

FROM SHIPBUILDERS TO COTTON MANUFACTURERS: EDWARDS OF FRODSHAM

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This story was revealed during research for the Heritage Shop Project.

It begins in 1794, when George Edwards, a carpenter, married Sarah Hopkins at St. Laurence Church, Frodsham. They had 5 children christened at St Laurence's, then a son, George, christened in Warrington in 1808 and a daughter, Elizabeth, in Gt Sankey in 1811. George presumably moved to the Warrington area to hone his skills in shipbuilding. Sarah, their youngest child, was born in Frodsham in 1816, by which time George was a partner in the shipbuilding firm of Hayes, Urmson and Edwards at Frodsham Bridge.

Chester Chronicle 27th December 1816:

On Thursday se'nnight [last week], a fine Galliot, called the Kent, was launched from the yard of Messrs. Hayes, Urmson and Edwards, at Frodsham, in this county; she went off in a beautiful manner, and without the occurrence of the least accident. At 2 o'clock, the shipwrights, and others in their employ, were treated with a good substantial dinner, plenty of strong ale, etc, etc. A little before the Kent began to move down the launch Mr John Edwards, son of one of the proprietors, with daring intrepidity, ascended her mainmast, where he maintained his perilous situation amidst the violent concussions which so weighty a body inevitably produces, on plunging into the fickle element, and to the astonishment of a great number of spectators.

George, the shipbuilder, was also a grocer, listed as such in Pigot's Directories of 1828 and 1834 but he considered himself mainly a shipbuilder and vessel owner. When he wrote his will in 1827 he owned his own shop and the flat "William".

John b.1795, the daredevil mentioned above, became a carpenter and was widowed in 1832. He too died young in 1836, leaving his 3 young sons, Richard, James and George, to be raised by their grandparents, George and Sarah.

George Snr. died in 1839, leaving his estate to his wife Sarah, with the proviso that on her death or remarriage their son George had first option to buy the business on account of his infirmity. In the event this stipulation was unnecessary as George died later that same year. He left his mother the profits from his share of the following vessels, all sailing from Liverpool; $\frac{1}{2}$ of the "George and Sarah", $\frac{1}{3}$ of the sloop "Weaver" and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the sloop "Jane". (In August 1848, at 2am one morning, a sloop named "Jane" from Liverpool, carrying flour and sugar, was in collision with "The Prince of Wales" steamer from Belfast to Fleetwood. The steamer was run ashore with the loss of 3 men. The sloop was a complete wreck.)

Of James's children, Richard became a draper and in 1861 had a shop in Lower Church Street. He was listed in the 1860 trade directory as a silk merchant, haberdasher, hosier and dealer in millinery, flowers and funerals. He gave all that up and had moved to Everton by 1871. Another son, James, died when he was only 11. George went on to run the family grocer's on High Street, following the death of his grandmother Sarah. Mary, the eldest of George's 3 daughters, married Andrew Hutchinson of Manor Farm and their son, John Arthur Hutchinson, had a garage on High Street.

Returning to the 8 children of George Snr, two died in infancy. Elizabeth born in 1811 died aged 18. John and George have been mentioned already. Thomas, a shipwright when he married his first wife in 1821, became a successful draper and grocer in Barnton, Northwich. Sarah, the youngest, married Richard Guest a chemist of Frodsham. She lost 2 of her 3 children in infancy and her husband after only 6 years of marriage. Although her husband was from a wealthy family, his father being a gentleman farmer with land and cottages in Hatton, Sarah spent her widowhood bringing up her young daughter by herself, earning a living as a needlewoman. We will now concentrate on James, born in 1806, who is possibly the most interesting of all.

James married Martha Williams, daughter of a cheese factor of Norley, in 1835. They had 7 children, 2 of whom died young. In 1841 he had a draper's shop in Church Street but by 1851 James had moved to a draper's in Main Street, next to the Golden Lion. In the 1861 census his occupation was woollen draper, cotton spinner and manufacturer and in 1871, cotton manufacturer and draper.

Back in 1813, Samuel Mouldsdales, a draper of Frodsham, put the following properties up for auction:

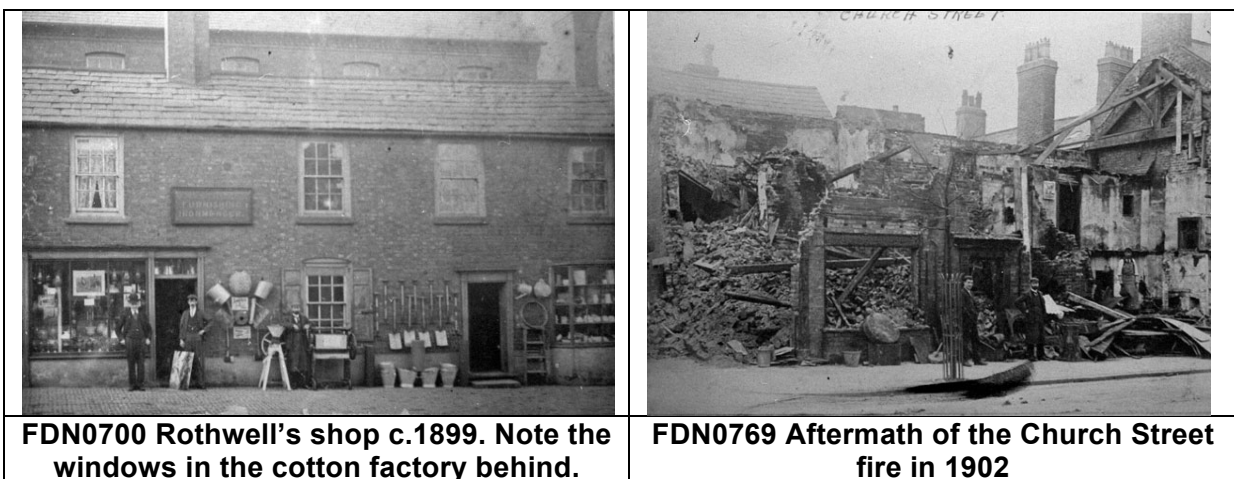
Chester Chronicle 26 March 1813

Lot 1 All that building, situate and being in front of a certain street in Frodsham aforesaid, called Church Street, lately used as a cotton factory, and at present unoccupied.

Lot 2 Twenty eight looms, now fixed up in the before-mentioned building.

Lots 3, 4 and 5 were a terrace of 3 newly built brick dwelling houses on Church Street and the advertisement stated that Lot 1 was a new building capable of being converted into 4 cottages.

That description matches the property at the lower end of Church Street, next to the Golden Lion. The cotton factory building is still there at the rear of the shops, despite the fire and explosion in 1902 that destroyed the neighbouring buildings.



It is not unreasonable to think that James Edwards purchased these properties at some point and re-established the cotton factory. James died in 1879 and in 1881 the property in Church Street, then occupied by J. W. Rothwell, ironmonger, was auctioned. It was probably then it was purchased by Mr. Rothwell who later used the "cotton factory" as a workshop for making milk churns and suchlike.

There is more evidence of a small cotton industry in Frodsham in the early 19th century.

Chester Chronicle 24 December 1802

Lot 1 That well accustomed Inn called the King's Head [now Queen's Head], in the town of Frodsham, now in full trade and in the occupation of John Shaw; comprising a substantial brick built dwelling house, with excellent stabling for 22 horses, cowhouse, barn and spacious yard and garden. Also, an extensive building situated on the above premises, well calculated for carrying on the Cotton business, being sufficiently capacious to contain 16 looms on the first floor, or the whole may be at little expense, ...converted into a malting.

James Nickson, landlord of the King's Head, in his will of 2nd May 1831, mentioned his dwelling house known as the King's Head, with its outbuildings, cotton factory, cottages, garden, bowling green and croft.

Back to James Edwards: His wife Martha died in 1857 and James married her sister, Jane. He bought a house on Main Street on 3rd August 1874 from the sisters Miss Frances and Miss Elizabeth Fawcett and retired there. We know this house as "The Gables". His shop next to the Golden Lion was taken over by another draper, Thomas Roberts. James died in 1879 and in his will he left the house to his children, allowing Jane the full use of it during her natural life. James was a wealthy and generous man. He left £10 to the Rev. John Cartwright and £5 to each of 13 friends. He also left every family in receipt of parochial relief in Frodsham and Frodsham Lordship the sum of 2s 6d, to be paid in the week of his funeral.

Of his 5 surviving children, George became a draper in Winnington Northwich. Sarah married Jabez Thompson, son of a shipbuilder of Witton. Jabez, originally a salt merchant, had a Terra Cotta business in Cuddington. Elizabeth married a veterinary surgeon of Tattenhall. Francis went to Rochdale where he established his own cotton manufacturing business, eventually retiring to Southport. James a cotton spinner by trade moved to Rochdale too and married there. He returned to Frodsham and in 1890 bought his parents' home from his brothers and sisters following his stepmother's death in 1888. He called the house "West End". At that point he was a corn, hay and straw merchant. In 1906 his daughter, Eleanor, married and moved to Swinton, Lancashire. James moved in with her and in the 1911 census described himself as a "retired cotton spinner". In July 1908 he sold "West End" to the sisters Miss Roscoe and Mrs Jameson from Knutsford who in turn sold it to Samuel Hancock who called the house "The Gables".



The Gables, 52 Main Street, in 2010