

Chapter 10

Around Plant's Yard

HOW IT MAY HAVE GOT ITS NAME¹

May 1995. One of a series of Chapters by Dr. John S. Plant, Keele University, England, ST5 5BG.

The Sheffield shoemaker William is known to have been living by 1840 near the foot of The Moor, not far from Plant's Yard in Little Sheffield. There was some considerable development at the site of Plant's Yard around 1825 and this could conceivably have related to this shoemaker's father (*W^m(1)* of Chapter 9) though Directories show that, from around 1790, there were two other Plants in Little Sheffield. These were apparently two of *W^m(1)*'s uncles from Duckmanton, which is about 10 miles to the south near Chesterfield, and more generally it may be supposed that there could have been a gathering, in the vicinity of Plant's Yard, of Plants of this Duckmanton Plant family from as early as the mid eighteenth century.

10.1 South of Sheffield (1740-1800)

The township of Sheffield around 1740 extended little more than 0.25 miles from Trinity Church (now the Cathedral) to Lady's Bridge, which are shown as (5) and (9) respectively in Figure 10.1².

It was 1740 when the Sheffield cutler Thomas Boulsover first discovered the basic process of forming Sheffield Plate, involving the fusing of silver onto copper. This was also when the Doncaster clockmaker Benjamin Huntsman came to Handsworth near Sheffield where he invented crucible steel, though it was many years before this set Sheffield far along the route towards becoming one of the world's greatest steel cities, by the end of the nineteenth century³. As will be described later (Chapter 12) Huntsman's son, William, was to become an associate of the Plant family from Duckmanton. This Plant family was associated with Plant's Yard just to the south of Sheffield.

10.1.1 South of Sheffield (circa 1750)

On Sheffield's southern edge, there was a slight spur of buildings extending along Coal-pit (or Cow-pit) Lane where Benjamin Plant from Duckmanton owned many properties (Chapter 11). Near to Coal-pit Lane was St Paul's Chapel (item (2) towards the left side of Figure 10.1), which was near the site of the present Town Hall. Coal-pit Lane was, despite its name, a desirable address at the head of Little Sheffield Moor with views across open land that led to Broom-hall (item (1) of Figure 10.1). Broom-hall, which will feature in Chapter 11, lay to the west of the common land of Little Sheffield Moor, which subsequently became known as The Moor (item (14) at the extreme left of Figure 10.1)

¹Including data supplied by Pat Clark of the Local Studies Centre, Sheffield City Libraries.

²This figure shows (1) Broomhall, (2) St Paul's Chapel, (3) Road to Manchester, (4) the (old) Town Hall, (5) Trinity Church (later The Cathedral), (6) the (old) road to London, (7) Hospital founded by Gilbert, Earl of Shrewsbury, (8) Castle Green Bowling Green, (9) Lady's Bridge, (10) River Don, (11) Bridge Houses, (12) Duke of Norfolk's Nursery Gardens, (13) Park Hill, (14) The Moor.

³At first, crucible steel did not catch on with Sheffield's cutlers who found it much harder to work than blister steel and so Huntsman subsidised his business by exporting his superior steel to France.

