0
1 Garhlock(?) 1 Mall 1 Spade and other odd things	0	:10	:0
One Barren Cow	4	:0	:0
All Ilplements(?)	0	:5	:0

	16	:15	:6

Appraisid Wm. Marsdly, John Parker (he marks)

The will includes an inventory of John's goods. It details the contents of the rooms in Walk Mill House. These show a tolerable standard of living. He certainly was not short of things to sit upon. There were at least twenty chairs and forms in the house altogether. There were two rooms downstairs, a kitchen or living room and a parlour. Upstairs were two bedrooms and somewhere was a cellar, which contained all John's brewing equipment! The inventory is on above.

Notice they had beds in the parlour. With five living children, plus Thomas Slack and the two parents, two bedrooms must have been a bit cramped. Also in the Parlour were John and Margarets' saddles. Hers was referred to as a pilgeon, today pillion or lady's saddle. In the bedroom over the house were two wheels, perhaps spinning wheels one imagines. Or were they spares for John's cart? Trundle beds made economical use of the space. One could wheel them about to get access to the other things. A strick, or today a strickle, was a tool for sharpening scythes. This was a hand tool and certainly was not the tool by which he earned his living. A peck was a two gallon measure. The Kneating tub is probably a kneading tub for bread making. A Garhlock was meant to be a gavelock or crowbar, a Mall a large wooden mallet perhaps for knocking on wheels or mending some aspect of a water wheel. A Barren Cow is one which can give no milk, but even that was worth keeping.

So if they had saddles where were the horses? They must have travelled by horseback, it seems unlikely that horses would be hired. At that time of course horses were quite expensive, much more so than cows. If John had been ill for a while perhaps they had sold the horses. John clearly had access to land in the lease because he enjoyed the falls of the woods. That is the wood and fruit etc., which fell to the ground. However one cannot be sure; the falls may have referred to the waterfalls and thus the value to be derived from their flow. Lady Spring Woods is a steep wooded hillside behind the Walk Mill. The trees were coppiced for charcoal burning. His cow also says that he was a farmer in a small way. It could have grazed in the wood and there was still some common land. This would have been normal at that time. John's inventory was towards the low end of the local range. It put him at about the level of a husbandman at the time. Hey analyses twenty-nine inventories of Ecclesfield cutlers from 1692 to 1789, in his book "The Rural Metalworkers of the Sheffield Region". Their total personal estates range from £2:2s:6d to £278:6s:10d, with the median being about £31:0s:0d. Where were John's scythe grinding tools and materials? There is also no record of any goods held in the mill.

Elsewhere in his book, Hey refers to evidence that scythe grinding was only a seasonal activity. That could explain why, when the inventory was taken on 6th May 1756, there was no work in progress. However it is also possible that the appraisers, William Marsdly and John Parker who in any case could not write, may have missed that. The first appraiser's name is probably a misspelling for William Marsden. He was the corn miller at Bradway Mill next door. Almost certainly by the time of his will John(2) had been ill for some time and the inventory reflects a poor standard of living with the sale of things like horses and equipment to make ends meet. Death at such a young age, 37 years, suggests that grinders' asthma could have brought his untimely end. This was a common disease of his trade.

John(2) was only thirty six years old when apparently weak in body, as the will says, he was ill enough to have a will placed in front of him for him to sign and seal. Of course we don't know what state of mind he was in at that time. He couldn't sign. John only marked. Maybe he was too weak. Who knows, maybe his hand was held. Soon after that he died and the will was proved in 1756. Margaret was given Probate and Thomas had to come back later to formally be given his executorship, presumably when he was twenty-one. It is quite probable that he was bequeathed the estate and Wheel Gains at eighteen years old by his stepfather, as the new man of the house. Thomas was born 25th January 1738 at Dronfield. He clearly was expected to look after his mother, (the widow of Samuel Slack and now of John Tyzack), and younger brothers.

