

CHESHIRE CURTAINS.

The history of the building in Stanley Street.



Standing on the western boundary of what was the medieval borough of Macclesfield, the premises have a fascinating history. The remains of a mid-17th century stone building on the site, can be seen incorporated in the wall on the southern side; it belonged to the Pickford family, one branch of which later became the famous carriers and removals company. The other branch became prominent citizens, aldermen and mayors of Macclesfield, particularly during the Parliamentary Period of the mid-1600s.

By the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 these latter family members owned large areas of land on the outskirts of the small borough, and several buildings and important businesses etc. within the borough. These included a tannery and many facilities for beer brewing.

A deed of 1662 describes a house, land and buildings, together with a malthouse, on the north side of Dog Lane. This was a very ancient street in the centre of the borough, which was renamed Stanley Street in 1827, and the site of those buildings today would have included the original stone built premises on the Cheshire Curtains site. The street originally ran through what is now the Mall leading from the Market Place, to the rear exit of the Indoor Market which is nearest to its overhead car park entrance.

By the early 1820s the silk trade was thriving, and a large mill complex had developed around a courtyard in this small area, with two silk mills fronting Stanley Street; these required enlarged warehouse facilities. The stone building, which was situated at the rear of the silk mills, across the other side of a courtyard, would have been only one to two storeys high. Evidently it was partially demolished but then extended in brick to a height of three storeys. About this time it became a button and twist warehouse tenanted by a George Johnson Moss, who also leased two floors in one of the silk mills for his silk twist and silk manufacture.

At this period and earlier, mill premises were often shared by different manufacturers; in fact the word mill originally referred to a loom, but was eventually adopted to mean the building into which a loom or several looms were place. The two silk mills, together

with a whole row of properties on the north side of Stanley Street, were demolished to accommodate the building of the Indoor Market in the late 1960s. The result was the creation of a smaller street given the name Stanley, to preserve the memory of the old one which ran a few yards in front of it at its western end.

Although only brief records of George J. Moss still exist, yet he and his family allow us a glimpse back in time to the days of George IV (1820-30) and his brother William IV (1830-37), just before their niece, Princess Victoria ascended the throne.

George was actually born in Stockport to Isaac and Martha Moss, and baptised at the parish church of St. Mary's 6th March 1803. Unfortunately, he only had a short life, dying at the age of 26 years, and was buried on 2nd April 1829 at the impressive Stockport Circuit Tabor Chapel, which was Methodist. His estate was less than £1,000 which does indicate a not inconsequential business. He had two brother, Abraham and Isaac; three sisters, and also a natural daughter, Mary Drury whose mother, a widow, had died.

It was not uncommon at this period for fathers of natural offspring to be concerned about their welfare, and to leave provision in their wills. In this instance George asked his father to be the girl's guardian and invest £200 at interest; the interest received had to be used for his daughter's maintenance and education. If, for any reason his father was 'prevented' from acting as guardian, then he had to retain the interest, and when Mary reached 21 years, to give her the capital and interest which had accrued. If she died before then, the investment had to be divided similarly amongst his sisters.

He did leave some money to his sisters and a friend, and after payment of debts etc. the remainder to his two brothers. And it would seem that his brothers took over the Macclesfield business. As his daughter Mary lived in Liverpool, this indicates business connections in the port, and Liverpool, having shaken off restrictions to its import trade which had allowed London to dominate for long enough, was now poised for even further expansion.

Originally George was in partnership with Abraham in Mill Lane, Sutton as button makers, then George took the premises in town. The year after his death the business is shown as George, Isaac and Abraham Moss, button makers at the Stanley Street premises, but County Directories at this time are quite often notoriously out of date by two or three years. The other alternative could have been the retention of George's name in recognition of his founding this part of the business.

The last mention of their connection with Stanley Street is an advertisement of 22nd. August 1835, announcing a sale by auction of the two silk mills, part occupied by Messrs. Moss, and a substantial building 19 yards by 6 and a half yards, used as a button and silk twist warehouse, with a cross building (still adjoining) adapted for three dwellings or 'warehousings'. Additionally there was 'a good spring of water and plenty of hands in the neighbourhood'. The dwelling today known as Stanley Mews and situated close by the warehouse, although described as a cottage at that time, was used as stables, with six further cottages completing the surrounding enclosure of the courtyard.

By a quirk of fate in 1848 Messrs. Moss were operating as 'Fancy Trimming Manufacturers', on PICKFORD Street, on the opposite side of the town.

Until recent years the whole of the premises, on the corner block of Chestergate and what is now Churchill Way, have been under one ownership as investments properties.

Compiled by Dorothy Bentley Smith
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