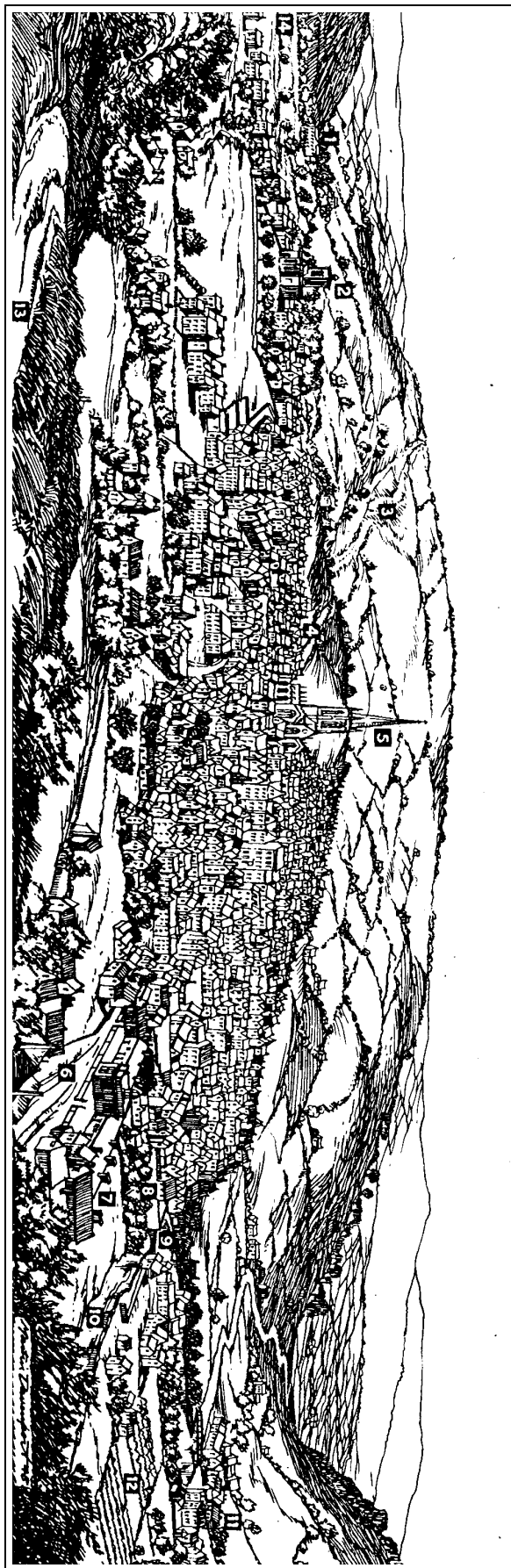


Figure 10.1: Sheffield about 1740 (Adapted by Martin Davenport from “The East Prospect of Sheffield in the County of York” by Samuel and Nataniel Buck)



Figure 10.2: Site of Plant's Yard (a) in 1808, showing Little Sheffield to the south of the Porter Brook and (b) in 1850, showing Plant's Yard at the bend in the road

In 1756 the road to Chesterfield was the first in the area to be turnpiked. It led SSW from Sheffield down the gentle slope of Little Sheffield Moor, in the chapelry of Ecclesall in the parish of Sheffield, to a ford over the Porter Brook and then on into the separate small hamlet of Little Sheffield some 0.7 miles south of St Paul's Chapel. As the buildings of Sheffield spread, all the pasture gradually disappeared and the people took to manufacture instead of farming.

10.1.2 Little Sheffield Moor

Until 1779, Little Sheffield Moor (to the left of Figure 10.1) was a rather forlorn bit of heath with the deeply sunken turnpike road on the one side and a causeway raised above the mud on the other. As soon as the area had been cut up into 'allotments', most of the new owners let them out for building and the streets up to Button Lane on the west and Porter Lane on the east were filled with houses, shops and factories which were probably as mean as others in Sheffield at that time. The turnpiked road was then called South Street (it was later called The Moor and it is now a pedestrian precinct). By 1795 the buildings fanned out either side of South Street from the head of the Moor, forming a narrow wedge flanked by Button Lane and Porter Street where, some 40 years later, the Sheffield shoemaker William Plant (presumed to be *W^m(2a)* of Chapter 9) lived (in Porter Street) and apparently had a shop (in Button Lane) as will be described more fully later (Chapter 14).

10.1.3 Little Sheffield

South of where South Street crossed the Porter Brook at the foot of the Moor, it became London Road. Just 0.1 miles south of the Brook was the hamlet of Little Sheffield, which had long stood separate from Sheffield and the sparsity of its habitation, even by 1808, is apparent in Figure 10.2(a).