John(2) was the first son to be raised in the Sheffield region and in a scythemaking family. He could not write. His father, Benjamin and all before him could sign their names. After John(2) we find no evidence of the ability to write again until we get to Henry born in 1809. So glassmaking seems somehow to have influenced the level of education, at least in the three R's. Those born between 1580 and 1684 could sign. Those born between 1719 and 1809, could not. It is quite possible that the income of the family compared to the average, was higher during the earlier period. Certainly as we have seen, glassmaking, in the early days, was very well paid.

Walk Mill was about a half mile above the Abbeydale works ¹. Seven other mills used the waters of the Sheaf above it. This river and its tributaries powered a total of thirty four mills, including some of the oldest. It is recorded that Thomas Slack, John(2)'s stepson, took over his position, so Thomas must have got his inheritance in due time.

Joseph and Thomas Crookes took over the mill after Thomas Slack. They may have been related to the Samuel Crook who witnessed the will. By 1797, Walk Mill was in the hands of Thomas Biggin. Biggin was a maker of hay and straw knives but in 1805 Biggin's executors were running the mill, as a sickle mill.

Jumping on for a moment and looking ahead to 1845 we find John(2)'s grandson Thomas becoming the tenant of the mill, in the name of Thomas Tyzack and Sons, saw makers. Grinding ceased there in 1864 when Thomas Tyzack, John's grandson, died. However, the mill continued in use later, despite adjacent work on the Midland Railway. The railway line opened in 1870 and followed the Sheaf valley ². This affected many mills along its track.

We know more about the mill above Walk Mill, known as Bradway Mill. In 1785 Bradway Mill, which had previously been a corn mill under William Marsden, was converted to scythe grinding, the tenant being Samuel Biggin followed by our Thomas

¹ David Crossley, Water Power on the Sheffield Rivers

² A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain Vol. VIII South and West Yorkshire, by David Joy, Page 170

Slack. Thomas certainly moved about and left a trail in the records. Surveys of both 1806 and 1816 record the owner as Edward Sampson and the tenant as Thomas Slack. The site was still a grinding wheel. A Sheffield directory of 1787 shows that Thomas Slack did not desert his step-brothers. This directory records Benjamin Tyzack, who was the youngest son of the family, as a scythemaker at Bradway. He must have been there with Thomas Slack. So Thomas appears to have had tenure of Bradway for thirty years, a long time. For at least part of that time he worked with Benjamin, his stepbrother.

Thomas Slack was the son of John(2)'s second wife Margaret by her first marriage to Samuel Slack. John(2)'s first marriage was to Ruth and they had one child, Mary, who was baptised on 1st January 1746 at Norton Derbyshire. Daughter Mary married Thomas Fisher on 20th June 1774 aged 28, rather old for those days.

Margaret Slack came from Dronfield about 2 miles from Norton. What a small world it was then? Margaret gave birth to five children by her husband John(2), four of whom survived. We do not know anything about son Paul. Son Philip was a fendermaker. He died at 48. This was later also to become the trade of his nephew, Samuel. Perhaps Samuel learnt his trade from uncle Philip.

Benjamin, the youngest son, married Martha Oates and later a Mary. He was the scythemaker of Bradway.

John(2)'s sister Mary married John Nettleship of Langwith in Norton, Derbyshire. A common name in Nottinghamshire, Nettleship was very uncommon in Derbyshire. So when "*Mr Nettleship's granaries were raided on 26th August, 1756*", it was probably the granaries of Mary's husband. "*A turbulent mob held the town at its mercy and also raided the Pond Mill. The parish constable had been routed and only saved his life by barricading himself, with others in the parish church.*"¹

Chief child from this line was John(3), who was christened at Norton, Derbyshire 21st November 1747. Forty-nine years later aged 49 years, he was buried at Ecclesall. This was not a great journey for a life time but in those days the roads were bad!

