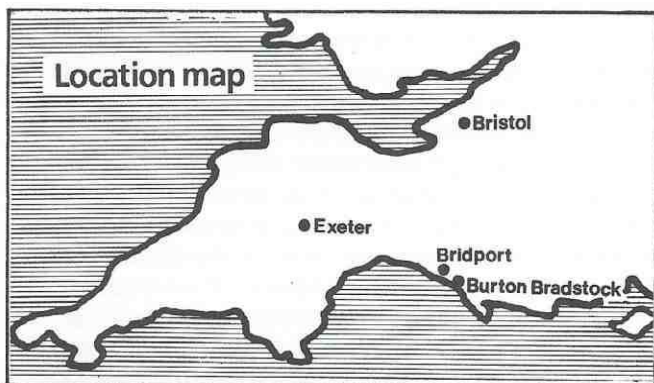


## The Bridport flax and hemp industry

Michael Bone

The small west Dorset town of Bridport, set in the midst of a popular holiday area, would not at first sight appear to have much of interest for the industrial archaeologist. Closer inspection, however, reveals ample physical evidence of the industries which developed in many small market towns in the last century when most needs were met locally. In Bridport, can still be found the remains of the flour and grist mills, breweries and maltings, and tanneries and leather works that once processed the agricultural produce of the area. The needs of agriculture, together with local industry and the building trades, provided work for iron and brass founders, blacksmiths and machine makers, while wheelwrights and coachmakers constructed and repaired vehicles for the horse-drawn society of the day. Bridport harbour - now called West Bay - is a fine example of the industrial archaeology of a small port and old tollhouses and railway relics are also evidence of former transport systems. Most of these buildings and structures were themselves constructed of local materials: stone and lime were produced in Bothenhampton quarries and bricks were made at five sites, at least, in the last century. Such public utilities as improved water supply, gas and electricity were also provided locally at first and have left their physical traces in the contemporary landscape. Of particular interest, however, are the buildings which represent the development of Bridport's dominant and distinctive industry from medieval times to the present - the manufacture of cordage and netting that once served a world-wide market and is still internationally significant. Such was the status of the industry in the mid-nineteenth century that In *The Official Descriptive and Illustrated Catalogue of the Great Exhibition* of 1851 the town was described as 'the especial seat of the hemp and flax manufacture' and the selection of goods displayed at the Crystal Palace by the local committee of manufacturers - twines, canvas, webs, nets, lines, shoe-thread, tarpaulings (sic) and sacks - is evidence of the great variety of items produced here. This Bridport industry is not without its Bristol connections - Stephens Bros of St Philip's Hemp & Flax Mills, near Broad Plain, also operated in Dorset and some further information on this firm and on the industry in general can be added to that provided by Joseph Bryant in *BIAS Journal* 10 in his article on the ropewalks and ropemakers of Bristol.



### History and Processes

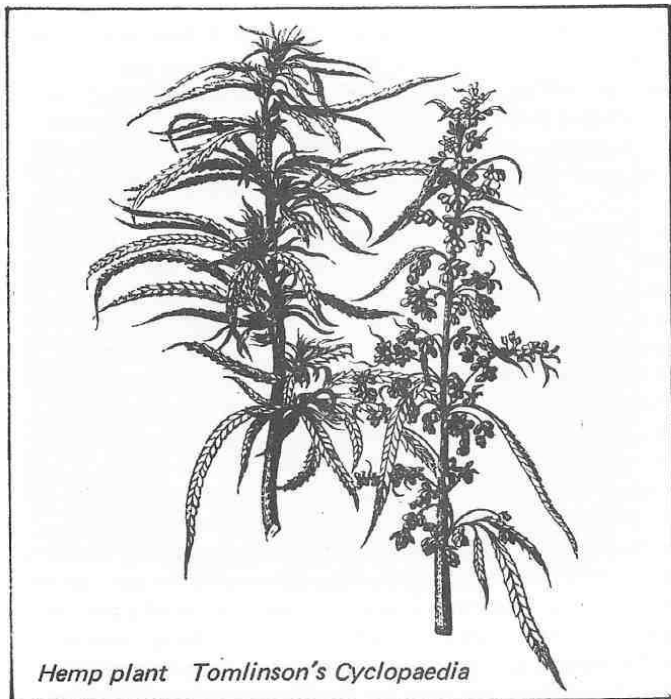
In order to appreciate the industrial archaeology of the industry, it is first necessary to examine, in outline, its historical development and changing technology.

The manufacture of netting and cordage is now carried on in the town by part of the Bridport-Gundry group at their Court Works in West Street. The concentration of the industry is a recent phenomenon, it being previously undertaken by a number of partnerships and small family firms, each specialising in a distinctive product range.

It is not known when the local connection with the trade began. It doubtless depended initially upon the rich alluvial soils of the district which are ideally suited to the cultivation of the demanding flax and hemp crops, raw materials which were augmented by cotton in the nineteenth century and have only recently been superseded by artificial fibres. The earliest records of the industry refer to production of hempen thread for making ships' cables, nets, ropes and twisted yarn for cordage in the early-thirteenth century. Other medieval documents suggest a wide product range and this was probably the case until twentieth century specialisation. The most detailed account of the history of the industry suggests three great periods in modern times, each linked with the dominance of a certain product: firstly, rope making for the Royal Navy, which culminated in the late-sixteenth century; then the making of tackle, cordage and nets for the Newfoundland fisheries, which began in the late-sixteenth century and reached its climax during the French Wars of 1793-1815; and finally, the manufacture of nets for fishing, agricultural, sporting and other purposes, which has lasted to the present. In addition, the weaving of sailcloth, a speciality of the nearby Somerset towns, was introduced in the mid-eighteenth century and continued throughout the nineteenth century. Smaller quantities of sacking and tarpaulins were also made in the town.

Information on manufacturing processes is more readily available for this latter period. By the eighteenth century production was organised by merchants who purchased the raw materials from local farmers or flax jobbers - these managed crops of flax and hemp on the farms - and put out the complex manufacturing processes to workers in the surrounding countryside or, in the case of lines, twines, ropes and thread for canvas, to craftsmen who spun in the long gardens or walks located behind the houses of the town. As noted by Sir John Clapham and subsequent writers, Bridport has maintained outwork as a method of production and many nets are still made in the cottages of local people in the time-honoured way. However, the concentration of production in factories which was to transform the other textile industries during the Industrial Revolution profoundly affected the Bridport industry. Flax spinning mills, first introduced in the north of England, were established in the

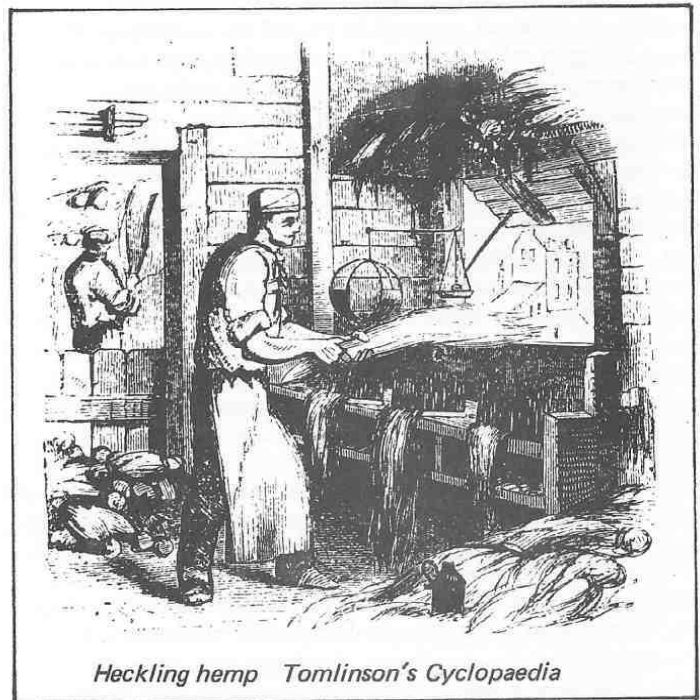
area during the French Wars of 1793-1815. The Factory Returns of 1838 provide the first parish-by-parish list of textile factories and show eight flax mills in the locality, two in Bridport, three at Burton Bradstock and one apiece in Bradpole and Allington. These mills employed 340 persons and were powered by three steam engines and eight water-wheels, which generated 72 hp and 97 hp respectively. The range of products made in the town, together with the complexity of processes in hemp and flax manufacture, make summary of the changes of this period difficult but this can perhaps best be attempted by a division into four stages: preparation of fibres; spinning; weaving, twisting or braiding and, finally, the finishing stages.