In Sheffield Directories⁴ there appears:

- 1787 John Plant, bricklayer, Little Sheffield
- 1797 Benjamin Plant, bellows maker, Little Sheffield

⁴Directory published by Gales and Martin (1787) reprinted in facsimile by Pawson & Brailsford 1889 and Directory printed by J.Montgomery — the Hartshead (1797) for John Robinson, Spring Street.

and these two Plants were in Little Sheffield just as it was beginning to be reached by Sheffield's spreading buildings.

These Little Sheffield Plants will be described more fully later (Chapters 11 and 12) and just a few salient points are outlined here.

The relatives mentioned in the 1805 will of this bellows maker Benjamin leave no doubt that he was from the Duckmanton Plant family, as indicated in Figure 10.3. The 1816 will of his presumed brother, the bricklayer John, mentions his '*Household property situate in Little Sheffield*' and it can hence be pondered how near this may have been to the site of *Plant's Yard*⁵.

Benjamin's 1805 will, which mentions widespread properties, names the the first trustee of the will as '*my Friend Samuel Broomhead Ward*'. By 1794, this friend of Benjamin owned a large house called Mount Pleasant just 0.2 miles south of the (future) site of *Plant's Yard* (Mount Pleasant appears near the bottom right corner of Figure 10.2(a)). Moreover, in 1798, Benjamin's friend S.B.Ward was Master Cutler, the region's most authoritative official⁶.

Such indications of influential connections, as well as Plant property, in and around Little Sheffield can be taken as a sufficient basis of evidence for *starting* to understand how the name *Plant* may have come to be ascribed to a subsequent block of dwellings called *Plant's Yard*.

10.2 Plants around Plant's Yard

It seems that the name Plant had been associated with a yard earlier in the eighteenth century. A 1779 Rate Book mentions '*Late Plant yard*' in Ecclesall Bierlow, which suggests that the name had its origins in a earlier generation of Plants (Chapter 11). By the early nineteenth century, two isolated buildings appear on the site of *Plant's Yard* (Figure 10.2(a)).

Some late eighteenth century arrivals

It could be supposed that the bricklayer John or the bellows maker Benjamin may have been instrumental in developing a prominence for the name of *Plant's Yard* though there is less known evidence of the influence of the bricklayer John in this area than there is for the bellows maker Benjamin.

There is a 1797 deed (DZ-313-424) for Little Sheffield property involving John Plant '*late of Rotherham ... bricklayer but now of Little Sheffield*'. Rotherham is 6 miles to the NE of Sheffield. This is where John had been twice married and had had several children baptised, around 1760-85 (Chapter 14). John's children do not seem to have become established near *Plant's Yard*, as later records for this locality (1851 Census) have revealed only one of John's grandsons (Chapter 14) and he came from Beighton which is where his father Samuel (1785-1865) was a corn-farmer. Beighton is 6 miles SE of Sheffield. In his 1816 will, the bricklayer John is described as '*of Sheffield but ... late of the Township of Beighton*'.

On the other hand, a 1793 rate book for Little Sheffield mentions '*his Yard*' in connection with Benjamin Plant. There is a 1794 deed (DO-684-836) for Sheffield property involving Benjamin Plant '*late of Coalpit Lane otherwise Cowpit Lane in Sheffield but now of Little Sheffield, bellows maker*'. Although it seems that this bellows maker Benjamin had no sons of his own, his 1805 will mentions nephews Benjamin and Joseph (sons of his brother, yeoman farmer James 1740-1825

⁵One possibility, which may be considered in connection with the fuller information in Chapter 11, is that two houses on the (future) site of *Plant's Yard* had been occupied by John (1787 Directory listing) and/or Benjamin (1797 Directory) of Little Sheffield though there is evidence for example that Benjamin in particular had various other properties, including some about 2 miles to the west in Ecclesall Bierlow as well as some in other parishes.

