

Notes on some Sheffield Nicholsons

by Robert Arnold

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Early records from Darnall

There are references in 'Reminiscences of Old Sheffield. R.E. Leader.1896' to "John Nicholson of Darnall". This relates to before 1800 when he lived in a village outside Sheffield. Various rural jobs such as coachman and shopkeeper are mentioned for the family and then later one is a presser (scale presser in the steel industry, a scale is the side of a pocket or pen knife). He is also referred to as grandfather of "Messrs Nicholson of Mowbray Street" which implies that John Nicholson & Sons at the Mowbray Street works were well known by 1896. Darnall is now a suburb east of Sheffield embedded between Attercliffe and the Sheffield City airport.

John Nicholson & Sons

Near the top of the tree diagram is a John Nicholson born in 1790 in Darnall. He moved to Sheffield and somehow became a steel manufacturer, founding John Nicholson & Sons, which ran from about 1847 to 1971. In 1849 it is listed in White's Directory of Sheffield at 69 Charles Street and in 1852 as "Nicholson John & Sons, springknife, tableknife, razor & etc manfrs. 19 Union Street". By 1856 White's describes it as "merchants & steel converters & refiners" in Mowbray Street. It seems to have grown from a workshop into one of many small industrial firms doing smelting, re-melting and some manufacture of articles, as well as a retail outlet for steel goods. They are still mentioned today on the internet by collectors of straight edged razors ("cut throat shaving razors").

Mowbray Street Works

John Nicholson senior was living in Gloucester St in 1852 and 12 Orchard Street in 1856. The business was at Mowbray Street from around 1854 where it stayed until it closed around 1971. The Sheffield City Council plans to preserve and restore the south side of Mowbray Street in some way to show the history of small works. I do not know if this includes the site of John Nicholson & Sons.

John senior was married to Martha from Upper Hallam and they had five sons born between 1812 and 1831. These are the sons in John Nicholson & Sons. William and James were trading as John Nicholson & Sons in 1865. They made a claim that is listed in the Sheffield Flood Claims Archive, when a dam burst in 1864 and damaged the city centre.

SFCA Claim for Loss of Property #438				Page 1 of 1
Sheffield Flood Claims Archive Online - Prototype				
Claims for loss of property: Claim no 438				Claim summary Search Claims index Names index Home Page
No. of Claim	Name of Claimant	Description of Claimant	Address of Claimant	
438	William Nicholson and James Nicholson trading under the firm of John Nicholson & Sons	Steel Manufacturers	Mowbray Street Sheffield	
Nature of Claimant's Interest	Particulars of Claim	Amount of Damages Claimed		
	7 Tons Converting Coal @ 9/6	£3	6s	6d
	5 Tons hard Coke @ 15/.	£3	15s	
	50 Bushels Charcoal @ 4d		16s	8d
	16 Bushels Charcoal @ 3½		7s	4d
	2 Tons White Clay @ 40/.	£4		
	21 Tons Pot Clay @ 24/.	£25	4s	
	5 Tons Stand Clay @ 8/.	£2		
	320 Clay pots for melting Steel @ 9½ each	£12	13s	4d
	1300 Clay pot Lids @ 1d each	£5	8s	4d
	1300 Clay pot Stands @ 1d each	£5	8s	4d
	4 Tons River Sand @ 6/6 per Ton	£1	6s	
	To rebuild 12 new melting holes stone Bricks Labour etc.	£5	5s	
	To cash paid for Wages for cleaning the yard & cellars of the Mud brought by the Flood also the use of 2 Horses & Carts for cleaning away mud	£10		
	To damage done to Furniture in the Cottage	£1		
		£80	10s	6d
Certificate Granted 15 April 1865		Assessed by Assent at £80 10s 6d		

Note: Nature of Claimant's Interest is omitted

John Nicholson senior's eldest son died aged 26 in 1839

The eldest son, another John Nicholson, married Elizabeth Grayson. This couple had three children but John died aged 26 (no death certificate found) in 1839 when his son John junior was 4 years old. Their other son had died the previous year aged 17 months and their daughter was born fatherless and died of consumption after 9 months.

Elizabeth, now widowed and with a young son, became the housekeeper for her father-in-law and moved in with him and his wife and some of his sons. In 1851 they were in the census living in Gloucester St, Broomhall, Ecclesall Bierlow. John junior was 15 years old, working as a spring knife cutler. He lived with his uncle Matthew, a spring knife manufacturer, and his 60 year old grandfather, John senior and Martha aged 63. They were looked after by his 39 year old mother who was the housekeeper. Elizabeth died of pneumonia in 1857 aged 45 just after her son John junior was married.