Hemp plant Tomlinson's Cyclopaedia

The useful fibres of hemp and flax are located in the stems of the plants, sealed in pectins and gums between the bark and a woody core. Hemp grows much taller than flax and its fibre is longer and coarser and is thus best suited to different products, but the manufacturing processes were broadly similar to those employed in flax manufacture. In the early-nineteenth century, locally grown flax and hemp would be pulled and the seed removed, flax seed being sold for planting out of the district or crushed locally to provide linseed oil. The plants would then be 'dew-retted' or left in the fields to rot, so as to dissolve the pectins and begin to free the fibres. In other areas hemp and flax were retted in ponds and this process was employed locally during war-time revival of flax processing in the present century. After drying, the next stage was to break up the woody core and remove it. This was known as 'breaking' and 'swingling' - the term 'scutching' is used in other areas - and was originally performed with hand tools. Machinery for breaking and swingling was invented in the early eighteenth century but was not introduced into the Brlldport area until 1803, when Richard Roberts erected a mill at Burton Bradstock for this purpose. In mills, the stem of the plant was first broken by passing it through a set of three fluted rollers and the sections of core were then removed in the swingling process whereby the fibres were beaten by revolving wooden arms set on a vertical

shaft turned by water power. After swingling, hemp would be softened in a stamping or 'balling' mill, also operated by water power, established in the district by the late eighteenth century. The final stage in the preparation of flax and hemp fibres was combing or 'heckling', whereby the fibres were drawn by the hecklers through a series of steel spikes set in wood. The fibres were cleaned and straightened at this stage and the long or 'line' fibres separated from the shorter 'tow'. Imported flax and hemp upon which the industry increasingly depended in the nineteenth century, was delivered ready-scuted and could proceed directly to the hecklers. Heckling was originally carried out in small sheds or shops in the town,



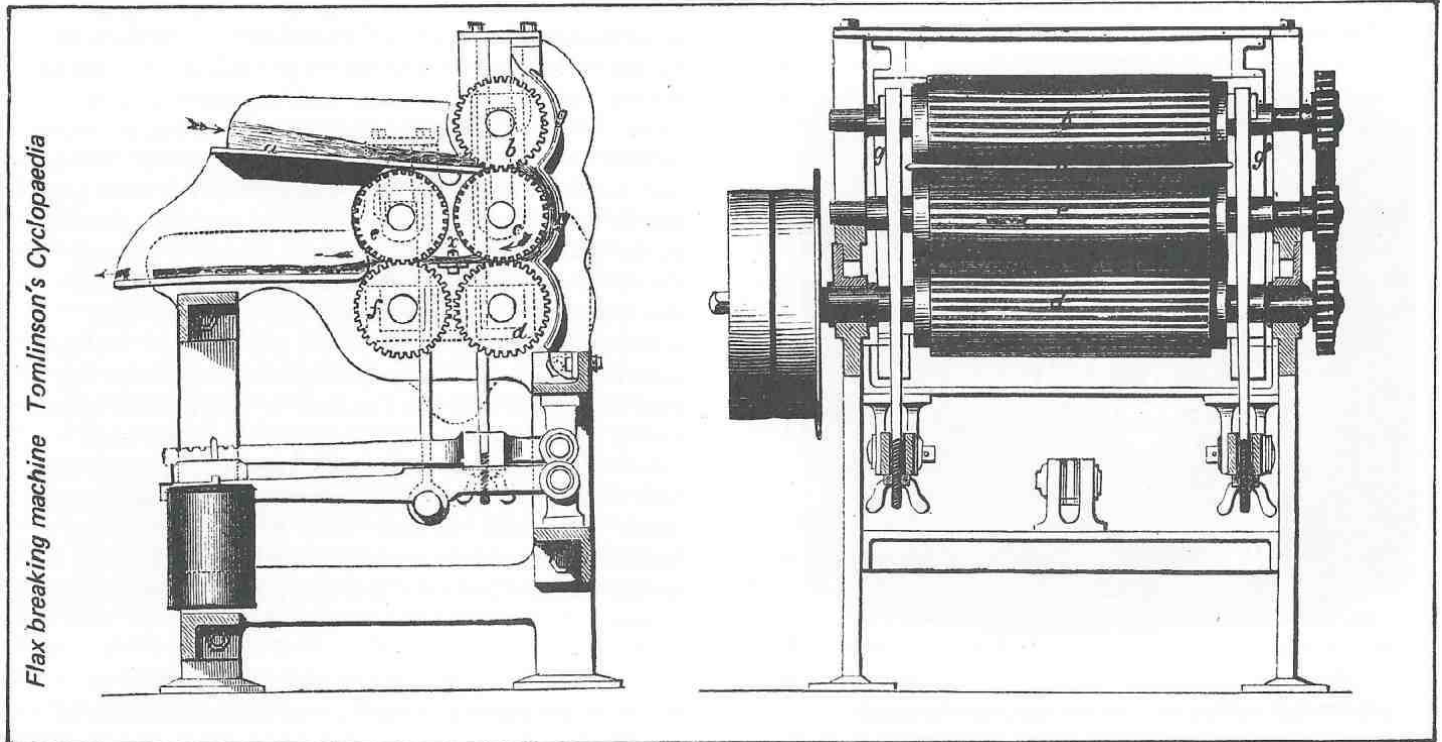
Heckling hemp Tomlinson's Cyclopaedia

but the hecklers were concentrated into the mills later in the nineteenth century in an attempt to solve two management problems: their prodigious drinking habits and the theft of raw materials. Machines for heckling were invented in the early-nineteenth century and were at work in the town in the 1870s, but they did not displace all of the handworkers.

As with other textile fibres, the spinning stage for flax and hemp consists of drawing out and twisting the fibres, but is more complex in that individual flax fibres can be broken down into finer filaments at this stage. Before spinning, the tow had to be carded, as with cotton and woollen fibres, but line could be spun directly. Traditionally, the spinning of yarn for cordage and sailcloth was carried out in long open walks, sited on level ground behind the houses of the town, sometimes with shelters at each end of the walk. The spinner would carry a bundle of heckled fibres around the waist, and having fixed a thread to a spinning wheel, would walk slowly backwards whilst spinning the yarn, the wheel being turned by a boy. This process continued into the present century, but latterly only for Manila fibre which was spun by hand for trawl twine. From the late-eighteenth century, the spinning of yarn for cordage and sailcloth would also be carried out on machinery developed from Richard Arkwright's frame, which was first employed

in the cotton trade. The first patent for adapting this to flax spinning was taken out by Messrs. Kendrew & Porthouse of Darlington in 1787 and was later improved by Murray and de Girard. In its final form flax spinning involved repeated spreading, drawing, roving and spinning operations, by which a stike or small quantity of flax could be elongated in a ratio of 1:90000 in the early-nineteenth century, and much more so later. A later refinement was wet spinning, whereby individual flax fibres could be further broken down by immersion in hot water during spinning in order to produce finer yarns. An example of the arrangement of machinery in a local spinning mill may be taken from an auction catalogue of 1878 for the sale of flax and tow

workers and much is still produced in this way. The mechanisation of net-making owes its origin to the invention in Scotland of the 'jumper' loom by James Paterson, shortly after 1817, and its improvement by Walter Ritchie in 1835, whereby an arrangement of hooks and sinkers and a single shuttle simulated the actions of the braider. These machines were large, costly and required the strength of a man to operate them and were thus concentrated in factories or workshops, rather than in the homes of the workers like other handloom weaving or knitting processes. By the 1870s, William Hounsell & Co had developed a semi-powered factory machine which could be operated by girls. The 'jumper' loom was finally replaced by the multi-shuttle



preparing and spinning machinery at Ewens' Factory. The layout of the multi-storey mill was similar to that outlined in Warden's classic work on the linen trade, published in 1864; the ground floor housed a tow breaker and three cards, a tow drawing frame and four tow roving machines; the next floor had ten tow spinning frames, one twisting frame and a new hot water frame, while the top floor contained two flax spreaders, three drawing frames, two roving machines and ten flax spinning frames. The attic was employed for reeling and winding yarn.

After spinning the yarn would be made up according to the product required. Twines, lines or threads would be made by twisting the requisite number of yarns together on a twisting frame, similar in operation to a spinning frame, or would be laid in walks in the traditional manner. The latter process, similar to spinning of threads in walks as described above, was mechanised in the later nineteenth century when the backward walk of the spinner was simulated by a machine which travelled on rails. Ropes would also be produced in this manner. The local firm of William Hounsell & Co were in the forefront of machine-made line technology and had introduced the new methods by the 1870s. Much twine was made up into nets for fishing and other purposes. As mentioned earlier, braiding or net-making was originally carried on in the homes of the

loom, introduced from France in the last years of the nineteenth-century. Much of the yarn produced in the spinning walks and later spinning mills was woven into sail-cloth, canvas and, to a lesser degree, sacking and tarpaulins. In the early nineteenth century this was carried out on handlooms, often operated by the young girls of the area around Bridport. Richard Roberts of Burton Bradstock claimed to have 200 handlooms in the villages and his letterbooks suggest that the looms were owned by the entrepreneur and not by the weavers or their families.