⁶The Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire was formed by an act passed by the Commons on 23.4.1624 '*for the good order and government of the makers of knives, sickles, scissors and other cutlery wares in Hallamshire ... and the parts neere adjoining*'. Around the time of Samuel Broomhead Ward's year of office, there had been the 'thirteen to a dozen' controversy (Chapter 12) but the rulers of the Company were known in general less for their commercial efficacy than for their zeal for the public good and they were active in all the benevolent and administrative activities of the town, with the Master Cutler taking precedence over the Town Collector as chief citizen. Their central base was the Cutlers Hall which stood (and still stands, though rebuilt in 1832) near the Trinity Church (now the Cathedral) in Sheffield.

of Duckmanton) and nephew *W^m(1)* (eldest son of his brother, farmer Thomas 1745-1827 of Clowne). These three favoured nephews appear to have settled near Plant's Yard in Little Sheffield in the early nineteenth century. The name of *Plant's Yard* can be taken as evidence that this Plant family had become well established in this area, at least by 1825 in as much as the name *Plant's yard* (sic) appears as an address in Sheffield Directories of 1825 and 1833⁷.

The three favoured nephews

The bellows maker Benjamin's nephew Benjamin appears to have been a carpenter and he will be denoted *Ben(carp)* as this serves to distinguish him from his uncle, the bellows maker Benjamin, who will be denoted *Ben(bellows)*. *Ben(carp)* appears to have been the most favoured nephew for the long term perpetuation of *Ben(bellows)'s* estate since, though only aged 15 at the time of the 1805 will, he and his *heirs male* were to receive the residue of the estate, following various bequeathals and life annuities to others. His brother Joseph, then aged 18, and *his* heirs male were to be substituted only if the eldest son of *Ben(carp)* died without heirs male.

The remaining nephew, *W^m(1)*, was a cousin of the other two nephews and older (aged 33). He was to receive immediately a simple gift of \$10.

The nephews Benjamin and Joseph

It seems that *Ben(carp)* was the Benjamin who appears in Dore parish records between 1817 and 1821, as was outlined in Chapter 8, and Dore is around 4 miles to the SW of the site of Plant's Yard. *Ben(carp)* was buried even closer to Plant's Yard, at Ecclesall Church (aged 36) in 1827, apparently shortly after the development of Plant's Yard into a block of dwellings with that name⁸. Moreover, there are Little Sheffield property records involving (this) Benjamin Plant in 1816, 1818, 1822, and 1823, for example⁹.

Another potential beneficiary of the will of *Ben(bellows)* was *Ben(carp)'s* brother Joseph (1787-?). However, the children of this Joseph were still being baptised at Duckmanton by 1831 and Joseph owned land there in 1832. Despite having owned land, he appears as a 'labourer' in the 1841 Census returns, near Plant's Yard. There are Little Sheffield property records involving a Joseph Plant in 1816 (in the same deed as the Benjamin who was presumably *Ben(carp)*) and later in 1834¹⁰.

The nephew Wm(1), eldest son of Thomas (1745-1827) of Clowne

Despite there being doubts about the extent of *W^m(1)'s* influence, it seems likely that *W^m(1)* was one of the nearest Plants to Plant's Yard at the time of its development around 1825. He may have been a companion to his cousin, *Ben(carp)*, who may have been more directly associated with *Plant's Yard*. *Ben(carp)'s* brother Joseph may have held interests at that time mainly in Duckmanton, 10 miles to the south.

One might wonder if, by 1825, *W^m(1)* had attained some of the considerable influence of his uncle, *Ben(bellows)*, though this is not reinforced by *W^m(1)'s* description simply as an agricultural labourer in the 1841 Census returns. This 1841 description should perhaps not be given too much weight, however, as this was over 15 years after the development of Plant's Yard into a

⁷The address *Plant's yard, Highfield* appears in the Alphabetic Street Indexes of W.White's Directory (1833) and a Sheffield Directory compiled by R.Gell and printed at the Albion Press, Manchester (June 1825). It does not appear in the indexes of three earlier Directories, namely R.Gell and R.Bennett's Directory (1821), W.Brownell's Directory of 1817 (secretary to the Sheffield Fire Office), and Wardle and Bentham's Commercial Directory (1814-15), though this does not necessarily mean that the site had not been developed beyond the original two buildings rather earlier than 1825.

