

Winwood & Co Bristol

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In July 1995 a group from BIAS was welcomed at Hawker's Joinery at North End, Batheaston, by Colin Frayling, managing director and a long-standing member of BIAS. Supporting the roof of one of the workshops was a weather-beaten cast iron pillar bearing an obscure inscription. This had been but partially deciphered until this auspicious occasion when the legend WINWOOD & CO BRISTOL was suggested, essayed, and found to fit. This family of iron founders is best known for its name alone, though Hugh Torrens identified three members of the family particularly associated with Bristol; these included the most important member of the family, John Winwood III (1732-1810).¹

Back in 1764 John Jones, along with two fellow partners in the Dowlais Iron Company, Isaac Wilkinson and Thomas Harris, had established an iron foundry in Cheese Lane, St Philips. When in 1766 Isaac Wilkinson retired, he sold out his share to John Winwood III who had arrived in Bristol some years before as a sugar baker. Well after 1766, the date of Jones's

merger with Winwood, a firm with the name of John Jones & Co, of 40 St Philips Plain, iron founder² supplied anvil bits, butts, blocks and bottoms, and cast hammers and forge hammers to Frenchay Iron Co, 1776-1780, and were also described as the engineers who took delivery between 1750 and 1775 of parts for engines to be constructed at Dolcoath in Cornwall,³ and in the 1770s was kept busy making cylinders for 'Fire Engines, Cannon and Sugar Mill Cases, Mill Beds, Rollers and other articles of hard Metal'.⁴ From 1781 the firm traded as Jones and Winwood, and when John Jones died in March 1788, John Winwood III took over the iron foundry⁵

Winwood also became involved with Jonathan Hornblower (1753-1815) in developing and supplying Hornblower's steam engine, the first of which was set up at Radstock in 1782, where it worked until at least 1801.⁶ Hugh Torrens comments that the manufacturing of these complex engines was a genuine engineering achievement

by Winwood.⁷ The firm, which eventually became Bush and Soyres, closed down in 1889.⁸

No trace of the foundry is apparent today, but besides archival references to Winwood's products, much of his actual output, including notably a number of bollards around Bathurst Basin,⁹ almost certainly survives, although not all of it is identifiable. Torrens quotes in his articles lists of items such as equipment for sugar mills in every island in the West Indies besides cannon, cast iron pipe, canal ironmongery and iron utensils for factories, but none of this so far has been recorded as having the manufacturers name on it anywhere.

This dearth of identifiable Winwood products renders the Hawker's pillar the more interesting. Unfortunately, how it got where it is we cannot be sure. But Colin Frayling's great-grandfather was in charge of the carpenter's shop at Stothert's at a time when space was running short, and it was suggested to him that he might like to set up in business on his own and make their crane houses on his own market garden premises at North End. This he did in 1919, gradually putting up more and more sheds and finding the bits and pieces for them where they were no longer needed. It seems that the most likely source was Stothert's own back yard! The shed in question was apparently put up in the 1920s and, if we suppose that the pillar came from Stothert's, it is worth remembering that George Stothert jun. established his own foundry in 1815,¹⁰ so that he would no longer have needed to buy castings from Winwood's after that date. This suggests that the pillar was supplied between 1788 (when Winwood took over at his foundry) and 1815. In any case, Winwood & Co. in 1837 became Winwood, Bush & Beddoe¹¹ so it cannot have been made later than that year.

References

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