

Thomas Shaw

(born 1827, died 1884)

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Jane Collins

Thomas Shaw was born in Leeds. His father, John Shaw was born in Saddleworth, Lancashire in 1791, but moved to Leeds and married Elizabeth Barratt at St Peters Parish Church in 1811(1). Several years later in October 1827, their second son Thomas was born, his baptism taking place at St Peters Church in December of that same year (2).

John Shaw worked in the woollen textile industry and is variously describe as a Cloth Maker (1), Clothier (2) (3) and Weaver (4). Thomas Shaw followed his father into the woollen industry working as a Cloth Dresser throughout his life. In 1841, Thomas was living in the Woodhouse Carr area of Leeds with his father, mother and older brother, Joseph. In this year, his father John was a Clothier, brother Joseph was a Stuff Singer, and 13-year-old Thomas was working as a Cloth Dresser (3).

Cloth-dressers (also known as croppers) were woollen industry workers who had the task of raising the nap of the fulled cloth (originally this process was done with teasels) and then clipping it. The dresser's job was to cut the nap of the cloth to a uniform surface using heavy shears 40 lb (18 kg) in weight and 4 feet (1.2 m) long. At the beginning of the 19th century, croppers were well paid but with the introduction of water-powered cloth shearing frames the process was speeded up and fewer croppers were needed. The dresser's job became less physical, and the work was simply to check the quality of the mechanically sheared cloth (4).

In 1841, we do not know whether Thomas Shaw was employed as a skilled craftsman to cloth dress by hand or if he was merely checking the output of a mechanical cloth frame (probably the former due to his young age). We do know that in 1841 there were a number of specialist woollen mills in the Woodhouse Carr area where the Shaw men might have worked. Two examples being Carr Mill (Buslingthorpe Lane), built by Abraham Rhodes in 1810 specialising in dyeing and finishing of cloth and Perseverance Mill (Cross Chancellors Street), a woollen and finishing mill (5).

Thomas Shaw married twice. His first marriage was to Ann Forkan in 1850 (6). Ann was born in Ireland and in 1851 they were living together in Huddersfield Street in the Woodhouse area of Leeds, with Thomas working as a Cloth Dresser (7). Thomas and Ann had one daughter, Mary Ann Shaw, born in 1854 (8). Ann died three years later in 1857 at 31 years old (9).

One year later in October 1858, Thomas married Ann Prest, nee Silversides (10). Ann was a widow; her first husband John Sowden Prest died in 1855 leaving her with three children. In 1861 they were living together in Delph Terrace (Woodhouse area) with Ann's three children (Mary, George, and John Prest) as well as Thomas's child Mary Ann Shaw (11). Thomas was working as a Cloth Dresser and two of his Prest stepchildren were also working in the woollen mills. Mary Prest (aged 16 years) was a Cloth Burler (4) and George (aged 13 years) a Cloth Dresser. John Prest (aged 8 years) and Thomas's daughter Mary Ann Shaw

(aged 6 years) were at school. Ten years later in 1871, Thomas and Ann were still living in the Woodhouse area of Leeds but at a different address, Pleasant Court (12). The two Prest boys were living with them, George working as a Cloth Dresser and John as a Cloth Fetter (4).

The next record of Thomas Shaw is in 1881, aged 53 years, when he is widowed and living as an inmate of the Leeds Union Workhouse (13). His second wife, Ann, died in 1873 and was buried in Becket Street Cemetery in July of that year (14). The following year in January 1784, his daughter Mary Ann Shaw married George Thompson (15). It is possible that his Prest stepchildren had also married and left home in this period. In 1884, Thomas Shaw died and was buried in Beckett Street Cemetery (16)(17). His last abode is noted as the Union Infirmary, Leeds but he is still acknowledged as a Cloth Dresser.

References

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- (3) 'Thomas Shaw' (1841) Census return for Brick Garth, Woodhouse Carr, Leeds Town, Leeds West Subdistrict, Yorkshire. Public Record Office: PRO HO107/1348/5, Folio 40, p.13. Available at: <http://www.ancestry.co.uk> (Accessed: 5 Jan 2021).
- (4) Weaving occupations in Yorkshire.
Cloth Dresser: <https://spartacus-educational.com/TEXcropper.htm>,
<http://maggieblanck.com/Land/WE.html>
Burler/fabric mender – responsible for checking and removing or mending the defects in the woven fabric ensuring that only good quality fabrics were taken for further processing. <https://www.sunnybankmills.co.uk/our-story/blog/menders/>.
Cloth Fetter – responsible for ensuring that the woollen and worsted carding machines work at maximum efficiency by removing fibres and grease that accumulate in rollers. http://ulita.leeds.ac.uk/files/2014/06/On_Tenterhooks.pdf.
- (5) Carr Mill, Perseverance Mill and Peter Laycock:
<https://www.leodis.net/viewimage/68878>, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1255761>,
<https://lawnswoodcemetery.org.uk/grave-spotlight/22-peter-laycock-1837-1905>
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