The Parliamentary Report on Handloom Weavers of 1838-39, suggests that there were about 206 looms in Bridport and its vicinity in 1840, with a further 120 at nearby Beaminster. Some of these looms were sited in workshops, as at Priory Mill in Bridport where weaving shops were built in 1839. It seems that the power loom was first introduced in Bridport at this mill in the 1840s, as the owner Stephen Whetham received a threatening letter regarding its appearance at this time. However, progress in introducing power looms appears to have been slow and by 1862 there were only 10 power looms in the whole of Dorset. Asker Mills, built in the late 1860s by Stephens & Co, was probably the first specialist power loom factory to be opened in the town. A valuation of 1875 lists the machinery here as including 20 canvas power looms together with equipment

for bleaching, calendering and winding the yarn, driven by a steam engine. This valuation also includes the equipment in the premises of Stephens Bros of Bristol, which was for the preparation and spinning of fibres. Whethams, leading canvas manufacturers, had 17 power looms at their Priory Mill in 1911 when canvas manufacture died out in the town.

The finishing processes would again vary with the product made. Twine for nets was passed for finishing, polishing and striking, earlier carried out in walks but mechanised at Pymore Mills by the 1870s. The twine was cleaned by revolving bristles, passed through a trough containing size and dried and polished by heated cylinders. Twine or

have been replaced by artificial fibres and the industry has again been transformed by new technology, new markets and changing business structure. The adoption of new techniques over the years has been uneven and, as mentioned above, outwork is still an important feature of the net-making trade. The new spinning mills of the early-nineteenth century did not entirely displace hand spinning and it was still possible for visitors to see the old spinning walks at work in the closing years of the century.

A variety of buildings are testimony to these changes. Remains of balling mills, similar in appearance to grist mills, survive at Port Mead and West Mills, whilst Richard Roberts' swingling mill is still intact at Burton Bradstock. The early flax spinning factories were long, narrow multi-storey water-powered mills, similar in appearance to those built for the cotton and worsted-spinning trades and it is sad to record that only remnants of these structures survive locally, at Pymore, North Mills in Allington, and at Ewens' factory in Bridport. An early steam-powered mill, Priory Mill, survives intact, however. The multi-storey mills gave way to single-storey sheds with pitched roofs for spinning by the mid-nineteenth century, as at Burton Bradstock, Pymore and North Mills. Canvas and netting looms were also lodged in single-storey sheds, but with north-light windows, as can be seen at Pymore and in the St. Michael's Lane complex. The early open spinning walks have left little obvious remains but a number of long covered walks survive in Bridport and are the town's most distinctive industrial monuments. Early examples had brick columns with wooden boarding between, which supported pantile roofs. Later walks had slate roofs. In addition to manufacturing premises, the trade also required buildings for storage and administration and many warehouses and offices survive.

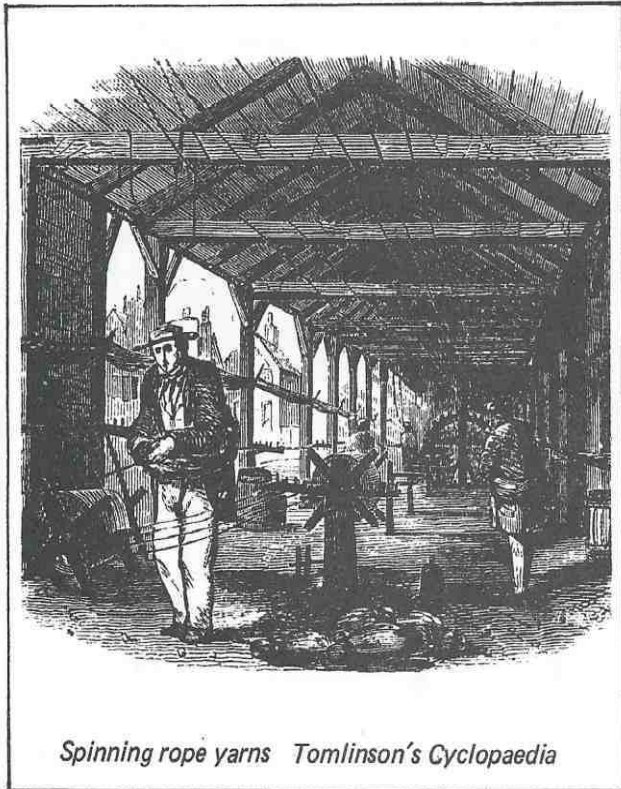
These structures, in the light of the uneven survival of documentary material, constitute an important source of information on technical developments and the working environment of people involved in Bridport's textile industry. Most have been put to alternative use in recent years and have entered a twilight stage in their history, others have been demolished. Few of Bridport's industrial buildings are of any great architectural merit, but they do form a distinctive component of the local landscape and merit selective preservation or at least some detailed recording.

### The Sites

The sites have been arranged to assist the visitor rather than to provide a sequence to illustrate historical developments or particular types of building. Such an arrangement would be very difficult as many sites include evidence of different processes and periods. Sites around the centre of Bridport are listed first, followed by those in the western and northern parts of the town and, finally, those in the out-lying settlements at Pymore and Burton Bradstock. Wherever possible, the name of the company with major associations with each site has been shown. Most of the sites are within the kilometre squares SY4692 and SY4693 on OS maps. References have been given for those outside this area.

### Central Bridport

#### South Street



*Spinning rope yarns Tomlinson's Cyclopaedia*

canvas might also be bleached and dyed and these processes were carried out with chemicals by the 1870s, when bleaching and dyeing plants were located at the larger mills. Earlier, materials had been boiled in alkaline lyes in 'bucking' houses and bleached by exposure to sunlight on bleaching grounds. Nets would, after machine braiding, be stretched to tighten them and then boiled in oak bark in a tanning house as a preservative measure. After this they were hung in drying grounds near to the mills. Fishing nets would finally be fitted and rigged into the various types by the addition of ropes, weights, cork floats and, in the case of trawl nets, wooden boards. Sports nets, increasingly important from the late-nineteenth century, would also be made up as appropriate to their intended function. Rope yarns might be tarred to prolong life by drawing through tar heated in a furnace.

Throughout the many different manufacturing processes, fibres and yarns had frequently to be collected up and wound on to machines and this laborious task had largely been mechanised by the later nineteenth century, as had the winding of twine or string into balls for sale.

The changes in technology and organisation, begun by Richard Roberts in the early years of the last century, have proceeded apace and in the past few years flax and hemp

From 1902 OS 25 ins map of Bridport: West Street and South Street



1. Bridport Museum and Art Gallery: machinery and textile material.

The Museum was the home of Seth Seymour in 1786 who worked spinning ways to the north of the present Folly Mill Lane and has many items and illustrations relating to local industrial and transport history. It is well worth visiting before undertaking an exploration of the town's industrial archaeology. Of particular interest are the exhibits connected with hemp and flax manufacture, which include a display of equipment used in domestic 'outwork' a model of a ropework, some rope-making machinery, a 'jumper' net-making loom and a more recent powered machine. These exhibits, though by no means a comprehensive selection, show something of the type of equipment used in many of the buildings described below.

The streetscape to the south of the Museum displays no obvious connections with the local textile industry. During

the last century, however, this street was chiefly occupied by the working people of the town and many small rope walks and workshops were situated behind and between the houses and courts.

2. No 45 South Street: former warehouse of Thomas Tucker & Co.

No 45 South Street, at the junction with Church Street, is the former premises of Thomas Tucker & Co, manufacturers of twine, thread, fishing and sporting nets, sailcloth, sackings and shoethread. Tucker is shown in directories here from 1824, and more precisely, at No 45 from 1898. No 45 was a warehouse, other premises listed in a partnership agreement of 1911 were another warehouse in nearby Folly Mill Lane, braiding shops at Folly House and St John's line shed - the latter will be mentioned later. Tucker also had interests in Slape Mill at Netherbury, a village to the north of Bridport.

- 2 Sites of spinning walks in South Street, including former works of George Kenway.

The area bounded by South and Church Streets to the south of Tucker's premises, now a car park, is shown as an open rope walk of the 1:500 OS plan and there were also two hemp-combing shops here in the present century.