⁸This burial was at All Saints Church, Ecclesall, and this was around 1.5 miles to the west of Plant's Yard. All Saints Church may have been regarded as the (sometime) church of Plant's Yard, even though it was slightly further away from Little Sheffield than the nearest 'Sheffield' churches by 1825.

⁹Condensed Index 1801-18 and 1819-48, West Yorkshire Deeds Office, Wakefield.

¹⁰Condensed Index 1801-18 and 1819-48, *ibid*.

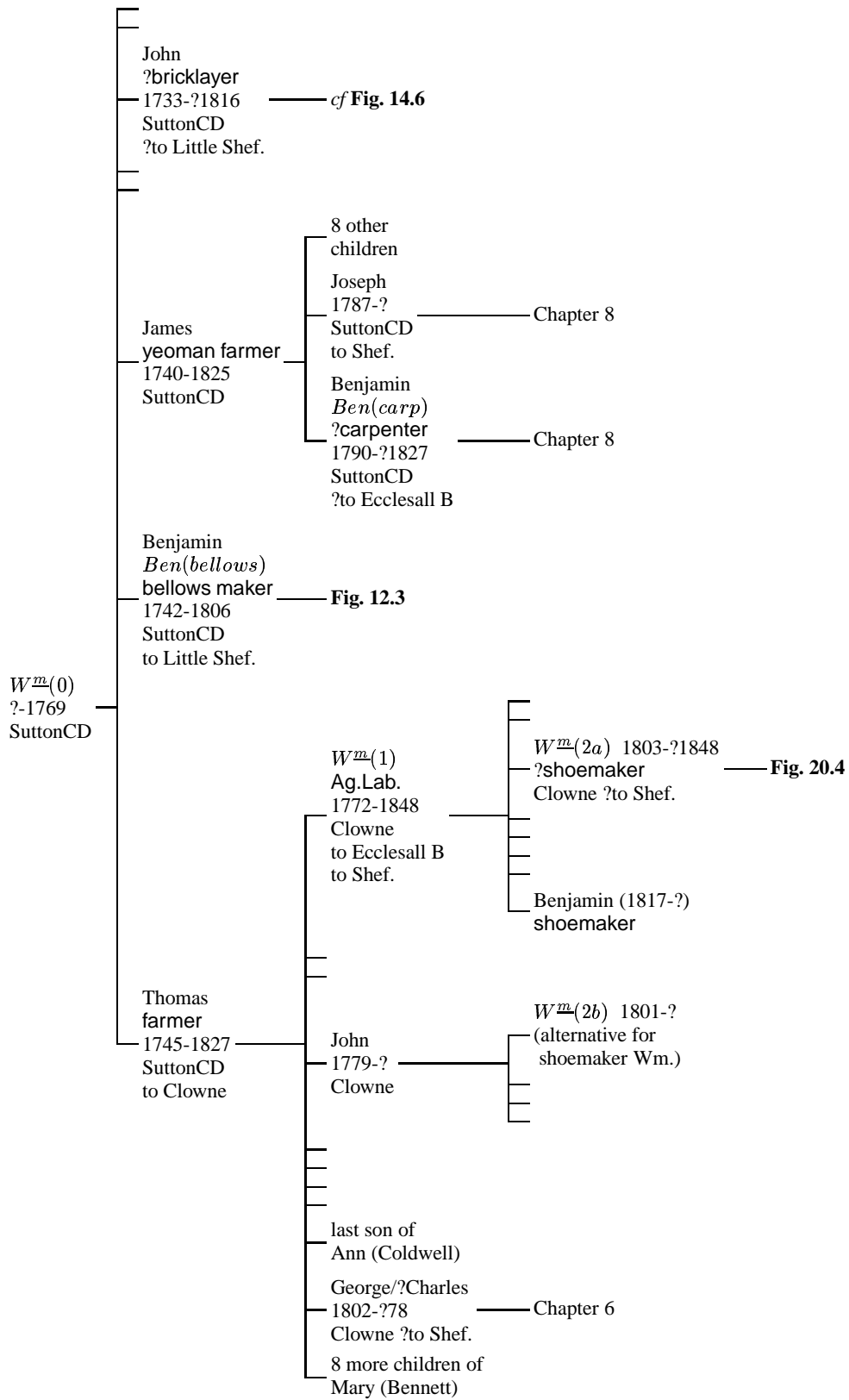


Figure 10.3: Outline ancestry of Little Sheffield Plants

block of dwellings and $W^m(1)$ was by then elderly, for whom the epithet 'labourer' could have been partly complimentary¹¹.

The precise date of arrival of $W^m(1)$ in Ecclesall is uncertain but, as was discussed in Chapter 9, one could suppose for example that $W^m(1)$'s family may have settled here shortly after $W^m(1)$'s last known son had been born at Clowne in 1817 and before another son was married in 1826 at Ecclesfield. On the other hand, it seems *possible* that $W^m(1)$ may have been a regular visitor to *Ben(bellows)*'s lands near Sheffield from before the time of *Ben(bellows)*'s 1805 will. This latter supposition can be regarded to be consistent with the fact that $W^m(1)$'s widow in 1851 had been born in Pontefract, to the north of Sheffield, which suggests, provided that we assume that this widow had been his first wife, that $W^m(1)$ may have met her before the turn of the century, perhaps through early links with Sheffield.

$W^m(1)$'s known address of 1841 was a little over 1 mile W of Plant's Yard and near where his uncle, *Ben(bellows)*, had owned some land (Chapter 11). A supposition that a *close* relationship developed between the families of all 3 nephews mentioned in *Ben(bellows)*'s 1805 will is supported by the fact that, by the time of more detailed 1841 records, the shoemaker William ($W^m(1)$'s son) was living near *Ben(carp)*'s son who was by then living in the household of *Ben(carp)*'s brother Joseph. Thus, children of all 3 of the 'favoured nephews' were living by 1841 about 0.4 mile NE from Plant's Yard, near the foot of Little Sheffield Moor.

