

Chapter Eighteen

Toolmakers of Old Street

Shoreditch

Sheffield born Henry Tyzack, the sawmaker, was thirty years old in 1839. He was at that age when the ambition of youth blends with the confidence of maturity. At thirty, unable to resist the lure of a good market for saws, he moved his family from Sheffield to Shoreditch. They settled in Curtain Road.

Curtain Road, in the 1840's, was the home of the furniture industry. Furniture uses wood and wood cutting demands saws. Henry had a nose for sawdust. Until the mid-nineteenth century the quality firms of the West End and City produced most of the furniture made in London. There was very little furniture making in the East End before the 1830s and 40s. According to the 1801 census only one firm was noted in Curtain Road (Messrs. Brown, cabinet makers and upholsterers), a street which 50 years later was to be the nerve centre of the East End furniture trade. From about 1840 there arose a demand for lower priced furniture. The East End trade developed to meet the need, starting mainly with chairs but soon growing to cover most articles. The trade grew rapidly from the 1840s and became one of the main occupations of that area. It was always highly concentrated in London. From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century just under two-fifths of all furniture makers in England and Wales worked in the capital, where the core of the East End trade were the small workshops where long hours produced cheap furniture. Most furniture workshops, even those of the West End, were accessible to a lively saw merchant from Curtain Road.

The Napoleonic wars caused a dock building boom. It attracted thousands of labourers and their families to the East End, which developed an industrial character but where overcrowding from the City brought disease. By the year 1799 a large vinegar works, built on the northeast corner of the City Road and Old Street, added to the malodour of the area. Housing conditions rapidly worsened in the 1830's. Smoke from the brick yards cast a pall. This new development began in the early years of the nineteenth century with the opening of the East India and West India docks. Timber yards and saw mills, which sold and prepared the woods imported through those docks, appeared nearby and some furniture men moved nearer their sources of wood. The opening of the Regents Canal in 1820 spurred it all on but not all timber yards and saw mills were on the banks of the Canal; many were in the main furniture making

streets themselves. The yards and mills supplied a small but growing number of master craftsmen who worked to orders sub-contracted to them by larger firms. These masters usually employed between two to five men or boys. The move from worker to independent master was so easy to make that many skilled craft workers considered it when they hit hard times.

Many found themselves in just such a situation in the harsh economic times of the 1830s and 1840s and the small master system rapidly took root. There were some firms in the East End which sold directly to retailers but they were in the minority. There were many timber yards but the largest was the City Sawmills in the New North Road. Cabinet makers, chair makers, carpenters and houses used as furniture making shops operated all over the locality. Chairs were amongst the first items of furniture to be made in the East End and from about 1790 to 1803 Stubbs's Chair Manufactory in City Road and Brick Lane produced Gothic and Windsor chairs in yew together with dyed and stained chairs, garden furniture and wheelchairs for invalids. Other chair manufacturers grew up as the East End trade developed, with firms often specialising in one or two types of chairs. Chair work was broken into stages with a single item passing through several workers. Each would perform a few tasks and family members in the one or two rooms of their home often carried out operations. They crowded into the courts and alleys of the area. South of the parish was the centre for the furniture trade but impoverished poor in increasing numbers were packed into thousands of identical dwellings. They were victims of the population explosion. In 1821 Shoreditch had 53,000 inhabitants. By 1841 there were 83,000 and this number reached its peak in 1861 at 129,000. In 1839 the second Commons Select Committee on Metropolitan Improvements published ideas to stop the growth of filthy and unhealthy slums, including Shoreditch¹. Maps with the report showed demolition and new roads south of Old Street but high costs prevented the scheme going ahead.