There is little to see now, but some idea of the appearance of the walks can be got from maps and documents: the 1:500 OS Plan of 1887 shows a number in the street and the report of the Assistant Commissioner to the Children's Employment Commission in 1865-66 describes their operation:

'twine spinners work in open spinning walks or ways planted with trees to keep off the sun, the turners sitting in a shed at the end, open on the side towards the walk, turning a small wheel by hand to twist the fibre for the spinner. Bridport is full of such spinning ways, several side by side, with no separation. The number, however, is said to have decreased of late years, it is estimated by one witness to a third of the former amount, owing to the great increase of the work done in factories'.

The Report provides some harrowing insights into working conditions in the walks. Most of the spinners in these small ways were females from age fourteen upwards. The turners were boys or girls who might begin work at six but were on average 8-14 years old. Wages were from 1s 9d to 2s 6d per week, often for a working day of 6am to 8pm. In winter time, when demand for twine was strong, the spinners fastened small lanterns to their bodies whilst the turners, who did not require light, often sat in darkness in the sheds.

Small combing shops adjoined the spinning ways and it was estimated that they numbered 200 or more in the 1860s. In these cramped conditions, dust was a major hazard to health. In his evidence to the Assistant Commissioner in 1865, the twine-spinner Josiah Welch, who himself worked at combing in one of the small sheds, thought combing to be 'the hardest work under the sun' and that more combers died under 40 years of age than over it.

No 42 on the opposite side of the street was the premises of George Kenway, manufacturer of rope, line, twine, shoe-thread and nets. Kenway is listed here in directories from 1880 and at No 42 between 1895-98. He later moved to premises in St Michael's Lane. The area to the rear of No 64 is also shown as an open walk on the 1:500 plan.

4. South Mill: balling-mill site.

On the east side of South Street, just below the Chantry, is the site of the old Friends' Burial Ground. This site, the entrance now bounded by a pair of millstones, leads to South Mill, one of four grist mills that worked in Bridport into the twentieth century. A fire insurance policy of 1785 describes these premises as including a mill house and mill with a balling mill and stable adjoining.

Bailing or 'bolling' mills were built, it seems, at many of the grist mills and were employed to soften the fibre to prepare hemp for combing. They were similar in operation to Cornish stamps or other devices for crushing materials:

stampers, beneath which the hemp was placed were raised by cams on a shaft turned by a waterwheel and allowed to fall by gravity. The process was rendered obsolete by new machinery which was introduced into the spinning mills in the late-nineteenth century. South mill worked as a corn and meal mill into the twentieth century, latterly driven by a turbine.

### Port Mead

5. Port Mill: ruin of former balling mill (SY 464919).

The ruins of another balling mill are to be found opposite the cottages at Portmead on the River Brit below the Bridport Brewery. This site, which can be reached by following the footpath - known as the 'Bolling Mill pathway' which runs south alongside the west side of the river, is labelled 'Cottage, Factory and Portmead', occupied by Robert Turner, on the Symondsburty tithe map and apportionment. According to an undated note in Bridport Museum this mill was converted about 1890 by Job Legg, then owner of the nearby brewery, for grinding and crushing oats and beans for the brewery horses. Messrs Palmer, the present brewers, eventually removed stones and waterwheel - shown to be similar to that at the brewery in an old photograph at the Museum - as a flood precaution. The 1:500 plan of 1887 labels the mill as 'Port Mill, Corn'.

*It is possible to return to the centre of Bridport by following the path which leads north wards to the west of South Street from the bridge to the rear of the brewery and into-a playing field. The area around Gundry Lane and St Michael's Lane is rich in industrial sites.*

### Gundry Lane

6. St Michael's Foundry: formerly Ewens' factory.

If approached from the footpath and playing field, as described above, the first group of buildings to be reached was formerly the St Michael's Foundry of H N Harris. Harris, first shown here in the 1890 directory, carried on his business as an iron and brass founder and mechanical engineer into the post-world war two period and one of his hand-operated ropemaking machines can be seen in Bridport Museum. The history of this site is, however, of greater interest to the industrial archaeologist than this and surviving documents reveal a picture that is not immediately apparent from the physical remains. The early history of the site, situated across a channel or leat taken from the River Simene just before its confluence with the Brit, is obscure but it was probably one of the first water-powered spinning factories in the town. The Symondsburty tithe map and award of 1843 shows it as 'Goldings factory' owned and occupied by Sarah and Ann Golding and George Ewens. The factory was also known as 'Ewen's factory' and the 'Bridport factory'.

Early-nineteenth century directories list Ewens & Golding in 1824 and 'The Bridport Flax and Spinning Mill Co, Ewens & Golding proprietors' in 1840. The first detailed description of the site to be found much later in some sale particulars of 1882 when 'Ewens' Factory' was described as 'a Spinning Mill and Premises' consisting of a three-storey brick building with a large iron water wheel and a 25 hp

low-pressure rotative steam engine with two boilers. It seems that the mill was connected with Ewens' business in West Allington, as this was also offered for sale at this time. The machinery in the spinning mill had been offered for sale in 1878, as mentioned in the introduction. The 1:500 OS plan of 1887 labels the site as 'Canvas factory, disused' and it is possible that the premises, withdrawn at the auction in 1882, remained vacant until occupied by H N Harris.

7. **Priory Mill:** formerly Stephen Whetham & Sons.

Close by and on the opposite bank of the River Brit is the former steam-powered factory known as Priory Mills, built upon the old Priory Orchard. The mill was owned by a partnership which traded as Stephen Whetham & Sons, one of the town's major nineteenth century flax and hemp manufacturers. Whethams are first noted in the 1830 directory and last appear in 1931, this last entry recording that they had by then been taken over by Joseph Gundry. The 'Buildings and Machinery Book' for the mill survives at Bridport-Gundry Ltd and shows substantial sums expended on stone, sand, etc between 1837 and 1839, together with money for a conductor for a chimney in 1838 and wages for 'Leeds men' to install machinery. The date on the chimney stack - 1839 - seems to confirm that the mill was built at this date. Later entries refer to other buildings, but it is difficult to identify them on the ground. The 1887 1:500 plan shows the site to be much as it is today and an insurance valuation of 1911 provides a detailed list of the plant at this time. This included an overhead beam engine of 82 hp which drove, via line shafting, machinery for boiling, heckling, carding, drawing, roving and spinning flax and tow, together with machinery for cabling, twisting and polishing. There were also seventeen heavy canvas looms, calenders and gas-bleaching plant, as well as net-braiding machines and equipment for drying nets in the nearby field.

**Rope Walks**

8. **Warehouse:** formerly Stephen Whetham & Sons.

Further along Gundry lane, on the east side of Rope Walks is a tall stone building that was formerly the stores of Stephen Whetham & Co of Priory Mills. The site was owned by Whetham at the time of the Bridport tithe award and a deed of 1864 refers to their house and warehouse on the west side of nearby South Street. The Priory Mill Building and Machinery Book records expenditure of nearly £6000 on a warehouse in 1862 and it is likely that this sum refers to this substantial building.

**St Michael's Lane**

9, 10 & 11. **St Michael's Trading Estate:** formerly St Michael's Works and Stover Place Works of William Edwards and premises of William Gale.

The west side of St Michael's Lane was a most important area in the textile history of the town and the area - now known as the St Michael's Trading Estate - which extends northwards from Foundry Lane to the car park and bus station was extensively developed by manufacturers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It was until recently the manufacturing centre of Bridport Industries Ltd who merged with Joseph Gundry to form Bridport-Gundry Ltd. Some of the development of this site can be

traced from maps and surviving documents - but all is not clear, especially concerning twentieth century developments. The 1:500 OS plan shows the area as a number of open and covered spinning walks interspersed with houses and gardens, as do contemporary deeds, and most of the present buildings appear to have been constructed since this plan was surveyed in 1887.

The area immediately to the north of Foundry Lane - this lane was formerly regarded as an extension of Gundry Lane - was the St Michael's Works of William Edwards. The Edwards family - the name survives in Bridport-Gundry's range of 'Edwards Sports Nets' - were one of the greatest of the town's manufacturers. William Edwards is first listed in the 1859 directory, based in North Allington, and had moved to St Michael's Lane by 1874.

The St Michael's works was built on land acquired between 1895 and 1903. The plot purchased in the latter year was that adjacent to the present Foundry Lane and deeds reveal some interesting connections with the nearby works. In 1843, when the land was sold to the Whethams of Priory Mill, it was described as a 'Buckinghamhouse with the Plot or piece of land thereunto adjoining and belonging lately used as a Bleaching Ground but now converted into a Garden'. There was also a warehouse here, formerly occupied by John Golding and John and Thomas Ewens of the Bridport factory, mentioned above.

