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From Convicts to Comedies: A History of Scotland's Court Houses, Veronica Antcliff, Namala Publishing, 2012, 098737950X, 9780987379504, . .

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Digger , Max Anderson, 2005, , 304 pages. Digger is the story of a foreigner arriving unannounced and ill-equipped in a mining town that boomed and died before the Great War began, a town whose sole remnants are eight ....

Oakey the Oak Tree , Jodie Torney, Nov 28, 2012, Trees, 24 pages. .

Diary of a Lottery Winner's Daughter , Penelope Bush, Oct 1, 2011, , 224 pages. Charlotte's life changes dramatically when her mum wins the lottery, but not all for the better! The rest of the family appear to be deliriously happy with their new lifestyle ....

Me-Flow The Chronicle of Ether and Its Resurrection, MR Blake Taylor, 2010, , 320 pages. ME-FLOW is a book of two halves. One is a chronological history of physics dating from ancient Greece to today. It encompasses the many discoveries which unlocked the mysteries ....

Her two sons learned the safe making trade from their uncles and set up their own safe making businesses. The older son, Richard James Antcliff, migrated to Brisbane, Australia in 1884 and was the only safe maker in the colony of Queensland. The younger son, Harry Richard Antcliff, established the Empire Safe Works in Birmingham.

6. Thomas, born 1838 or 1839 Bilston, Staffordshire (birth not registered). He married Sarah Welch. He died on 20.2.1887 of acute chronic enteritis - duration of last illness: 8 months. His occupation is given on his death certificate as Iron Safe Manufacture. He is the founder of Thomas Withers & Sons.

The birth places of some of the children suggest that George and Mary Withers moved, for some while, to Wolverhampton or Bilston (as St. Peter's was where births, deaths and marriages in both places were registered). According to Margaret Lincoln (another more distant Withers relative who has done a lot of work in piecing together the larger Withers family tree) George Withers moved back to West Bromwich in 1843 and set up a two storey factory in Barrows Street, originally making metal bedsteads.

Presumably this was a greenfield site as Roebuck Street doesn't appear in the 1841 or 1851 Censuses. (The birthplaces of the four children of Rebecca Withers/Antcliff are also consistent with the Withers safe manufacturing business being established in West Bromwich in 1855). The factory was called the Park Works.

George Withers first appears in a trade directory in 1861. He is listed in the West Bromwich section

of the "Corporation Directory of Birmingham 1861". For the first time there is a category of "Iron Safe Manufacturers" in trades listings in West Bromwich. George Withers of Roebuck Street, West Bromwich is one of the four iron safe manufacturers listed. (The others are J. Cartwright of Roebuck St, Wm Cotton of the Vulcan iron foundry and John Hall of Bull St).

According to "Newton's London Journal of Arts and Sciences" April 1st 1863 page 253, patent application no. 417 of 1863 lodged 16.2.1863, was by "William Charles McEntee of Birmingham, and George Withers and Thomas Withers, both of West Bromwich, for improvements in locks." There is also an entry in "Jones Mercantile Directory of the Iron District of South Staffordshire & East Worcestershire" in the West Bromwich Alphabetic Commercial and Trade section

The 1871 Census shows that Mary was still in charge of the Park Works in Roebuck Street. (The Wesleyan Chapel had a room in the works). The Census refers to "Mary Withers. Head. Widow. 65. Iron Safemaker employing 12 men and 7 boys". It also lists at the same address "Elizabeth Winkle. Daur., married, 24" and "James Hinchliff [sic]. Gson. unmarried. 18. Iron Safe Maker.

Jesse and his family were in Canada at this time. We know this because his daughter Alice was born in Toronto, Canada in 1875. The family returned to England and at the time of the 1881 Census were living at 9 Beswick St, Manchester. Jesse's occupation was Iron Safe Maker (Others 21/8) which suggests that he employed 21 men and 8 boys.

