

Biscuits

Introduction

Malton had a strong Victorian connection with biscuits. An early mill was destroyed by fire in 1868. In the 1880s a new biscuit making business was

established but encountered commercial difficulties and was wound-up.

The Derwent Biscuit Works

It was probable that Mr. E. Johnson operated the original biscuit factory as his occupation was given in a marriage announcement in June 1859 'On Thursday week, at St. Leonard's Church, Malton, Mr. E. Johnson, biscuit manufacturer, to Maria, third daughter of Mr. John Hudson, ironmonger, all of Malton.' [1] Edward Johnson is listed in the 1861 Census as a 'biscuit manufacturer' in Low street. That same census lists 8 'biscuit makers', mostly under 16 years old, a 10 and a 12 year old apprentice, and three others including a 9 year old boy.

Evidently there was some mechanisation as a 'lad named Carr was caught between two revolving wheels, the cogs of which lacerated one of his arms' [2] Possibly this 'lad' was either Walkington Carr or Preston Carr both described as biscuit makers and living with their grandparents in Wheelgate per the 1861 census.

In August 1860, Edward Wheeler, a tea and coffee merchant in Sudbury, advertised and described himself as an agent for 'Johnson & Taylors Delicious Malton Biscuits' and offered 'Luncheon, 4d;

People's Mixed, 6d; Mixed Tea, Bath, and Spice Nut, 8d; Best Mixed, 1s; Cracknell, 1s 2d, per lb' [3]

On Wednesday, 19th February 1868, the Derwent Biscuit Works were destroyed by fire, together with machinery and stock, owned by Messrs. Johnson and Taylor. [4] A further report suggests the scale of the fire 'The Malton Gas Works and other property were for some hours in the greatest danger. Had it not been for the plentiful supply of water from the newly-accomplished public works, the most part of the business premises of Malton must inevitably have gone down.' [5] The loss was estimated at £7,000 - £8,000, partly insured by 'The Royal ..The loss will be very heavily felt in Malton, not alone by the proprietors but by the large number of hands whom they employ - the majority of which were dependent on this manufactory alone for employment, there being none other of a similar nature hereabouts; and the calamity suggests to them either great distress or a speedy removal.' [6]

Soon after the fire, the Malton Board of Health met to discuss 'the inefficient state of the fire brigade.' Apparently 'neither of the board's engines could be got into play.' [7]

The Malton Biscuit Mill

That was not the end of biscuits in Malton as it was reported early in 1883 that 'there is every prospect of a company being successfully floated for the establishment of a biscuit manufactory on a large scale at Malton. A biscuit factory formerly existed there, but was burnt down about fifteen years ago..... A committee has been formed to meet an

engineer who is coming to inspect some suggested sites' [8]

The mill, leased from Earl Fitzwilliam began work in August 1887. The first general meeting of the Malton Biscuit Mill Company Limited was held on 8th September, 1887. It was formed 'for the

manufacture of biscuits of all kinds of confectionery, cakes, and for the supply of whole wheat meal flour.' The mill was capable of manufacturing 8 - 12 tons of biscuits and three and a half tons of fancy cakes per week. When a certain percentage of dividend is paid, the employees were to get a share of the profits. Earl Fitzwilliam was said to own the mill and to have subscribed for 100 shares. [9]

In October 1890 the company was advertising for 'A Foreman Biscuit Baker' and offering 'constant employment to a steady efficient workman.' [10]

In 1893 the company was charged under the Factory Acts for employing boys under the age of 16 who were unregistered and uncertificated as it was necessary to have all boys examined within seven days of the commencement of their employment, and certificates of fitness obtained. [11]

The company struggled to get established and in 1894 an extraordinary meeting concluded 'that the company be wound up voluntarily.' [12] A dividend was never paid and 150 shareholders lost money. After meeting all liabilities there was said to be just £1 18s [13]

References

- [1] Leeds Times, 11 June 1859
- [2] Cheshire Observer, 9 July 1859
- [3] Suffolk and Essex Free Press, 2 August 1860
- [4] The Morning Post, 22 February 1868
- [5] Sheffield Independent, 21 February 1868
- [6] York Herald, 22 February 1868
- [7] Leeds mercury, 27 February 1868
- [8] Daily Gazette for Middlesbrough, 6 January 1883
- [9] Sheffield Independent, 10 September 1887
- [10] Reading Mercury, 11 October 1890
- [11] York Herald, 31 July 1893
- [12] Yorkshire Gazette, 6 January 1894
- [13] Yorkshire Gazette, 30 May 1914