To the north of the St Michael's Works is the sale yard or cattle market, enclosed to the west and north by William Edwards' former Stover Place Works. Between 1895 and 1914 William Saunders Edwards purchased a number of properties around the sale yard, including Nos 1-9 Stover Place, and a plan of his property in the Dorset Record Office, made in 1929, shows this area to be covered by the Stover Works which was, at the time, powered by a gas engine. Edwards made a lot of money from war materials in the First World War and these premises may well be the result of these profits.

The area to the north of the Stover Place Works eventually became consolidated into the ownership of another member of the Bridport Industries group, William Gale. A number of Gales are listed in the directories but Walter Gale is the first to be located in St Michael's Lane in 1875. Much of this area of the lane formerly belonged to the Powell family, textile manufacturers here and in East Road for much of the last century. It was from Walter Powell that William Gale purchased in 1877 a plot with a dwelling house at the east (ie on the lane) and bookinghouse and combinghouse at the west, and a surviving plan of Gale's property in 1905 shows this to be a typical long spinning walk of the traditional type, sandwiched between rival manufacturers Ewens & Turner to the south and Robert Hounsell & Sons to the north. Ewens & Turner had purchased property here in 1876 and this passed to Gales in 1925, having first been sold in 1918 to Hounsell's (Bridport) Ltd. The property included a stone-built warehouse with counting houses and heckling and weaving sheds behind and this seems to be the warehouse now occupied by Livingstones. Robert Hounsell & Sons, whose main base was in North Allington, acquired their property in the lane in 1884 when it consisted of a dwelling house, workshops, property with two turnhouses, spinning walks and land behind. The deeds involved in these transactions offer interesting

insights into the development of the site and the legendary friction which arose between the rival manufacturers of the town. For example, Robert Hounsell's property, mentioned above, was described in 1891 as 'newly erected twine and line spinning shed, workshop and premises thereon' and Frederick Turner of Ewens & Turner had erected new heckling and weaving sheds behind his stonebuilt warehouse by 1886. Gale, who had in 1910 acquired property both to the north of Hounsell and between his factory and the lane, was involved in an acrimonious dispute over extensions and at one stage threatened to cut off the gas pipe which supplied Hounsell's gas engine. Gale wanted to buy the property and Hounsell's solicitors stated that their client ' . . . will not sell at any price and he says that if the order to remove the pipe is enforced, he will open the passage floor to take the gas pipe to his shed underground.' The outcome of this struggle has not come to light.

12. No 2 St Michael's Lane: formerly premises of George Kenway.

No 2 St Michael's Lane was the premises of George Kenway, rope, line, twine, shoethread and net manufacturer and merchant, who is shown here between 1905 and 1907, having been formerly based in South Street, as mentioned above.

#### West Street

13. West Mill: including part of former balling mill.

From St Michael's Lane, it is possible to enter West Street. On the north side of this street is West Mill, now an architect's premises. West Mill was in business as a grist mill until recent times but, as with other Bridport corn mills, also operated as a balling mill.

In 1842 the mill was occupied by Thomas Legg, a maltster and, brewer and a directory of 1848 refers specifically to his hemp and grist mills at this site. A lease of 1864 shows Henry Hansford as taking over the mill from Legg, together with a dwelling house, two closes and a brick building on one close 'formerly a brewery but now and for many years past a warehouse'. This lease also refers to a bolling mill and contains a covenant to the effect that the occupier of the two mills should not increase their machinery and share water when this was scarce.

The present mill building dates from 1878 and has three pairs of stones, driven by a turbine installed in 1886 by Hick Hargreaves of Bolton. The stone-built part of the old bolling mill, now forming a wing at right angles to the West Mill, survives.

14. Court Works of Bridport Gundry Ltd: formerly Joseph Gundry.

A short diversion along the path beside West Mill which runs north from West Street provides a good vantage point for the next site, the Court Works of Bridport-Gundry Ltd formerly the premises of Joseph Gundry & Co. The Gundry business, as indicated on the plaque on their West Street office block, was reputedly begun in 1665 by Samuel Gundry, a feltmaker. In 1762, Joseph Gundry occupied the Court, formerly Holland's Court, and an insurance valuation

of 1766 describes him as a twine spinner, sailcloth maker, maltster and brewer and shows his premises and stock to be valued at the high level of £4,200. Included in the valuation is a specific reference to 'utensils and stock of hemp and flax in his warehouse near West Mill' plus other premises including booking and combing houses and his house in West Street. The Bridport title award of 1845, which describes the area to the east of the West Mill leat as a 'mead', shows this to be then owned and occupied by Joseph and Benjamin Gundry and with a building of a similar ground plan to the office block of today. A datestone on the western gable end of the building indicates construction in 1844. Although similar in form to a spinning mill, there is no evidence of power supply and it seems that the building was probably a warehouse, workshops or office.

The main part of the Court complex is situated to the rear of the current office block. Many of the buildings were destroyed by fire in 1949 and were replaced by the modern factory building of 1963. Evidence on the growth of the works is scanty but suggests that it extended northwards from the present offices in the latter half of the last century with extensive construction of mills and walks for making twine, lines and rope and for netting looms, the whole powered by steam. Correspondence for the period 1864-77 between Gundry and John B Payne of Chard, 'Engineer, Inventor, Patentee and Manufacturer of Machinery for making Fishing and Other Nets, ropes, cordage, lines and laid twines', suggests that Gundry was making regular payments to Payne and providing materials and men for experiments or trials with machines for making twine and nets and for laying, striking, and hemp softening, Payne oversaw new building in 1864 and 1868 and his criticism of buildings erected earlier suggests that development had preceded this. Indeed, Payne's name appears on a cast iron stairway dated 1859, which is attached to a two-storey building which survives. The 1887 1:500 OS plan certainly shows an extensive range of buildings between the leat to West Mill and the road to the east, with drying grounds on the meadows and a stretching path which bridges the leat in an east-west direction.

15. South side of West Street: formerly R Budden & Sons.

The area to the rear of the shops on the south side of West Street opposite the Court Works, was also the site of textile manufacturing. R Budden & Sons, rope, line, twine, fishing net and plough rein manufacturers, are listed in the street from 1898, and from 1920 at No 54 which was an iron-works and brass foundry for much of the last century. A covered walk survives to the rear of the shops.

16. Market House: textile murals.

The Market House at the junction of West Street and South Street was erected under an Act of Parliament of 1785, on the site of the old St Andrew's Chapel. The building provided a ground-floor market with a council chamber above. The Market Hall, which gained its clock and turret some twenty years after its construction, contains a set of murals in the Council Chamber which illustrate the local textile industry in the past century. They were painted by F H Newberry (1855-1946) in 1925 and are based upon his youthful recollections of the old methods.