John Nicholson junior married and in business himself in 1861

John junior must have been ambitious and dynamic. Rather than joining his grandfather and uncles in John Nicholson & Sons he started his own business. At the age of 25 in 1861 he was living with wife Sarah Flather and their first child with one servant in Broomfield Villa, Ecclesall Bierlow.

Sarah Flather was from the family that ran "David Flather & Sons, mnfrs. of joiners' tools, skates, edge tools, and saws, &c., Solly Works, 251 Solly street". White's Directory 1862. It seems to be a small dynastic alliance.

ESTABLISHED 1817.

DAVID FLATHER & SONS,

MANUFACTURERS OF

JOINERS' TOOLS,

Edge Tools, Files, Saws, Skates, Augers, Tool Chests,

&c., &c.

Also, DAVID FLATHER'S IMPROVED REGISTERED PLATED BRACES,

AT SOLLY WORKS, SOLLY STREET.

ALSO, STEEL CONVERTERS AND REFINERS,

And Manufacturers of every description of Blister, Shear & Cast Steel,

AT LOVE STREET STEEL WORKS, SHEFFIELD.

Meadow Steel Works

His business, Meadow Steel Works, Allen street, employed 11 men and two boys in 1861 and has a splendid full page advert in the 1862 White's Directory of Sheffield.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

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JOHN NICHOLSON, JUN.,

MANUFACTURER OF

CAST, SHEAR, AND BLISTER

STEEL

OF EVERY DESCRIPTION;

ALSO,

CRINOLINE STEEL

OF

WARRANTED SUPERIORITY,

**In the Ingot, Sheet, or Tempered ready
for the Coverers.**

General Dealer in Sheffield Goods,

FILES, SAWS, MACHINE KNIVES,

LOGWOOD RASPS, AND CHIP KNIVES;

ENGINEERS' TOOLS, HAMMERS,

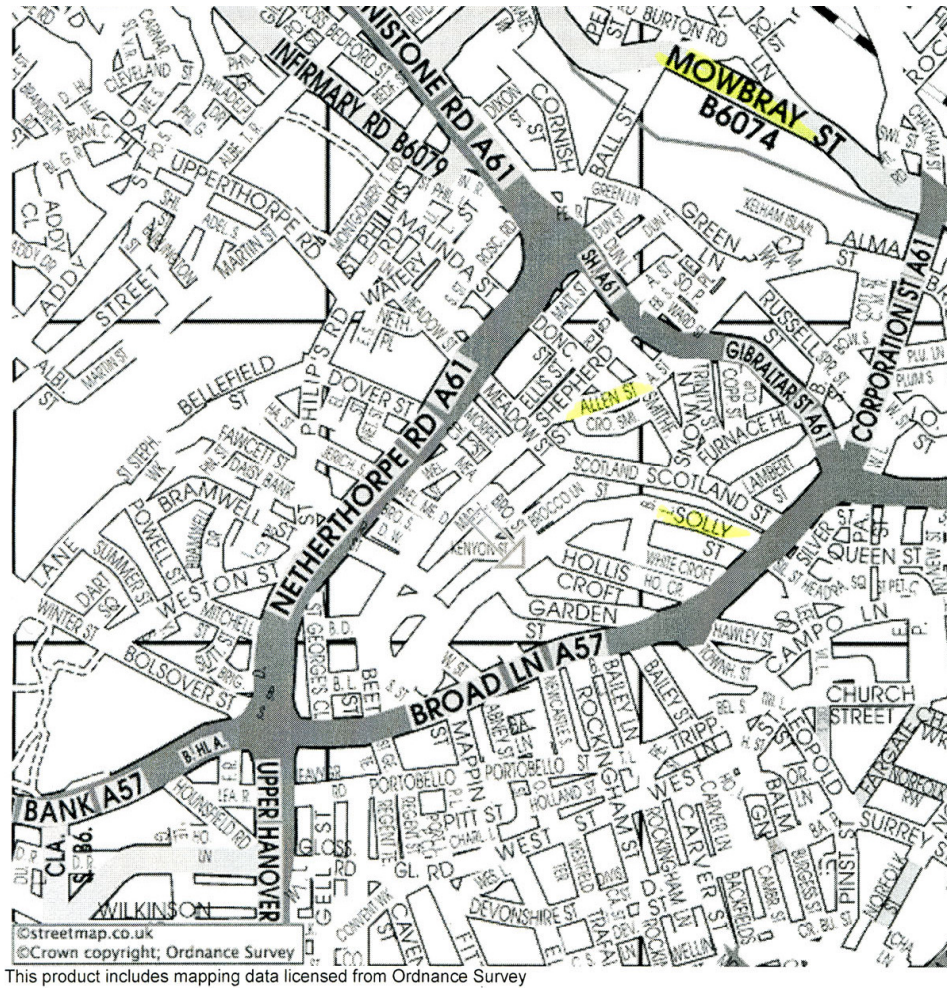
x &c., &c.,

MEADOW STEEL WORKS,

ALLEN STREET,

S H E E F F I E L D .