10.3 An outline history of the Yard's development

An account of the structural developments, from around 1800, at the site of Plant's Yard can be pieced together largely from the information shown on various maps. A fuller account of deeds for Little Sheffield property held, for example, by the bricklayer John before his 1816 death and by *Ben(carp)* before his 1827 death will be given in a later Chapter.

Map dated 1808

From as early as 1808 (Figure 10.2(a)) a track led from London Road across the north-eastern edge of the subsequent buildings of Plant's Yard. On later maps part of this track is labelled *Cross Walk* but, in 1808, the track continued further to the Broomhall Mill which was about 0.2 miles away on the Porter Brook.

On the 1808 map there is just a single building on the London Road side of the subsequent pentagon of the Yard and an L-shaped building at the subsequent southern edge.

Map dated 1832

On a 1832 map the structure seems perhaps to include the two original small buildings shown on the 1808 map but with substantial additions to form most of a pentagon though this pentagon was still open on one side. Certainly, the L-shaped building from 1808 still appears to remain in 1832 and the other original building may have been incorporated in buildings that extended, by 1832, along the whole of the eastern *London Road* side of the pentagon. These were supplemented by buildings along the north-eastern *Cross Walk* edge and along the north-western edge which was shown to be bounded by another track. On later maps this track is labelled *Club Garden's Walk*.

The 1832 map shows buildings on the other side of *London Road* from Plant's Yard, on the other side of *Cross Walk* but not on the other side of *Club Garden's Walk*.