In parts of Yorkshire, a three horse team was necessary to pull a shallow wagon, seven feet long and three and a half feet broad. Few persons travelled even to neighbouring towns. Roads were mainly adapted for packhorse². The stage wagon was first established on the road by Wright of Mansfield, at the beginning of the century. Fifteen hundred tons of manufactured goods had to be sent each year to Doncaster along almost impassable roads. Because of this situation a bill to make the Don navigable for boats of 20 tons was passed in 1726. This would enable ships to reach Tinsley, three miles from Sheffield. A canal cut was also proposed from Brightside to another Walk Mill, that is from Tinsley to Sheffield, but this proved too

¹ R. E. Leader, A History of the Company of Cutlers.

² J. Hunter, History and Topography of the Parish of Sheffield.

difficult. Navigability of the Don, when the work was completed helped a lot, but it did not completely solve the problem of getting the goods to market. Here is a railway prospectus of 1831.

" A large proportion of the manufacture of Sheffield is consumed in Manchester or exported from Liverpool. There is no other way of transporting this merchandise than by horse and cart over the mountains of Derbyshire, or by canal. The trip over the mountains is very expensive. The waterways offer a very circuitous route of ninety miles in length, that are scarcely less expensive. Both lines of conveyance occasion an extraordinary sacrifice of time. It requires two days to pass and repass between Sheffield and Manchester. By Railway it can be done in one day, with six to eight hours for transacting business.

By	Canal	eight days	28s/ton	
By	Horse & Cart	two days	34s/ton	
By	Railway	four hours	20s/ton	"

Sheffield was really misled by this railway prospectus. When the line was opened in 1840, from Derby to Leeds, Sheffield was left on a five-mile siding. Only in 1870 was a direct line from Chesterfield opened going through Sheffield.

Farmer John(3)

With two in the family dying so young, it is tempting to believe the grinding work was responsible. Many grinders died young with a disease known as Grinders' Asthma. The hunched posture and the dust were the cause. Some mills tried to extract the dust but the dust hoods got in the way of the work. Scythe grinding was a wet process and not so bad as some other dry grinding operations carried on in the cutlery trade. However we cannot be sure that son John(3) spent much time grinding. He was also a farmer. Unlike his father and his grandfather before him he only worked part of his time on tools. He turns up in various guises. However, as was common in many other areas at this time, he had another job on the side. Referring again to Hey¹, dual occupation was a common feature of most of the rural metalworkers of the Sheffield region.

So we find John(3) as a scythe grinder at the baptism of son John, in 1774, as a farmer at the baptism of Thomas in 1779, and William in 1781. By Philip in 1784, he calls himself a scythesmith. The conversion does not last long, because by Elizabeth in 1786 he's a farmer again. He is still farming at Samuel's baptism and has even gone down a peg by Ann 1792, then he's a husbandman. Finally in 1794 at his final child's baptism, Lydia, he's farming again.

¹ Op. cit.,

So what are we to make of him? At least we know that he must have had the equipment to carry on the craft of making scythes because it was his prime means of livelihood around 1784. No record has been found to show whether John(3) owned his farm or rented it. From the birth records it seems most probable that John(3) had a bit of land or was a tenant in Ecclesall and that he made a few scythes. He was lucky not to be one of the new breed of factory workers then. During his life's span began the worst factory conditions of any period of our history. Machines were unguarded, hours were long, and the conditions of hygiene were poor. 'Factory fever', probably typhus, was common.

John(3)'s father died when he was just eight years old and left only £16. He did leave the residue of a lease on Walk Mill but Thomas Slack probably took that over. There is a Fairbanks enclosure map which shows farm land of Widow Tyzack. That was just Margaret's inheritance of the remainder of the lease of the Walk Mill. She was probably joint tenant with Thomas Slack, her son. So where did the money come from which enabled John(3)'s sons to start up their sizeable tool businesses?

The answer to the mystery almost certainly is to be found with the Binneys.