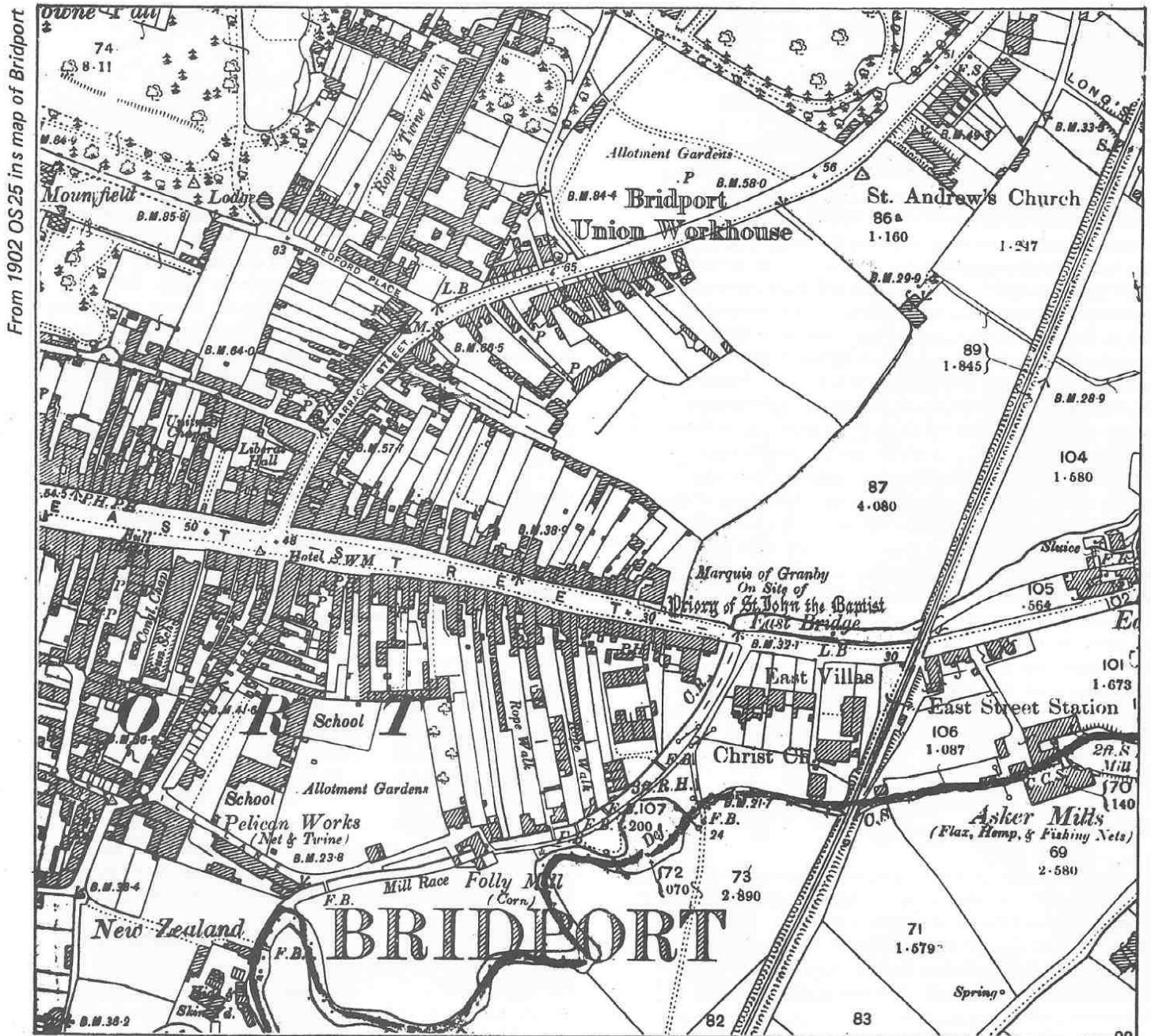
East Street

17. Stevenson's Garage: formerly H E Hounsell.

On the north side of East Street, Stevenson's Garage was formerly one of three sites in the town connected with the business of Herbert Eustace Hounsell, 'celebrated' makers of fishing nets since the seventeenth century. Herbert Hounsell is listed in directories in East Street in 1839, but Joseph and John Hounsell are listed here from 1823 and it is likely that, under the loose terminology adopted by the family firms and partnerships of the last century, that these listings refer to the same company. The three properties of the firm - the others were at Sparacre or Bedford Place and the Pelican Works in Folly Mill Lane, noted later - were fully described in a valuation of 1882. The East Street premises had frontages in East Street and Barrack Street and consisted of offices, stores for raw materials and together with two houses, a twine shop and workshop.

18. Sites and remains of spinning walks in East Street, including former premises of Norman & Son and Walter Tucker.

Other premises of textile manufacturers were located in East Street, especially on the area between the south side of the road and the River Asker which afforded ample room for the long spinning walks shown on the 1887 1:500 OS plan. Albert Norman & Son were located at 94 and 96 East Street between 1899 and 1903, and earlier Normans, manufacturers of rope, twine, hammocks, sports and fishing nets were in business from 1865. When sold in 1948, Nos 94 and 96 East Street were described as a cleared building site with two-storey workshops 88'0" in length x 12'0", a single-storey workshop 118' x 12'0" and a long shed with loft over extending to the river from East Street, measuring approximately 360'0" x 24'0". Nos 98 and 100 were offered for sale in 1910 and included the piece of land 'now or late used as a rope walk' of similar dimensions.



From 1902 OS 25 ins map of Bridport

On the opposite side of the street, No 79 was the base of Walter Tucker, manufacturer of rope, line, twine, shoe-thread, sporting and fishing net manufacturer from 1903-20 the business having been first recorded in 1885. When offered for sale in 1945 the property - Jessoppe House - possessed a store of 40'0"x 10'0" but no references to manufacturing premises have been found for this address.

Further along the street, No 97a was described, when sold in 1910 with Nos 98 and 100 East Street above, as a dwelling house and two spinning ways. The property was occupied by Mr D J Fry, but there is no record of him as a textile manufacturer in directories.

### East Road

#### 19. East Mills: balling-mill site (SY 472929).

East Street becomes East road when the River Asker is crossed. At No 1 East road is the former East Mills. Latterly a grist mill powered by a large iron breastshot waterwheel 8 ft diameter and 18 ft wide 'like five small wheels fixed together' - now removed - this site was a balling mill in 1841.

#### 20. Asker Mills: formerly Stephens & Co (SY 472928).

To the south of East Road, to the rear of the garage, is the site of Asker Mills, much of which has recently been demolished. The mill first appears in the 1867 directory as the premises of Stephens & Co, canvas and sail canvas manufacturers. John Pike Stephens & Co, situated in Rax Lane, Bridport and Bristol, are noted in directories from 1840. In 1875, a valuation of the machinery at Bristol and Bridport was taken, prior to the removal of this to Bristol, as mentioned earlier. Basically, the mills contained power looms and bleaching plant with the associated preparing and finishing machinery. Power was provided by one horizontal high-pressure steam engine which drove machinery via belting and shafting. A waterwheel is not mentioned in the valuation, presumably because this could not be removed to Bristol, but maps suggest that this was a waterpower site, with a large mill pond to the east of the mill building. Occupation after 1875 can be traced from directories: from 1880-1903 it was operated by Powell & Sons, manufacturers of twine, fishing line and nets, while from 1905-11 the Gourrock Ropeworks Co Ltd of Scotland had hand-operated machinery here. In 1915, R Budden & Son, earlier noted in West Street took over the mills but are not located here in 1920 when they took over the former West Street Ironworks. The mill presumably ceased to be used for textiles at this time and was later employed as a milk factory.

### Folly Mill Lane

#### 21. Folly Mill: Ackerman's works.

Alongside East Bridge runs a lane which passes behind East Street and affords a view of spinning walks noted earlier. The lane follows the course of the mill leat - now filled - which provided power for Folly Mills. Formerly a grist mill the site has connection with the textile trade and was probably a balling mill. The site is occupied by Ackermans who have built net-making machines, one of which is preserved in Bridport Museum, and have also

manufactured fishing nets. The waterwheel, removed in 1963, was an iron breastshot wheel of 12' diameter x 4'6" wide.

#### 22. Pelican Works: Formerly H E Hounsell

Further along the lane is the site of the former Pelican Works of H E Hounsell, the second of his premises to be noted. The valuation of 1882, previously mentioned in connection with his East Street warehouse, describes the site as '... a large galvanized Iron Braiding Shop, Mechanics' Shop with Smith's forge, Bellows, Lathe, etc. Chimney Shaft about 30' high, Furnace room for tanning, Drying loft, Casting room, Lay room, Engine room, 10 horse power fixed Engine and boiler, Boiler room, Coal store and work-shops. Also a Finishing room, drying Ground, Yard, etc together about one third of an acre'. The area to the north of the lane, next to the school, is shown as drying grounds on the 1887 OS 1:500 plan. The origin of the Pelican Works is not clear - the first reference to be found is in a receipt of 1873 - but the Bridport tithe map shows Joseph Hounsell as owner of the site and the plot to the north of the lane.

### Church Street

#### 23. New Zealand: former works of Thomas Tucker.

Folly Mill Lane meets Church Street just past the Pelican Works. Church Street leads to the car park which was noted at the beginning of the list of sites. Stretching from the end of the car park in a south-easterly direction to the River Asker, is the former works of Thomas Tucker, noted at nearby 45 South Street. The area - known as New Zealand - is shown as undeveloped on the 1902 25 in. OS plan, but had achieved its present form by 1930. The site was probably the St John's Works, Church Street, mentioned in directories from 1903 and the St John's line shed noted in Tucker's partnership agreement of 1905. Tucker had occupied this site at the time of the Bridport tithe award. Now seemingly absorbed by the former twine works is an old hide and skin yard, identifiable by its tall buildings with louvred windows.

### West Allington

#### 24. No 13 West Allington: former works of Rendall & Coombs.

Premises at 13 West Allington were formerly occupied by Rendall & Coombs, who became part of the Bridport Industries group in 1947. John Rendall, manufacturer of line, twine, shoethread, nets and sacks, is listed in Allington in the 1823/24 directory and the Allington tithe map and award of 1840 shows him as owner of a house, warehouse and garden here. He also owned, but did not occupy, houses, weaving shops and spinning walks to the north of St Swithins Church, off nearby North Allington.