¹¹ $W^m(1)$'s father, Thomas, was also described as a labourer in his later years even though he appears earlier to have been a farmer of some substance. Moreover, when $W^m(1)$ was described as a labourer at his childrens' baptisms at Clowne in 1813 and 1817, he may still have been remembered there largely as a sometime assistant to his father, even though he was by then around 40. $W^m(1)$ may have inherited *some* privileges following his father's 1827 death and, in general, it can be said that the use of the term 'labourer', which was quite widespread, does not *necessarily* preclude the possibility that $W^m(1)$ may have held *some interest* in some property at *some stage* in Ecclesall.

1841				1871			
Head of Household	age	occupation	No. in house	Head of Household	age	occupation	No. in house
Joseph Redfearne	36	Comb Polisher	6	Charles Houseley	48	Knifescale presser	4
Joseph Staniforth	45	Ag Lab	9	John Barlow	50	Brace bit forger	8
James Kelsey	35	Shoe M	5	Charles Brookes	26	File forger	3
George Rose	30	Scythe Grinder	3	George Watts	32	Spring Knife cutler	6
Edmund ?Milliner	30	Cutler	4	Henry Allen	55	Saw smith	3
James Rodgers	27	?Penrald Cutler	6	John Awdas	76	Spring Knife cutler	3
John Francis	40	?M S	4	Peter Awdas	31	Spring Knife cutler	6
John Houseley	50		3	Harry Birtles	37	Edge Tool grinder	7
John Awdas	45	Spring K Cutler	6	Peter Collis	35	Spring Knife cutler	4
William Heath	40	Comb ?Fluter	5	James Wragg	35	Spring Knife cutler	7
				Ann North	73	Charwoman	4
				James Bradbury	50	File Cutter	11
				Daniel Houseley	49	Hornscale presser	1

Table 10.1: Inhabitants of Plant's Yard

Map dated 1850

It seems that the L-shaped building may have been demolished around 1840 when the cul-de-sac *Broom Close* was added to form the southern edge of the final pentagon¹².

The three altered sides of Plant's Yard (western, southern, and eastern) are shown on an 1850 map (Figure 10.2(b)) in addition to the perhaps unchanged buildings from 1832 along the north-western *Club Garden's Walk* and north-eastern *Cross Walk* edges. Figure 10.2(b) hence shows a completed pentagon clearly labelled *Plant's Yard*. A double depth of buildings extended along the *London Road* edge and a single depth of buildings along the new western edge built at right angles to *Broom Close* joining up almost with the buildings that edged on to *Club Garden's Walk*.

This Yard was about 50 yards across, with a pump. It was on the west side of *London Road* almost opposite a Little Sheffield public house called the *Barrel* which was just a few paces north of another called the *Old Crown*. The pentagon of the Yard at that time was surrounded partly by 'allotments', without buildings, called *Club Gardens* and an 1851 map shows that the area was otherwise still open as far as the dams, a water-powered grinding wheel (called the *Broomhall Wheel*) and the adjacent *Broomhall Corn Mill* on the nearby *Porter Brook*.

Census data 1841-81

Plants Yard (sic) appears in the Census returns from 1841 to 1871 and, in 1861 for example, it is shown to contain 12 average households. A summary of the occupants is shown in Table 10.1. The occupations of the Heads of Household in 1841 are various, including 'Shoe M' and 'Ag Lab'. There are 51 occupants in 10 households in 1841 becoming 67 in 13 households in 1871. By 1871 most are engaged in metal crafts and almost half are listed as 'Spring Knife cutlers'. The conditions must have been remarkably cramped compared to the grandeur of the nearby home, *Mount Pleasant*, of Benjamin Plant's Master Cutler friend (Chapter 12). None of the inhabitants of Plant's Yard in these Census returns is called Plant and there seems little reason to suppose that any Plant continued to occupy this site long after its development, around 1825, into a block of dwellings.

Plant's Yard no longer appears in the *Street Index* for the 1881 Census though the same structure of buildings as on an 1850 map can still be seen, clearly labelled as *Plant's Yard*, on a map dated 1890.