"Kellys Directory of Birmingham etc 1888" reveals Samuel no longer living next door to the Park Works. He had built a substantial house in the new Beeches Estate. "Bombay House" at 13 Beeches Road, West Bromwich, a short walk from the Park Works, was named after the source of his first overseas order. Unfortunately the house has been demolished and the site is now occupied by a group of medium density single storey units.

As mentioned earlier, Thomas Withers died in 1887. It must therefore have been his eldest son Joseph Thomas Withers who moved the business to 104 Sandwell St, West Bromwich. At the time of the 1891 Census the family is living at 104 Sandwell St, West Bromwich with Joseph Thomas Withers aged 24, unmarried, Safemaker, Employer as head of a household which contained his mother, 4 younger siblings and a 14 year old servant.

The 1891 Census shows Jesse Withers and family living at 52 Barrows St, West Bromwich and the birthplaces of the youngest children indicate that Jesse's business remained in Manchester until the mid 1880s. Sabina appears to have taken over the running of the business after the family returned to West Bromwich.

By the time "Kellys Directory of Birmingham etc 1896", Jesse and Sabina's business had folded (presumably Jesse was an employee of another safe manufacturer); but Thomas Withers & Son and Samuel Withers & Co were still at Sandwell Road, West Bromwich and Park Works, Roebuck St, West Bromwich, respectively.

A 24 page catalogue issued by Samuel Withers at around this time was sold on ebay in October 2007. The catalogue is headed SAMUEL WITHERS & Co., BANKERS SAFE AND LOCK ENGINEERS, SANITARY IRONFOUNDERS, &c., &c., (The word "Samuel" was underlined to differentiate the firm from Thomas Withers & Son). Then there is drawing of the works with three long parallel buildings plus another building at the front, under which is written: Makers to Her Majesty's Board of Works and all Leading Bankers and Diamond Merchants of the United Kingdom. Park Works, West Bromwich, England. Established 1843. To the left of the drawing of the works is the registered trade mark and "Prize Medals 1899-1890, 1892 & 1895"

In 1953 a press review of the firm reported that "the Managing director Mr Phillip Denys Withers is a great-grandson of the founder. The firm has exported their goods to a world wide market and have manufactured over 34000 safes and steel chests for various Government departments. There are 70 employees who make an average of 120 safes per week."

K. W. "Bob" Sidbotham, in his book "Life and Tales of a Locksmith" (History into Print, 2005), says that his firm, WBS Locks, from its foundation in 1946, supplied most, if not all, the locks for Samuel Withers. He also says that at that time the firm was owned and managed by Dennis Withers. He dies about 1962 and the company was then run by his widow. Bob Sidbotham says that Samuel Withers did not last much longer and closed sometime in the late 1960s.

In the original entry in the Gazetteer of Lock and Keys, Jim Evans wrote that in the late 1970s the directors of Thomas Withers were Charles Robin Greenwood and John Peter Hewitt, who were also directors of the Churchill Lock and Safe Company and of the Dreadnought Safe Company. The business remained at Sandwell Road until it folded in the 1980s. Jim Evans said they they went into liquidation in 1982 and were removed from the companies register in 1984. All but one wall of their factory was demolished and a street of neat, new two storey houses was built on the site. This street is named Withers Way.

"It is with regret that we record the death of Mr Samuel Withers, which occurred on Saturday last at his residence at Ivydene, Ombersley road, Worcester in his 82nd year. He was about as usual on the previous day, but on Saturday morning he had a seizure, never regained consciousness, and died the same day.

Until recently Mr Withers was head of the firm of Messrs S. Withers & Co. Ltd, and his business career had about it something of the character of romance. The firm was really founded by his father, Mr George Withers, about 1843. Sometime after that Mr S Withers went away to America but 56 years ago on the death of his mother, he returned to West Bromwich and revived the business at premises in Barrows St starting with one workman. [If Samuel Withers went to America then he must have returned upon the death of his father in 1864 as he married his wife in West Bromwich in 1865]

As the business grew it was transferred to more suitable premises in Roebuck Street and later to the present premises in Barton St. In 1909 [this was the year his wife died] Mr S Withers retired from active part in the business and it was transferred to his sons, Messrs Geo A Withers. F S Withers, Warwick E Withers, and Frederick A Withers. Frederick A Withers subsequently died and the works are now carried on by the other three sons, under whose control the business has largely developed.

