

## Chapter 1 Early development

The engineering business that became Hindley & Co. had its beginnings in a very different industry.

The area around Bourton, including parts of Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire had been growing flax and processing the crop, involving retting, spinning and weaving, as a cottage industry since mediaeval times.

The Maggs family had lived in the area for many years, and became one of the principal landowners. In about 1750, Daniel Maggs built a factory powered by a waterwheel to perform all the processing of flax under one roof. This factory was on the site of what is now Bullpits house, where in the grounds, the long narrow retting ponds can still be seen. Later, another factory was built further downstream, and adjacent to the main road through the village, by William Jesse, who had married Rachel Maggs.

Jesse's mill expanded considerably over the next 40 years, with the introduction of a new material "linsey-woolsey", a heavy hard-wearing cloth with a linen warp and woollen weft. A rope-walk was also built.

By 1782, Jesse's mill, employed over 250 people, and a large blacksmiths shop has been built, power being supplied by an undershot water wheel in the river adjacent to Bourton Bridge. This mill had contracts with the Royal Dockyard, Plymouth for the supply of sail cloth.

Maggs mill had also expanded, and was now managed by Richard and Herbert Maggs. It seems likely that a new mill was constructed at this time, below the old mill buildings, to take advantage of the River Stour as a power source. Power was supplied by two waterwheels, and the availability of this enabled David Maggs (Daniel's son) to set up a small workshop to make harvesting and processing tools for flax workers, and also repairs and modifications to the mill machinery. This workshop also absorbed the smithy at Jesse's Mill, which closed in about 1801.

This branch of the works proved successful, and by 1810, Daniel, the son of David Maggs was also producing a small range of farm implements. At about this time, Daniel also made the first thrashing machine in the West of England, and a copy of his patent can be seen in Gillingham Museum.

In 1820, the Maggs' built a complete new mill on the same site, utilising all new machinery.

This mill was described in a Parliamentary report of 1837 as being entirely water driven, having two waterwheels with a combined horsepower of 20, of which only 15 was used, and employing 68 people, 37 of them being between 13 and 18 years of age and four between 9 and 11.



Demands for power at the new mill led to the construction in 1837 of a additional breastshot waterwheel 60ft. (18.2m) in diameter, and 4ft (1.2m) wide. At the time, this was the largest waterwheel in England. (Some sources give a construction date for this wheel of 1832, but the date of the report above suggests that this is based on an error in transcription.) The retting ponds were altered to provide the water supply for this wheel. The penstock at the end of the old launder still exists.