The partnership of Rendall & Coombs is first noted in directories in 1851. They produced sailcloth, bags, webs and waterproof coverings, in addition to items listed above. The firm expanded along West Allington over former rope walks shown on the tithe map and on the OS.1:500 plan and also operated at Burton Bradstock between 1898 and 1931.

On the formation of Bridport Industries Ltd the head office of the new firm was located in the three-storey building

which is now occupied by the YHA. The works closed in 1970 and were one of the last to employ walks for spinning.

**25. Magdalen Works: formerly William James.**

The Magdalen works, so called in the directory of 1905 after the nearby site of St Mary Magdalen's hospital, were occupied from about 1890 by William James, flax spinner and manufacturer of rope, line, twine, shoethread, fishing and sporting nets. The premises were previously the works of Thomas Ewens & Co, listed in directories in West Allington from 1830. In addition to cordage and netting, Ewens made canvas and sailcloth. The Allington tithe award of 1840 describes the site as 'Warehouse Yard and Barton and Booking House' and sale particulars of 1882 show development with reference to a warehouse and three cottages on the west of Magdalen Lane, a large comparatively new warehouse standing opposite and a new spinning shed 250 feet long with bleaching buildings and ground'. William James became part of Bridport Industries Ltd in 1947.

**26. Grove Iron Works: balling-mill site (SY 455931).**

The Grove Iron Works, earlier known as Allington Foundry, is situated at the extreme edge of Allington parish on the River Simene. The foundry was operated by the Samsons, Gerrard and later Richard Robert, between 1840 and 1915. and afterwards by the Paragon Engineering Company. Amongst other things, Samsons made waterwheels and textile machinery (including the 'Jumper' loom in the Museum) and cotton nets, the latter between 1890 and 1898.

The site has earlier connections with the local textile industry; in 1783, Robert Gummer dug a mill pond - filled recently - and built a balling mill here. The mill was sold to Robert Sprake in 1809 and was converted into a foundry and manufactory of flax machinery. Gummer also operated spinning ways in the area over the road, now Simene Close.

**North Allington**

**27. No 5 North Allington: formerly Robert Hounsell & Sons.**

Premises immediately to the north of St Swithin's Church were formerly occupied by Robert Hounsell & Sons, manufacturers of line, twine, shoethread, fishing and sporting nets and canvas in North Allington from 1855 to 1935. Hounsell, who also had a spinning walk in St Michael's Lane (see page 25), is first listed at No 5 in the 1898 directory.

**28. No 80 North Allington & Fullbrooks: formerly Richard Tucker & Sons.**

Adjoining premises here were occupied by at least four of Bridport's textile manufacturers.

William Fowler and William Good, a shipbuilder, had a rope walk here. The Allington tithe map of 1840 reveals James Edwards, manufacturer of cordage, netting, sacks and canvas, as the tenant here and directories list him in North Allington from 1840 to 1852/3 and thereafter in St Michael's Lane. The partnership which traded as Richard Tucker & Sons, listed in directories in South Street

and West Street between 1830 and 1855, had moved to North Allington by 1859 and is listed more precisely at Fullbrooks between 1885-1895 and at 80 North Allington in 1915. Tuckers, who manufactured cordage, nets and sail cloth, had been taken over by Richard Hayward & Co Ltd of Coker Sail Cloth Works, Crewkerne, in the later-nineteenth-century and the business was acquired by Hounsells (Bridport) Ltd, eventually members of Bridport Industries Ltd in 1916. Documents provide descriptions of the premises at this time: No 80 was described in 1898 as a shed and rope walk used for preparing and manufacturing twines and the equipment included a large iron furnace, two tar furnaces, twelve large posts and two large posts to a windlass at the bottom of the shed. In 1899 the Fullbrooks property was described as a warehouse with braiding shops, weighing and bolting house, flax stores and tanhouse with the right to the use of the adjoining field for spreading, straining and drying nets and lines.

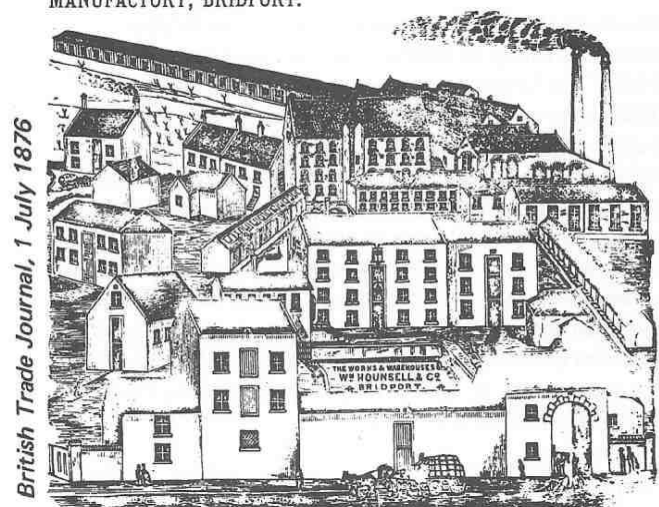
**28. North Mills: former works of William Hounsell & Co.**

Once on the northern outskirts of Bridport, but now surrounded by modern development, is North Mills, a large and important site which has only recently been left by Bridport-Gundry Ltd.

The site can be reached by a footpath from Fullbrooks Lane or from Victoria Grove, which joins West Street near the centre of Bridport. It was formerly the manufacturing base of a partnership which traded as William Hounsell & Co, one of Bridport's most progressive manufacturers.

The early history of William Hounsell & Co is not clear, but their cash book for 1777-1856 survives and shows them to own weaving shops in Barrack Street and Wykes Court in Bridport, which were leased to other manufacturers in 1825 and 1826, respectively. It is likely that North Mills was started at this date on the site of a former corn mill. The Factory Returns of 1838 include a water-powered flax mill in Allington which employed 36 people and the tithe map and award of 1840 show the mill to be then owned and occupied by Thomas Collins Hounsell.

**MESSRS. WILLIAM HOUNSELL & CO.'S TWINE AND FISHING-NET MANUFACTORY, BRIDPORT.**



*British Trade Journal, 1 July 1876*

Hounsells manufactured a wide range of cordage, netting, canvas and sailcloth and an account of a visit to the works, together with a composite illustration of North Mills and the firm's warehouse at Wykes Court, appeared in the

*British Trade Journal* in July 1876. This provides a description of the manufacturing processes of twine and netting at a time when the firm was in the forefront of the mechanisation of the manufacture of these products. After softening in corrugated rollers, the raw material, mostly hemp, was passed to 30 hecklers, still working by hand at this time, but recently having been concentrated in a heckling shop for purposes of supervision. The heckled fibre then passed to machinery for spreading, drawing, roving and spinning. Spun yarn was twisted into twine by machinery which travelled on rails and the material then passed to large sheds for finishing. Twine for netting passed to the weaving shed where it was braided on semi-automatic machines, said to be the only examples in the county at this time. Nets were then passed to the tanning house where they were boiled in coppers with oak bark and then exposed in the drying grounds. Motive power was provided by two powerful steam engines and a waterwheel of 'about 25-horse power'.

Some seven years later, the premises were leased to Messrs Dammers and Stephens and a detailed description of the property is given in the deeds: it then comprised the old spinning mill, engine house, boiler, drying house, coal shed, twine and line sheds, striking room, two tall chimneys, bundling house, new stores, kitchen, heckling shop, new spinning mill, engine house, lint store, mechanics' and carpenters' shops, net room, offices, tarring sheds, smiths' shop, store, cork-cutting and tow store, tan house and cart and pole house on two floors. Wykes Court, recently demolished, was then described as offices, stores and stabling.

The site was expanded rapidly in subsequent years. *The Bridport News* of 5th September 1884, reports celebrations of new works which included a new shed with tan and drying houses, new offices, hemp store of four storeys with spinning mills added to it, a room for twine machinery and a hemp rolling mill. Further extensions are recorded in 1904 and after 1914, the latter following the formation of Hounsells (Bridport) Ltd, from William Hounsell & Co, Herbert E Hounsell Ltd, Richard Tucker & Sons and Ewens & Turner, when work from the Spar Acre premises of H E Hounsell was transferred to North Mills.

Hounsells (Bridport) Ltd became part of the Bridport Industries Group in 1947 and Wykes Court was sold in 1949. The further merger of the Bridport firms in 1963 to form Bridport Gundry Ltd resulted in the concentration of production at the Court and on this site. North Mills has been considerably altered in recent years. The original mill was built across the mill race, below the pond, and was a traditional brick multi-storey block of seven bays with a slated roof. Power was supplied by an internal waterwheel. Only the stone foundations of this still survive. Later development, as indicated above, proceeded to the north and west of the old mill building and some of the long sheds can still be seen, as can the single-storey spinning mills and multi-storey hemp stores.