For many years the late Mr S Withers played his part - and a very active part - in the public life of our town. He served on the Town Council for three years from 1897 to November 1900, succeeding the late Mr Josiah Guest. On the Board of Guardians he served as one of the representatives for West Bromwich from 1888 to 1892, and later he was one of the representatives from Handsworth from 1896 to 1907 and again from 1911 to 1912. He was a member of the old original Volunteer Force in West Bromwich, and at one time he took a keen interest Free Masonry being for some time a member of the Dartmouth Lodge. In July 1902 he was placed upon the Commission of the Peace for the Borough. Mr Withers was associated in politics with the Liberal Unionists and in religion he was a churchman.

Before the ordinary business of Police court on Monday, the Chairman (Mr A Long) remarked that it was with very much regret that he heard the news of the death of Mr S Withers, and he wished to express his deepest sympathy with the family. Mr Withers was a colleague of his on the bench for many years, and had always endeavoured to deal out justice with mercy. He was a prominent man in the public life of the town and served for some years on the Board of Guardians where he rendered valuable services. The local Bench had sustained a great loss on the death of such a colleague, and he was sure the sympathy of the Magistrates went out to the family and relatives of Mr Withers. Mr Lyon Clark on behalf of his legal colleagues also regretted the passing away of Mr Withers, who said Mr Clark, was a man of strong views which he fearlessly expressed. On behalf of the officials of the Court, Mr W J Phair (Clerk) associated himself in the sympathetic expressions.

According to Margaret Lincoln the Thomas Withers & Son business was bought by John Izon Chesshire, in 1943. I have a photocopy of a four page catalogue from this period and the directors

are listed as W Hall-Keys, J. Izon Chesshire, J. Richard Siddons, Howard S. Siddons, and J. Ready Simcox. The word Thomas in the name of the firm is underlined so as to distinguish it from Samuel Withers & Co. The second page has a picture of the SANDWELL security safe and then a price list for all the different sizes which could be supplied. The third page is headed "Strong room Doors and frames", has a picture of a door and a price list for different sized doors. The back page has a long list businesses and organizations using Thomas Withers & Sons safes starting with HM Government - War Office, Air Ministry, Royal Air Force, Office of Works, Army and Navy Canteen Board and Woolwich Royal Arsenal.

Nevertheless for one West Bromwich company which specializes in making safes and strongroom doors business is booming. Thomas Withers Security Equipment Ltd of Sandwell Road was founded in 1855 and has been going strong ever since. This small private firm employs 30 men - all highly skilled in their own particular field. Many of them have been with the company for over 20 years, and only recently two men retired after completing more than 50 years of service. Following the present trend, however, the firm has only one apprentice. Managing director, Miss Joan E Russell, said the men worked as one large family, and everyone was on first name terms.

The products made vary from small wall safes at around 11 pounds, to anti explosive strong room doors and frames at 400 pounds. Orders come from all over the world and at the moment there is a 16 week waiting list for a Withers safe. The safes are made from mild steel and the company has its own locksmiths. The majority of them are key locks, but Miss Russell said the trend of combination locks seemed to be growing all the time.

Situated in one of the old parts of the borough the company is at present thinking of expanding. Miss Russell said they had already applied for permission to extend one of their workshops, but no decision had yet been received. If permission was received it was likely they would be taking on more staff. Although she admitted it was extremely difficult to find experienced men. There were also problems with finding apprentices and there were already some vacancies for school leavers wanting to learn the trade.

The company used to make the foundation bodies for tabernacles for Roman Catholic churches. Miss Russell said this too was a very skilled job, but their specialists in this field had now retired. At one time, however, it was major part of the business. The basic shape of the tabernacle would be made in heavy steel at West Bromwich. It was then sent away to be covered in gold or silver and decorated in jewels. Their bread and butter lines were small to medium size safes for domestic use.

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