

# *Barwell* AND *Earl Shilton* **BOOT** AND **SHOE** Trail

**G.B. BONSER**  
INCORPORATED  
BARWELL  
LEICESTER

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& CO. LTD.  
BARWELL - LEICESTER

**H. LEADER**  
INCORPORATED  
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*Moulds and Moore*

**HODGKIN  
POWERS**  
BARWELL - LEICESTER

*B. Grewcock & Sons*  
LIMITED  
Sole of  
"MALLETS"  
SHOED TOOLS

**EATOUGHS**  
LIMITED

**W. H. COTTON & SONS Ltd.**  
EARL SHILTON LEICESTER

## *The Aim*

Through this leaflet the people of Barwell and Earl Shilton aim to record and commemorate the important role that the Boot and Shoe industry has played in the development of their villages.

Only 50 years ago, their streets bustled with women and men on their way to work in the Boot and Shoe factories and the footwear they made was worn by people around the world from Russia to South Africa. Today only two companies remain and the factories have been taken over by other industries or even demolished. On this trail you are invited to gain a glimpse of their past and ensure their industrial heritage is not forgotten.

June 2000

# The History

## Why did the boot and shoe trade develop in our villages?

In the 1860's Leicester boot and shoe manufacturers moved part of their production process to the area.

Leather uppers were cut and closed in city factories with village outworkers making and finishing the shoes in their homes, barns or garden sheds. Known as 'basket-work', this was the usual method of manufacture until the late 1880's when local factories became the rule. The earliest factory in the county outside Leicester was started in three cottages on the main road through Earl Shilton. By 1896 there were 12 shoe manufacturers in Earl Shilton and 11 in Barwell.



Photograph with permission of Mr J Bevin

## Hard working conditions

Conditions were hard, workers in the 1880's had to pay £1 down and worked the first month before receiving wages. Up to 1895 workers had to buy their own rivets and tacks from the factory owners. This led to the growth of independent hardware shops in both villages offering cheaper materials. As a concession the shoe workers were allowed to send out for 1/2 pint of beer to drink while they were working!

## Boot and Shoe Operatives Union

The hard conditions led to the growth of the Barwell branch of the Boot and Shoe Operatives Union in the early 1880's. There was a lock-out in the industry in 1895 because of resentment over bad factory conditions. During the dispute the Union held meetings in the Coffee House in Barwell High Street and paid lock-out money to the men who were out of work for 10 weeks.

## The 20th Century

The area became a major centre of production, manufacturing boots for the army during the 1st World War. At their peak in the early 1950's, the factories of Barwell, Earl Shilton and Hinckley produced over 7 million pairs of shoes per year.

However in the 1970's, foreign competition made shoe production uneconomic and within 20 years the industry had collapsed leaving only two shoe companies and the factory buildings to mark the industry's passing.

# Boot and Shoe Factories of Barwell



1. **Harry Lucas** Goose Lane, off Mill Street. Destroyed by fire. Horse drawn fire engine came from Hinckley to put out the blaze.



5. **Hall and Geary** Kirkby Road. Made boys and girls boots and shoes. Mr Hall lived opposite the factory at a house called Baveno. The company went bankrupt in the 1950's.



8. **Hodgkin and Powers** (Konfedence Works) Arthur Street. Made boys and girls shoes. The business was sold in the 1960's.



9. **George Ward Ltd** Arthur Street/Kingsfield Road. George Ward set up business in 1894. He was awarded the Military Medal in the 1st World War. His business expanded in



2. **Bennett and Company** The Barracks. Established in 1885 by Caleb Bennett. Made women's medium grade fashion shoes.



6. **H Grewcock** Arthur Street. Founded by Harry Grewcock, nicknamed 'Nazy'. Made boys and girls boots and shoes. Harry became a 'clicker' for George Ward when his business was taken over in the 1930's. He used to take leather home in a wheelbarrow and return the finished work to the factory.



3. **G Geary** Stapleton Lane. Made army boots during 1st World War and went bankrupt in the 1930's. Arthur Geary built a skittle alley at the back of the factory in the 1890's as a means of retaining his workers. Competitions were frequently held for a gallon of ale or dish of tripe.



7. **H Garner** Arthur Street/Kingsfield Road. On the Thursday of Barwell's September Fair, all the children had free rides paid for by Harry Garner. Went bankrupt in the 1930's.



4. **Sperope** Kirkby Road. The Barwell Productive Society was founded as a cooperative in 1890. The workers put down £5 each to start the firm. In 1895 it was renamed the Sperope Boot Manufacturing Company and moved to Kirkby Road. It was taken over in the 1950's.



Barwell

### Acknowledgements:

Earl Shilton and Barwell Local History Society  
 Boot and Shoe Manufacturer's Association  
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the depression when he took over 4 Barwell factories and eventually became one of the country's largest manufacturers. He put this down to his skill and knowledge of leather, paying his bills within a week, gaining good discounts and his keyword 'production'. Ward supplied Colin Cowdray with cricket boots size 19 and was the first factory in England to make trainers! They turned down a contract to make Doc Martens as they didn't think there was much future in them. Closed 1989.