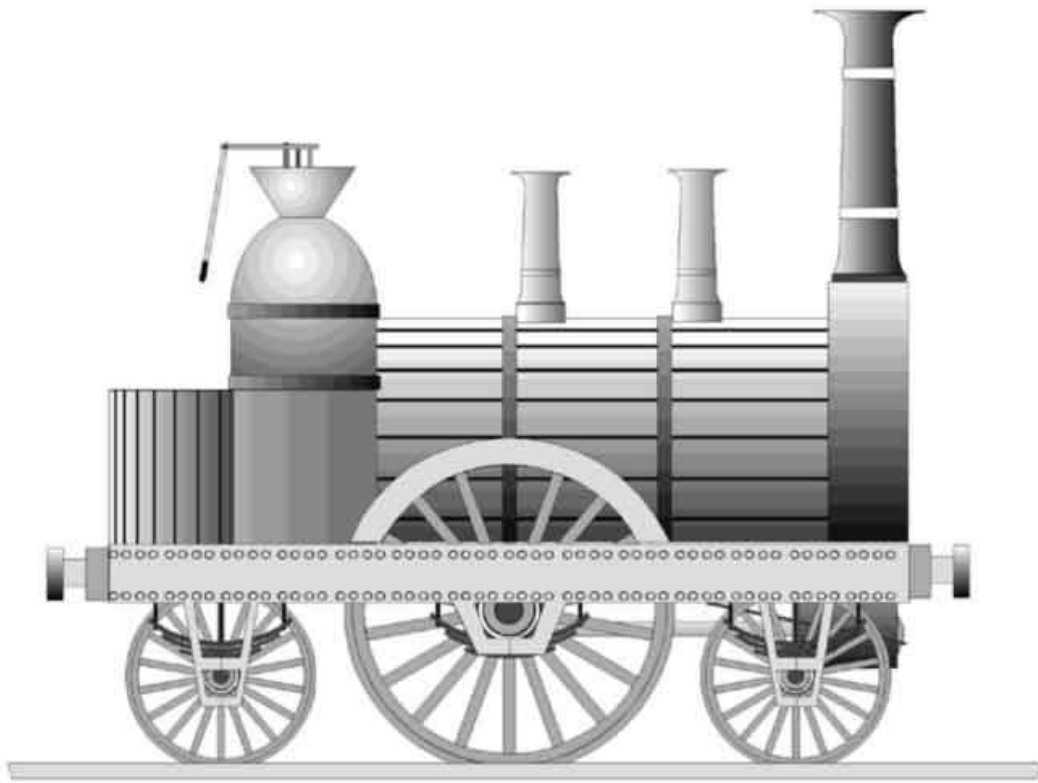
Henry's move corresponded with the opening of the Sheffield to Rotherham Railway line and the Masbrough to London line. Masbrough is within a mile of Rotherham's centre. Before the Masbrough station had opened in 1840, the only way to London was by coach. Journey time from the Tontine Inn was about twenty-six hours. The Inn was a mile north of the present site of Sheffield Railway Station. It was built where Exchange Street is now. Thirteen coaches a day left the Inn. It had the hectic scene of bustle of any transport terminus. Sheffield's growing links with the outside world of commerce, caused an increase in traffic. The inn's courtyard rang to the clip of hooves, the rattle of wheels on the cobbles and the commands of the ostlers.²

Then one day in May 1840 all fell quiet. From that day the North Midland Railway pulled into Wicker station Sheffield and made the journey to London possible in nine and a half hours.³ Henry moved to Shoreditch around the time of the first trains.

¹ Hackney Archives, Map SH 912:1839

² *Sheffield*, Mary Walton

³ *A Regional History of Railways*, David Joy



We don't know whether Henry went to Shoreditch to sell saws made by his relatives in Sheffield, or whether he was striking out on his own. A saw did not need much for its manufacture, just a fly-press, a vice for setting and sharpening and a small furnace. But Henry's younger brother Joseph had just started up a business at 160 Fitzwilliam Street Sheffield, and his father Samuel was also a sawmaker. Perhaps the move may have been to act as London merchant for these or for the saw business of Henry's uncle, Thomas Tyzack. He also had uncle William who set up his Sheffield tool business as early as 1812. Much Sheffield output was exported. In spite of that, most of the exporting during the eighteenth century was done through London merchants.¹ Probably Henry came to London originally, as the marketing arm of the family businesses.

Henry Tyzack and his wife Sarah Story registered their children and it showed the time of their move. Daughter Louisa was born in Ecclesall in 1838. Her sister Elizabeth Harriett, was born in London in 1841. After Elizabeth, all of Sarah's children were London born.

¹ *History & Topography of the Parish of Sheffield*, J. Hunter, edited by Gatty.