John(3)'s first wife was young Rebecca Binney. John married her when she was just coming up to sixteen years old and John was twenty-five. Rebecca's father Thomas Binney was a wealthy man. When he died in 1784, he left many houses, a farm and a coalmine. John almost certainly came to farming when old man Binney set him up. Thomas Binney also had a Smithy. That would have given John opportunity to use his skills as a scythesmith. So John became a farmer by marriage. He had married Rebecca on 1st June 1772. Alas, she was to die in childbirth soon after in 1774. (Later for Binney pedigree)

Imagine the fix in which this left John! With an eye to the main chance he noticed that Thomas had other daughters. Thomas Binney had married twice. First to Sarah Ibberson and then to Martha Unwin. Rebecca was the daughter of Martha Unwin, but old man Thomas had another young unmarried daughter, Sarah, who was the daughter of Sarah Ibberson. John(3) didn't want to lose his farm. What better, (John thought), than keep the family connection by taking Sarah for his wife!

Unwittingly John had stumbled into a trap. To marry a deceased wife's sister was not permissible then in Canon Law. The relationship was in the prohibited degrees. The Common Prayer Book had carried the prohibition since 1662. People did however marry, usually away from home and until 1835 the marriage was not void but voidable by legal action. It was not until 1907 that a marriage act made it lawful. So John got his skates on and by 20th March 1775, he had arranged to get a licence to marry Sarah Binney. As it was during Lent, did he give that as the reason for needing a licence? We know the real reason: he didn't want the banns read out in the local church. Just to confirm the covert nature of the arrangement John took Sarah to Handsworth, several miles away for the ceremony, which must have needed a horse

or a pony and trap. Marriage at Handsworth, very inconvenient for any guests, could have only been to avoid publicity. He did a good job; I only tracked this down by hard work and the help of a distant relative!

Sarah's father, Thomas Binney, farmed at High Storrs, where they really lived. It is at least eight miles from Handsworth. The local church was Ecclesall. So what did Sarah find so attractive about the church at Handsworth? In the marriage licence John was said to be a farmer of Trap Lane. A recent photograph shows this lane in the condition it would have been in John's time. The roadway for vehicles has a loose surface of earth, whilst a raised "causey", or pavement runs along one side. There is one going concern farm, called Meadow Farm and farther along the lane, another house called Old Trap Lane Farm. Either could be the remains of John's farm.

Trap Lane



Author tries scythe grinding



Thomas Binney's will below_ is a mine of information. Not only do we get the relationships of Sarah Binney, John Tyzack and Martha but we have John Tyzack grandson. Now the grandson, John(4), was born 20th March 1774, in Ecclesall. Rebecca was buried on 25th

March 1774. So John lost his wife, Rebecca, at the birth of their first child. Grandfather Thomas Binney, writing his will in 1784 made a provision for young John to enjoy in eleven years time.

John(3) had fallen on his feet and acquired his farm with the help of Sarah and Rebecca's father, Thomas Binney. Before his marriage to Rebecca, John (3) was a scythe grinder. At the baptism of Rebecca's son, John(4), Ecclesall parish register tells us that his father, John (3), was just a scythe grinder. He started to call himself a farmer when he married Sarah. Trap Lane is about three miles north of where John(3)'s father worked at Walk Mill.

Because scythemakers in the region at that time practised dual occupations, their standard of living appears to have been somewhat above that of the purely urban manufacturers or "little mesters". Hey¹ describes one Robert Gillot of Norton Lees. In 1628, he had three kine, and two calves, six swine, and a mare. This would place him on the level of Husbandman of that time. He was described in his will as a scythe-grinder. He had one hundred rough scythes in his inventory. *"Most of the rural craftsmen were probably part-time farmers, before the population explosion of the eighteenth and nineteenth century."*

People followed a limited number of trades in the parishes of Ecclesall and Attercliffe in 1780. The following is a brief summary of a parish register page from each of those two parishes then: -

Cutlers	26	Cordwainers	2	Scythe grinders	1
Scissorsmiths	14	Poor	2	Colliers	1
Labourers	6	Butchers	2	Potters	1
Farmers	3	Victuallers	1	Tailors	1
Grinders	3	Filemakers	1	Forgemen	1
Publicans	2	Silversmiths	1	Masons	1

Of the sixty-nine persons listed 38% are cutlers and 20% are scissor makers. Of the three persons who called themselves grinders it is quite possible that one or more of those ground knives or scissors also. So 60% of the working population were earning their living from the cutlery trade and that figure rises a little higher if cutlery includes scythe grinding. A cordwainer by the way originally was a worker in Spanish goatskin leather from Cordova. Later it became a name used for shoemakers.