10. **Harvey, Harvey and Company** George Street. Brothers William and Enos Harvey began manufacturing boys and girls shoes circa 1900, moving to George Street in 1930. Famous clients included Petula Clark, bowling shoes for Tony Alcock and coloured suede shoes for pop group Showaddywaddy.



11. **Amos Moore and Company** King Street. One of the earliest shoe manufacturers. Bought by Harvey, Harvey and Co. during the 1930's. Now owned by David Spencer.



12. **Moulds and Moore** Shilton Road. Established 1920. Made boys, girls and ladies shoes.



14. **Coley Brothers** Dawsons Lane. Noted for their 'glace kid patent cap shoes for men' made from Abyssinian goatskin.



13. **Ney Brothers** Hill Street. Sold in 1932. Made boys and girls boots.



# Boot and Shoe Factories of Earl Shilton



1. **J B Grewcock and Sons Ltd** Church Street. Trade mark 'Maureen'. Mr Grewcock was known for constantly smoking a pipe.



4. **Ladkin and Son (the Valdetta)** Keats Lane. Originally a heel manufacturer. Later produced ladies wide fitting quality shoes.



2. **T Whitmore and Sons Ltd** Hill Top. Founded 1870-1877. Employed 130 and produced 6,000 shoes per week at its peak. Closed 1994.



5. **J Lucas (Reliant Works)** High Street. Wholesaler. (Frontage is later addition).



3. **J.W. Woolof & Son**, Highfield Mills. Keats Lane. Employed 65 in 1920 making boots for the Russian Army.



6. **J Worthington and Co** West Street.



7. **H Orton and Sons - Boot Manufactures** Oxford Street. Founded in 1917. The only surviving shoe factory in Earl Shilton. Originally manufactured hobnailed boots, now supplies specialist shoes including golf shoes for Laura Davis.



8. **W H Cotton and Sons Ltd** Hurst Road. Established 1897. Employed 207 in 1920. The street would be flooded with workers walking or cycling home when work stopped at 6:00 pm.



9. **JW Watts (Empire Works)** New Street. Produced boots for Russian Cossacks and exported to South Africa.



11. **E Pinchess Ltd** Rossendale Road. Now Breconshire Hosiery.



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13. **R Loxley and Co** New Street. Became Vesty's Box factory supplying shoe boxes.



10. **E Pinchess and Co Ltd** Highfield Street. Produced 'Beacon' brand and 'Utility Shoes'.



15. **A Abbott Ltd** New Street. Founded 1880.



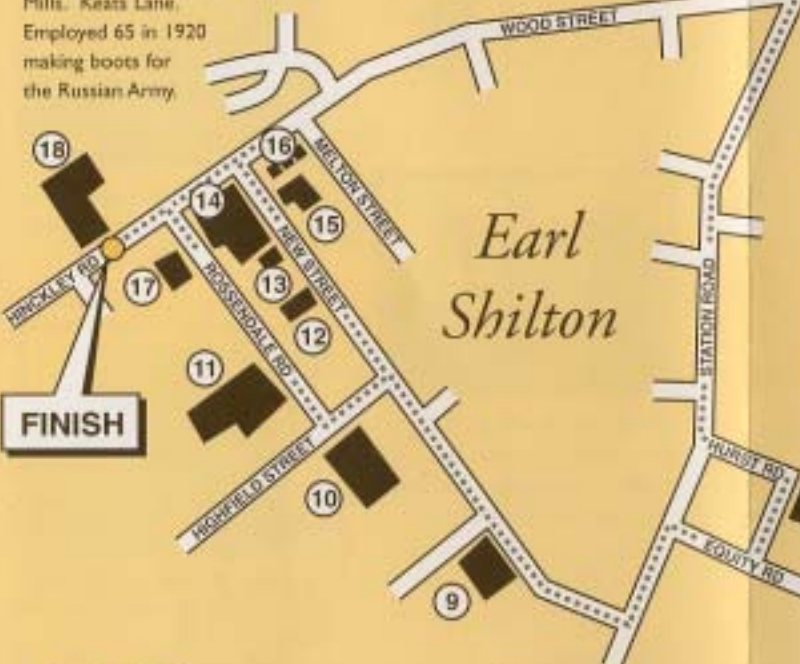
14. **Eatoughs Ltd** New Street. Founded in 1919 by Oliver Eatough who previously owned a slipper factory in the Rossendale Valley. Made children's slippers and sandals. In 1934 all 1000 employees were taken to Blackpool to celebrate Mr and Mrs Eatough's golden wedding. In 1936 Eatough's pioneered the installation of 'Music while you work' - the first in the shoe trade to do so. Produced slippers to be attached to electrically heated flying suits for 2nd World War bomber crews and dogs for women workers in the munitions factories. These were later produced for refugees in Europe. The factory was rebuilt in 1970 but closed 1969.



17. **Eatoughs Ltd** Rossendale Road.



18. **W Bird and Co** Hindkley Road. Established 1882. Brand name 'Charmian'.



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