Henry's first shop, No. 53, was located just east of Tabernacle Square and just before the exit of Crown Street but on the opposite side. Behind the premises were the alleyways of Bath Place. Just behind, where the shops alongside No. 53, were later built, a natural spring had been used, from the seventeenth century, to cure rheumatic pain. The baths there were large, twenty feet by thirty feet.¹ Henry's shop was just three hundred yards from the large notorious vinegar factory built by 1799, on the corner of Old Street and City Road. On the opposite corner was the City of London Lying-in Hospital, St. Luke's, a purely charitable institution. Sarah produced three of her children in its beds, Elizabeth, Maria and Frederick. Matron Mary Widgen reported the births. She must have been a stickler for promptitude. Henry and Sarah had not even decided on a name for poor Maria when her birth was reported. Just Female Tyzack, it says in the index.

Although Henry went to Shoreditch in 1839 his address there does not show until 1846, in the birth certificate of son Ebenezer. Then, by 1848, nine years after he came to Shoreditch, he took the shop at No. 53 Old Street. This was a good centre for the furniture trade. There were many small businesses ranged around, down to home workers making one component. There are still some, even today.

His neighbours were as shown below.

47	Thomas Mundy	Butcher
48	William Morgan	P. Surgeon
49	Thomas Robson	Fixture Dealer
49	Henry Chas. Simpson	Hairdresser
50	Frederick Cordaroy	Hatmaker
51	Samuel Andrew William	Hairdresser
53	Henry Tyzack	Saw and Toolmaker
61	Jas. Peak	Fixture Dealer
62	Owen Owen	Turkey & Whetstone Mnfr

¹ Cox, 344-5; Survey, 25-9.

There were some others between Nos. 62 and 68 and then came the Tabernacle. Henry took over the shop from John Taylor a whitesmith. Today we would call John Taylor a tinsmith, a worker in tinned or white iron.

Furniture ruled. Take Hoxton Market, just off Boot Street, where later we find Henry, of seven listed addresses, apart from the *George & Dragon*, the remainder were furniture makers.

J. Goddard	french polisher
A. Keer	cabinet manufacturer
J. Burgess	easy chair and couch manufacturer
W. Wilkins	cabinet manufacturer
T. Crawley	chairmaker
C. Hughes	cabinet manufacturer

Close by in Curtain Road, there were two timber yards. Another large one lay behind what was later to become the site of son Samuel's shop at No. 8 Old Street.

Sarah died on 18th April 1848, at No. 53 Old Street. The family lived over the shop. She was only thirty-nine and died of Pulmonary Tuberculosis. Clearly the living conditions of the area did not help Sarah at all.

Henry's 1851 census return shows he was employing one man.

In 1855 Henry and family left the house to which he had grown accustomed. He had first occupied No. 53 in 1848. His wife Sarah had died there and several of his Shoreditch children, including Louisa's, were born there. Now suddenly he abandoned No. 53. He went across the road and took up residence in No. 36 Old Street. His business went too. Why is not clear.

The previous occupant of No. 36 had been another Henry, Henry Wilson. Wilson was a leather seller, another supplier to the furniture trade. Next door was Jacob West at No. 37. Jacob was an ironmonger, and that was more in keeping with Henry's trade. On the other side, James Sheath had his gutta-percha factory. Modern plastics have almost washed out the memory of gutta-percha. It was probably used then in upholstery. Later it found a use in golf balls and then in submarine cables. Today it still finds favour with dentists in filling root canals. Ouch!

On the 31st March 1856, Thomas George Corbett of Elsham Lincolnshire made a contract with a builder, Arthur Wilson. In view of the expenses borne by Wilson, Corbett would grant him a piece of land in Tower Street Hackney. During the building Corbett arranged that Henry Tyzack should build an additional house on the London Lane front of the site.

Henry Tyzack signed the documents himself. This document was the first evidence that Henry could write. His was not a flowing hand. There are at least two hesitations



in the signature. One can imagine a tongue firmly held in cheek. Henry signed this part of the deal but with his poor literacy may not have been aware of the traps. Should he fail to make due payments, Corbett could end it by applying for a declaration of Henry's bankruptcy !

Henry did not make the payments or proceed with the planned work. Corbett gave notice to end the building agreement and Henry was duly declared bankrupt¹.

At that date Henry was running his business of tool manufacturing at No. 36 Old Street and at No. 11 Boot Street. At the time of the settlement there was a large stock in trade and other articles and materials.

To avoid further strife and litigation Corbett's solicitors, Bartle John Laurie Frere of Lincoln's Inn, made a proposal. They suggested that the creditors' assignees, Robert Marsden, of Sheffield, and James Miles, a merchant of Shoreditch, should buy the building, and other materials on the premises. Marsden and Miles should also buy all stock in trade and goodwill articles of Henry Tyzack. Marsden and Miles offered six hundred pounds.