¹ D. Hey, The Rural Metalworkers of the Sheffield Region

At the time the progress of the enclosure of arable land was very far from complete. Immense tracts of moorlands remained and there were large heaths and wastelands around. Towards the end of John (3)'s life the Enclosure Acts were to accelerate. Soon after 1790, Parliament passed around 50 private enclosure Bills a year. Sheffield saw disturbances, which resulted from these in 1790. For the most part, the land enclosed produced corn. Sheffield was not really an area of flat countryside and consequently not a cereal growing area. The Sheffield area with its many precipitous fields was not so suitable as it was for grazing. Moorland, sandy heath, old common pasture or waste, nevertheless was enclosed. A decline in the number of yeomen, small farmers and cottagers usually accompanied or followed the enclosure.

Heirs of Thomas Binney appear in the schedule of lands allotted in the enclosure act of 1788. Thomas left several parcels of land in his will. For three of the parcels he was named as the allottee. These were Little Common, Greystones Cliff, and Dobbin Hill. None of these was left to John and Sarah. They had a share in property in Blind Lane, which was about where Holly Street S1, is now. Although it may be no coincidence that John and Sarah's youngest son Samuel lived at both Greystones and at Dobbin Hill later.

Almost certainly the change in the nature of farming was the reason for all John(3)'s sons to go into toolmaking. The trend was to larger farms with the need for more capital to finance the newly invented equipment and fertilisers. Bigger annual planting or stock purchases also demanded increased outlay. It probably took more resources than they had to retain their rights to any lands. All the sons went into tool or metalworking. Life on the farm had no attractions.

First Name	Surname	Mother	Spouse	Bequest	Address	Living at	Relationship
Thomas	Binney	Lidday		Testator		Highstorrs	Yeoman
Samuel	Binney	Sarah		Property	Dobbin Hill	Highlane head	Son
Thomas	Binney	Martha		Property	Little Common		Son
Abraham	Binney	Martha		Property	Little Common		Son
William	Binney	Sarah		Twenty £'s			Son
Jonah	Binney	Martha		Property	Nether Green		Son
Joseph	Binney	Sarah		Twenty £'s			Son
Elizabeth	Binney	Sarah	Joshua Osborne	Thirtyfive £'s			Daughter
Sarah	Binney	Sarah	John Tyzack	Thirty £'s			Daughter
Lydia	Binney	Martha		Thirty £'s			Daughter
Amelia	Binney	?		Thirty £'s			Daughter
William	Binney	Sarah		Property	Graystones		Son
Samuel	Binney	Sarah		Property Share	Blind Lane		Son
William	Binney	Sarah		Property Share	Blind Lane		Son
Joseph	Binney	Sarah		Property Share	Blind Lane		Son
Mary	Binney	?	William Bartin	Property Share	Blind Lane		Daughter
Sarah	Binney	Sarah		Property Share	Blind Lane		Daughter
Elizabeth	Binney	Sarah		Property Share	Blind Lane		Daughter
Martha	Binney	Unwin	Thomas Binney	Farm Share	Highstorrs		Wife
Thomas	Binney	Martha		Farm Share	Highstorrs		Son
Martha	Binney	Unwin		Coal Mines on Farm	Highstorrs		Wife
Thomas	Binney	Martha		Coal Mines on Farm	Highstorrs		Son
John	Tyzack	Rebecca		Ten £'s			Grandson
TENANTS mentioned in Will							
Dobbin Hill		George Wilde					
Little Common		Sampson Brookshaw, John Abel, James Wilde					
Nether Green		George Skelton, Widow Green, John Ridge, Widow Rhodes, John Worren, William Ashforth, Thomas Binney Testator.					
Graystones		Amos Ridge					
Blind Lane		Samuel Lee, Samuel Lee the younger, William Stones,					
		Francis Cockin, Jacob Darwin, Henry Rollinson					