

Chapter 1 William Sparrow

Born in 1836, at Bourton in Dorset, William was apprenticed to Oliver Maggs, as a millwright. Family tradition relates that he went to the Stroud Glos, area for some years. This would mark the end of his apprenticeship, and his desire for wider experience, most probably at the Phoenix Iron Works, then run by the Freeabee family.

While here, he may well have made the acquaintance of George Parsons. By 1858, he had married, and was living at East Lambrook. where his daughter Mary was born. Within a year or two, he had moved to “the Nest” bower Hinton.

Why he settled in this area is probably that he was offered employment at the Parret Works, where George Parsons has established the West of England Engineering and Coker Canvas Company. Within a few years, advertisements for employees were appearing in local newspaper over his name. George Parsons was not an engineer, and needed an engineer to oversee that side of the business.

He seems to have set up as a wheelwright at Bower Hinton by about 1860. Where he learnt wheelwrighting is not immediately apparent.

The business expanded into Iron founding and millwrighting early on as in 1863, he advertised in Pulmans Weekly news for a couple of millwrights, or carpenters, two good moulders, and fitters. In January, he advertised for Millwrights, cart and wheelwrights. and in August of the same year, for “ash Planks, Felloes¹, and Round Timber.

Curiously, at the same time as he was developing his own business, he was also the foreman of the West of England Engineering and Coker Canvas Company. Where he was also recruiting additional workmen..

Pulmans Weekly News April 1866

“Two good Engine Smiths, and a steam hammer man, if steady and industrious may have constant employment and goods wages, by applying to Mr William Sparrow, Foreman of the Parret Works.”

When the West of England Engineering and Coker Canvas Company got into financial difficulties in 1867, the reorganisation saw William appointed as Engineering Manager.

This did not last very long, as the next year, the flax sipping and weaving were discontinued, and the Engineering part of the business also ceased, the company now acting as agents for J & T Howard, Ransom and Sims, and Hornsby and carried stock of their agricultural implements. The Plant Machinery and Stock were put up for auction in 1869 . The sale did not take place, and the entire works were taken over by William Sibley, although some at least of the patterns came into the possession of William Sparrow.

¹ Felloes – the sections that make up the rim of a wooden wheel.

William Sparrow was now advertising as the Somerset Wheel and Wagon Works, William Sparrow, proprietor. From later events, it appears that he had partners in the enterprise, but their names are unknown.

By 1871, he was employing 38 men and boys at his works.

Exactly when the foundry was started is unknown, but by 1873 it was well established, as the entry in Kelly's Directory shows.

William Sparrow, the Somerset Wheel and Wagon Works, Machinists, brass and iron Founders, Boiler Makers, agricultural implement maker. and agents.

A PRESENTATION

On Friday evening the members of the congregation assembling at Bower Hinton Chapel presented to Mr William Sparrow a handsome testimonial in consideration of his gratuitous professional services in connection with the building of the school room and the restoration of the Chapel premises. A congregational tea meeting took place in the afternoon and the presentation which took the form of a timepiece thermometer and an aneroid barometer combined, was made during the evening, the proceedings were of a social character.

Pulmans Weekly News July 1874: For sale one 6 hp portable steam engine; one 4hp vertical steam engine on upright boiler; one 2hp vertical steam engine on upright boiler; one 1 hp vertical steam engine on upright boiler; one 10hp beam engine; one street watering cart.

Apply to the Somerset Wheel and Wagon Company Martock

The 10 HP beam engine mentioned is likely to be the old engines used to drive the factory, as the 1876 sale particulars mention a 12 HP high pressure and condensing engine that replaced it.

In 1875, the entry in Kelly's directory was:

"William Sparrow, Engineer, millwright, Brass and Iron founder, agricultural implement maker, and all kinds of iron and wood wheels, Somerset Wheel and Wagon Works."

By 1876, disagreements between the partners led to a decision to sell the plant, stock, patterns and equipment by auction.