Of the six hundred pounds, five hundred was considered payment for the stock etc. The balance of one hundred pounds was the money for the rights under the said building agreements. This valuation gives some idea of Henry's scale of operations at this time, (1858). A bradawl at the time cost about two and one half old pence, a jack plane say five shillings. Therefore, this amount represented maybe about four thousand pieces.

With the bankruptcy order in his pocket, Corbett arranged to sell all Henry's chattels and used five hundred pounds to pay for the seized goods. With the remaining one hundred pounds, he bought out Henry's rights under the agreement. Henry thus finished one hundred pounds worse off, plus all the disruption of his business. How much he had left, after clearing his other creditors is not clear. Marsden and Miles were given the right to enter the premises of No. 36 Old Street and No. 11 Boot Street. They could take possession of the stock etc.

¹ Hackney Archives, Bankruptcy Indenture 1858, Reference M4404/1-2

Henry's tough break, perhaps from lack of reading skill, did not deter him. He seemed to push on with his business, because work at No. 36 Old Street continued until 1861, when Henry was fifty-three years old. He appeared there in the 1861 census when he was employing two men. Nineteen years old Elizabeth, his daughter, was also a sawmaker there. Soon after all this the business was transferred to his son.

Henry had been a man of adventure. Samuel, the eldest son¹, did not seek his fortune elsewhere, like his roving father. He simply settled for a smoky old shop next to the railway station.

In 1860, Samuel acquired the lease of No. 8 Old Street, probably with dad's help. No. 8 was the plot right up against the North London Railway line, next to what became Shoreditch Station. No. 8 did not appear as an address in 1853, only No. 9. By the end of 1850 the railway had linked Camden town with the Docks. The North London Railway line from Kingsland to Broad Street Station was built and opened in the year 1865. Broad Street Station was opened in 1866. An act dated 26th August 1846, 9 & 10 Vic. c. cccxcvi, enabled the North London Railway. There must have been great railway building works alongside No. 8. It was right next to the ugly iron box bridge,



¹ An old faded scrap of pedigree drawn from memory by a descendent of Frederick, one of Henry's sons, shows a William as Henry's eldest born in 1830 and shot in USA. It seems likely, as Henry married in 1830 and Samuel was not born until 1933. So far I have been unable to trace a William son of Henry.

which is still there. However, on the 6th January 1871 there was a renumbering ordinance. Thus, in place of No. 8, we find Samuel now in possession of No. 345. In the 1871 census, Samuel reported five employees, at No. 345. That year he signed a twenty-one year lease for 50 pounds per year for the shop.

In 1877 the North London Railway, which was the freeholder, put the lot up for sale. Altogether it totalled fifty feet by thirty-two feet, a mere sixteen hundred square feet. Samuel must have bought it because when he died on 3 August 1903 Samuel bequeathed the freehold of Nos. 343 and 345 Old Street to his wife Emily, his son Horace Tyzack and son-in-law Henry Dunkley Carter.

He left all his business interest, goodwill and use of the freehold in the property to his son Edgar Tyzack, 1877-1959. Edgar's business was also charged to pay £1,000 between his brothers and sister, Horace, Arthur, Emily and Oscar. Edgar found this an enormous burden for the run down state of the business after Samuel's long illness before he died. He challenged the bequest in court but lost. Edgar eventually prospered and rebuilt the enterprise.

Handsaws	8	10	12	14	16	in.
Steel Blued Back	3/6	3/9	4/3	5/-	5/9	each
Brass Back	5/-	5/3	5/9	6/6	7/3	„

Apple Wood Handles with polished Edges

A catalogue dated 1911¹ and printed on credit for Edgar, lists over 3,000 different tools, mostly imported. These saws, priced here were made by Henry Disston & Sons of Philadelphia USA as were most of the saws.

By now there was another shop. As well as the one at Nos. 343 & 345 Old Street, there was one at No. 153 Shoreditch High Street.