The addresses of the three works, Mowbray Steel Works, Meadow Steel Works and Solly Works are all still on the Sheffield map and are close together in the old original industrial area below the city centre.



David Flahner and Sons
Solly Works, Solly St

John Nicholson and Sons
Mowbray Steel Works, Mowbray Street

John Nicholson Junior.
Meadow Steel Works, Allen Street

John Nicholson junior died aged 35 in 1871

However this early success in business and local politics ceased in 1871, when he died of “rheumatic gout 8 years – epilepsy 1 hour” aged 35. The family was the second generation of Nicholsons to be afflicted with the early death of their breadwinner.

Sarah Nicholson was left with five children to look after, the eldest, Elizabeth aged 11, Mary, John, Herbert aged 1 and Edmund. She had also lost an infant son in 1868. John junior’s estate and effects were valued at “under £9000 leaseholds”, which sounds quite a lot for 1871.

Sarah Nicholson and Elizabeth



Photo provided by Margaret Holman

Sarah Nicholson widowed at 35

In the 1871 census Sarah, now 35, was living at 7 Westbourne Road, Ecclesall Bierlow with her five children and her sister, Martha Flather, as companion, along with three servants (a housemaid, a cook called Mary Gibbins and a nurse). She was living on “income from property”. In 1881 they were still at number 7 Westbourne Road, all the children were at school except Elizabeth who was 21, and there were two servants (one is still Mary Gibbins). Sarah and Martha were listed as “annuitants”.

In 1891 the family lived at 4 Elmore Road, Nether Hallam. Martha was not with them anymore. Sarah was 55 and “living on own means” as was Mary, aged 26 now (not yet listed as blind). John was a medical student and Herbert, aged 21, was a “Silver & Electroplate Manager”. Edmund was a “Manager Fancy Leather trade” and Mary had been their servant for twenty years. Elizabeth had left home to be married to Frank Herbert Peace whose family also ran steel manufacturing businesses.

Herbert Nicholson in 1901 at 179 Rustlings Road



By the 1901 census the household was Sarah aged 65, Mary aged 35, Herbert 31, Edmund 30, Mary, their servant for thirty years, aged 61 and Annie another servant aged 26. They were living at 179 Rustlings Road. Herbert appears on the census as an “insurance agent / tobacconist”, Edmund was also a “tobacconist” and Mary is “living on own means”.

White's Directory for 1901 has two addresses for Herbert Nicholson, tobacconist, 434 and 661 Ecclesall Rd (661 is still in the Herbert Nicholson Trust Estate in 2008). There was also a mention of John Nicholson & Sons “steel mfrs” in Mowbray Street.

Elsie Phipps Jones married Herbert Nicholson

In 1903 Sarah died aged 68 at 179 Rustlings Road. 13 years later Herbert married Elsie Phipps Jones on 23 February 1916. He was still living in Rustlings Road and was a 46 year old insurance agent. She was 24 (born 1891 at 80 Cromwell St) and at the time of the marriage her father was a Post Office worker living in 37 Louth Road, quite near to Rustlings Road. Gwenol was born in November that year and Sheila in 1919. On the Nicholson side of the family their grandmother, Sarah, died in 1903, and their grandfather, John junior, died in 1871, many years before they were born.

Elsie's middle name, Phipps, comes from Elsie's mother who was descended from Joseph Phipps, born in 1825 in Lavington, Wiltshire. He was a coachman who had moved to Sheffield by the 1860s. John Jones, Elsie's father was latterly a telegraphist for the Post Office, which in 1901 was high technology. When he was growing up his family had a grocery business in St Philips, which is near to Well Meadow Street. In 1901 he was living at 78 Cromwell Street with his wife and two young daughters.

The other children of John Nicholson junior

Elizabeth, the older sister of Herbert Nicholson, had four children with Frank Peace who worked as a cabinet case manufacturer, and she died after having a miscarriage in 1895 aged 36. Frank Peace died of “congestion of liver 2 years, Ascites 2 months” aged 48 in 1905. Herbert continued to live at Rustlings Road with his immediate family until his death in 1941, while Mary had become blind and was looked after by her brother Edmund. John Nicholson became a general practitioner in Leeds.