### **Pymore**

30. Pymore Mills: factory community and former works of Pymore Mill Co (SY 470946).

Pymore Mills, situated some 1¼ miles to the north of

Bridport, represents a fascinating example of a decayed industrial community.

The site has been an important one in local textile history and the mill was one of the earliest flax spinning factories to be set up in the area. Two insurance policies survive for the period before spinning commenced, the earliest, for 1785, records an oil and grist mill at Pimer(sic) owned by J T Bull and occupied by Samuel Gundry, whilst a policy for 1789 describes the mill as a flour and hemp balling mill, then owned by William Fowler, twine spinner, of Bridport. Deeds in the Dorset Record Office record the lease and conveyance of the mill from J T Bull to trustees of William Fowler in December 1790 and in 1799 Fowler leased and conveyed one-third of the mills to Samuel Gundry and another one-third to Messrs Gundry & Downs. The partners purchased six and a half acres of land adjoining the site in 1804.

It is not certain when the mill was converted to flax spinning, but a lease of 1812 stated:

'... the said Joseph Gundry the Elder and J G Downe have with the aforesaid William Fowler and Samuel Gundry and John Gale their copartners caused to be erected and fixed on or to the aforesaid hereditaments and premises divers Mills Wheels Machines and Machinery proper and necessary for the purpose of carrying on an extensive Manufactory and which they now carry on under the Firm and in the name of The Pymore Flax Mill Company ...'

According to a letter written in 1919 by H S Suttill, whose family were connected with the mill for much of the nineteenth century, the waterwheel, originally inside the building, was removed to the outside in 1800 to make the mill more suitable for spinning machinery. Suttill was under the impression that spinning began in 1801 but the earliest records he could find dated from 1812. The letterbooks of Richard Roberts suggest, however, that Pymore was already spinning flax in 1811,

The account book for the mill for 1829 survives and records the amounts of flax and tow being spun for local entrepreneurs and lists machinery for carding, roving, spinning, spreading and drawing and reeling twine, the whole powered by a waterwheel. Suttill notes in his letter of 1919 the decision to instal a steam engine in 1833 and the 1838 Factory Returns record a mill in Bradpole, obviously Pymore Mill, which employed 87 hands and was powered by both steam and water. The tithe map for the West End of the Parish of Loders (1846), in which the mill was located, shows the mill buildings to be confined to the area south of the large mill pond, but considerable expansion took place after this date. Documents at the Dorset Record Office record building works between 1843 and 1861 which include a warehouse, six cottages, a mechanics' shop and counting house. By 1876, when the mill was visited by a reporter from the *British Mercantile Gazette*, the premises covered a site of upwards of 20 acres and included two three-storey warehouses, a single-storey mill, a ropewalk, 27 cottages, a school and a lodging house for migrant workers. Products at this time were twines for nets, shop twines, yarns for fishing lines and shoethread. Three hundred people were employed on what was described as a model settlement. The final phase of development, to the north of the site, is recorded on the 1902 OS 25 in. Plan.

The mill was closed to textile production in 1958 and is now occupied by Duncan Tucker Ltd, furniture manufacturers. The original mill building is now a ruin but photographs appear in J M Richards' **The Functional Tradition in Early Industrial Buildings (1958)**.

### Burton Bradstock

31 & 32. Grove Factory (SY 491897) & Burton Factory (SY 489894): formerly Richard Roberts.

Sites at Grove Mill and Burton Mill played a pioneering role in the mechanisation of the local textile industry during the French Wars of 1793-1815. Richard Roberts (1752-1820 or 1822) was associated with both sites and his career as an innovator has been noted by both contemporaries and recent historians.

Roberts is described as a miller in insurance policies for 1784 and 1785 and entered the textile trade in 1793. In 1803 he introduced the first flax swingling or scutching mill in the west of England and this achievement is characteristically recorded in the surviving inscription on his Grove Mill. Roberts' letter books for the period 1807-1815 survive in the Dorset Record Office and it is possible to trace the expansion of his business from this source, although it is difficult to relate entries to buildings on the ground. Early in 1811, he was taking on preparing and spinning work for local manufacturers and enquiring after 'apprentice' labour of the Cranborne overseers of the poor and textile machinery of contacts in Leeds. By the summer of this year he was about to fill a mill with machinery 'on the best and newest: Principles I can find out'. Further development took place in 1814, when Roberts refers to 'a new Mill not yet fitted: with Machinery'. Business was stimulated by wartime demands for sailcloth, hammocks, etc, but also fluctuated and, although Roberts seems to have been successful in transplanting the textile technology of the Yorkshire linen trade to Dorset, his desire for innovation led him - along with many other flax manufacturers, it must be said - to engage in unsuccessful experiments in spinning Sunn hemp and in the use of Lee's patent system for preparing and scutching flax without retting.

After 1815, the end of the period covered by Roberts' letter books, information is sparse. Roberts died in either 1820 or 1822 and the business was carried on by his sons, Richard Roberts junior, having already taken over the Burton Factory in a dissolution of partnership by January 1913. Early nineteenth-century directories refer to partnerships of Darby & Roberts and Roberts, Ewens & Co. The 1838 Factory Returns record three mills at Burton, powered by a steam engine and four waterwheels, the whole employing 153 persons - by far the largest factory enterprise in the area. The Title Map of 1839 shows Francis Roberts as owner and occupier of the Grove Factory and Richard as occupier of the southern mill. Richard also occupied a flax shop to the west of the latter mill, whilst Eliza Roberts was owner-occupier of property between the church and mill which included a flax shop, counting house, factory and 'Lawrence Mill Dwelling House'.

The last detailed evidence of the Burton Factory to be located is a deed of 1850, by which shares in the factory were

assigned to Joseph Gundry on the bankruptcy of Messrs Samuel and Walter Gundry. This document refers to a grist mill called Burton Mill, a spinning factory and a factory erected 'shortly previous to 1822' by R.F Roberts which formed part of this spinning factory. The Gundry connection probably came about in connection with the family interest in the Pymore Mill Company, who also operated in Burton Bradstock between 1848 and 1865. The reference to the grist mill no doubt indicates the conversion of Grove Factory to corn milling, a role it fulfilled until recently.

Directories record later operators of the spinning mill at Burton as Charles Hoare (flax spinner and manufacturer of line, twine, shoethread and nets) in 1867, William Vernon in 1871, Burton Spinning Mills between 1875 and 1885, and finally, Rendall & Coombs of Bridport from 1898 to 1931.

### Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to Mr John Sales of Bridport Museum, who first encouraged me to investigate Bridport's industrial history and archaeology and helped with material and advice thereafter. Also to Mr A C Sanctuary of Bridport-Gundry Ltd for access to premises and materials and Mr Basil Short for comments on an earlier draft and for advice.

My grateful thanks also to Miss Holmes (now retired) and the staff of the Dorset County Record Office, to staff of the Dorchester and Weymouth Libraries and to library staff at South Dorset Technical College, the Science Museum, and the University of Leicester.

### Further reading and sources

Dorset has been rather neglected by industrial archaeologists and nothing detailed has been produced on Bridport's IA. For Bridport in general, see Basil Short & John Sales, *The Book of Bridport* (1980) and Basil Short, *A Respectable Society: Bridport 1593-1835* (1976). For the history of cordage and netting, see Miss M M Crick's essay on 'The Hemp industry' in *VCH of Dorset* (1908); Janice Pahl, 'The Rope and Net industry of Bridport' in *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society* Vol 32 (1961) pp 143-154; and Anthony Sanctuary, Hope, *Twine and Net Making* (Shire Album 51) (1980).

Two general social histories of Dorset: Barbara Kerr, *Bound to the Soil: a social history of Dorset 1750-1918* (1968) and M B Weinstock *Old Dorset* (1967) deal in detail with Richard Roberts and his enterprise.

Most of the research for this article was undertaken in Dorset in the mid-1970s. The main sources were the various editions of trade directories, OS maps and plans, especially the magnificent 1:500 Plan of 1887/88, tithe maps and awards, and deeds and business records in the Gundry Papers deposited in the Dorset County Record Office. Additional detail was obtained from Parliamentary Papers, from the papers of H S Simmons in the Science Museum Library and from nineteenth-century technical works.

More recent books on flax and hemp manufacturing in Leeds and Northern Ireland, the main seats of the UK industry, proved helpful in acquiring the wider perspective into which local developments must be put.

Further details concerning the firms engaged in the industry can be found in my article 'Bridport Textile industry 1814-1945' in *Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset* Vol XXXI (September 1981) pp 141-154.