Henry and his second wife Louisa had a daughter and a son. Walter Henry, the son, was born in the last quarter of 1853, in Shoreditch. In 1869, when he reached sixteen, his father Henry, aged sixty, sniffed sawdust again. This time Henry took Walter Henry, and Louisa to High Wycombe, in Buckinghamshire. That was in 1869 when Henry realised that the furniture trade was no longer confined to London's Curtain Road. We find all three of them at No. 29 Oxford Street on the night of the 1871 census. As usual dad was head of the household and a sawmaker but Walter Henry was also a sawmaker. A sizeable furniture industry was established around High Wycombe, in Bucks. *The Directory of High Wycombe 1875*, records a daily output of four thousand seven hundred chairs.

¹ Hackney Archives, Reference 331.3, Y7521

At sixteen, Walter Henry served in the shop at No. 29 Oxford Street High Wycombe. Over the shop it said, "Henry Tyzack Saws" but Henry returned to live in Hoxton.

Walter Henry remained at High Wycombe. Walter had two sons. One became mayor of High Wycombe in 1931. The other became proprietor of a furniture factory in Slater Street in 1907. A *Tyzack Road* in the town was named after the Mayor of High Wycombe, 1931-21.

High Wycombe was too dull for Henry. His son, could be trusted to look after that business. Action was in Shoreditch with Samuel's shops and the business of the other sons. By 1875, Henry, partially retired, was back living at No 7, Somerset Place, Hoxton. Henry died in 1876 and his second wife Louisa outlived him by twenty years.

Shoreditch, covered just one square mile. It had grown faster than any other London parish in the first half of the century. Demolition made in the 1860's, for the rail link between Dalston and Broad Street, ousted many locals. It came within feet of ejecting Samuel. Sanitary conditions began to improve after the Metropolis Management Act of 1855. In 1864 the sewer system was completed.

After Samuel died in 1903, the Tyzack shop by the station remained in his name until 1905. From 1905 the directory records that Edgar renamed the shops as "Samuel Tyzack and Sons". Edgar had no sons, which was why he tried, unsuccessfully, to adopt my father. Later he saw another chance to continue the family name. He tried to get Cecil Tyzack, his older step-brother's son, into the business, but they argued and fell out. As a result, about 1936, Cecil started yet another Tyzack tool company, which still exists at Nos. 79-81 Kingsland Road. Late in his life Edgar had a daughter Margaret, and the shop by the station continued to trade under the family name until 1987. Parry's Tools had been a competitor. Parry died and his widow offered the business to Edgar, following Parry's wish. Edgar bought it and sold his railway site. The two businesses were merged in the smaller premises of Parry's at No. 329 Old Street. It continues to operate with a smart green sign saying **Parry Tyzack**. Alas there is no one with the family name now involved.

Today the large red brick building built by Edgar, still exists on the site of the original shop at No 345. It no longer carries the Tyzack name.

At No. 345, it was now mostly imported saws but Henry's descendants were still making saws around Old Street. By 1911 Ebenezer Henry, his youngest son, had a saw workshop in Kingsland Passage just up at the northern end of Kingsland Road. He was born in Shoreditch on 10th November 1846. Ebenezer married Emma Lipscombe in 1864 and they had seven children of whom the youngest surviving son was Sydney Reuben, my grandfather, born in 1879.

Ebenezer did not like his first name. At his marriage to Emma Lipscombe he gave his name as Henry Ebenezer. Even as early as the 1851 census he was referred to as Henry. By 1896, a year before his death in 1897, "Henry Tyzack Sawmaker" was at Nos. 9 & 10 Kingsland Green.

On the twentieth of October 1897, Henry Ebenezer signed a will. He was then living at No. 89, Culford Road, De Beauvoir Town in the County of Middlesex, just a quarter mile from his shop. He left his household furniture, plate, linen, china, books, (he could read!), pictures, glass ornaments and other household effects to Charlotte Gladwin. Charlotte, whoever she was, also got his silver lever watch, gold chain and gold ring.

His vices, benches, fly presses, shears, anvil and gas engine and everything appertaining to the manufacture of saws, he left to his youngest son Sydney Reuben. That list contained the tools of the trade used then for saw making. Sydney also got the ordinary stock in trade on the premises, which Ebenezer rented at Nos. 9 and 10 Kingsland Passage. Then with a final flourish he added the money in the Post Office Savings Bank.

Ebenezer's premonition was right. He soon died and probate was granted on the sixteenth of December 1897.

Sydney was lucky; he inherited the business as a mere lad aged 18 years old. His older brothers resented the will but Henry did not intend his own youngest son to be ignored as he had been.