¹²There are several possibilities for how the name *Broom Close* may have arisen. One might wonder, for example, whether it was inspired by the name of the ancient *Broom Hall* on the other side of the *Porter Brook*, or perhaps arose from the name of Benjamin's associate, the influential *Samuel Broomhead Ward* or, even more fancifully and less likely still, from the Anjevin connection of the name Plant to *Plantagenet* (derived from *planta genista* for the *sprig of broom* that was their emblem). More generally it may be commented that the predominant vegetation in *Ecclesall* before *Parliamentary Enclosure* in 1788 is recorded to have been heather and broom.

Map dated 1890

On the 1890 map, the structure of the buildings of Plant's Yard is essentially identical to that on the 1850 map. One notable alteration however is that nearly all of the small 'blocks' that can be seen in Figure 10.2(b) had been removed (such as behind the buildings on the western side of the Yard). These 'blocks' may have been privy middens and their removal *may perhaps* signal an end to human habitation, in keeping with the evidence that Plant's Yard no longer appears as an address in the 1881 Census returns.

The surrounding area was more fully built up by 1890. In addition to the Barrel Inn and Old Crown (P.H.), which appear on the earlier 1850 map, there are two more public houses, which are on the same side of London Road as Plant's Yard. Just a few paces north of Plant's Yard is shown the Pheasant Inn and to the south, on the other corner of Broom Close, is shown the Tramway Hotel (P.H.). The Tramway Hotel, which is still adjacent to the site of Plant's Yard, no doubt relates to the tram tracks that are marked on the 1890 map along London Road¹³.

Amidst the few buildings between Plant's Yard and the Pheasant Inn there is one that is marked as a Smithy. On the opposite side of Club Garden's Walk from Plant's Yard is shown the '*Cross Walk Works, Augers, Screw Bits &c.*'. Otherwise, the general area seems to be mostly residential with, for example, houses shown by then along both sides of Broom Close and along Club Garden Road behind Club Garden's Walk.

Later Maps

The structure of the buildings of Plant's Yard remains apparently mostly unchanged on a 1930 map. However, by 1930, the few structures along the north-eastern *Cross Walk* edge of the Yard had seemingly been demolished and there is also evidence of some extension to the rear of the buildings that fronted onto London Road. The same pentagonal structure remained in 1955.

Plant's Yard today

The buildings dating from the 1850 map (Figure 10.2(b)) have recently been demolished and 19 inwardly facing lock-up garages for neighbouring properties now line the London Road, Cross Walk and Club Garden's Walk edges of the Yard leaving the pentagon open on the two sides to the south and the west. In a sense this has returned the 'Yard' to its 1832 configuration but without the L-shaped building on the site of Broom Close.

There is now a children's play area diagonally opposite from the site of the Yard at the corner of Cross Walk and Club Garden's Walk. The public houses called the Old Crown, Barrel Inn, Pheasant, and Tramway, all remain.

It seems unlikely that any of the neighbouring residents, or the passers by on the busy London Road, know much of the former history of this site though its outline still remains. Some key historical events in the late eighteenth century, for the general region of Sheffield, can be associated with the bellows maker Benjamin Plant, who apparently lived at or near the site of Plant's Yard, and this Plant related history will be outlined further in Chapters 11 and 12.

¹³On 19.1.1852 Shortridge had started Sheffield's first horse bus service which operated down the Moor and past Plant's Yard to Heeley. The fare was 3d, there were no fixed stopping places and the return trip set off half an hour later. A horse tram service from the Moorhead to Heeley opened on 29.10.1877 and was run by the Sheffield Tramways Company. The Corporation had constructed the tramway and they took over the running of trams on 11.7.1896 introducing fixed stops which, along London Road, were at the Brunswick Chapel, Lansdowne Road, the 'Coffee House' (near Plant's Yard and possibly part of the Tramway Hotel) and Sharrow Lane. Horse cars were replaced by electric trams along the Heeley route, reaching past Plant's Yard in 1899 to Lowfields on 1.8.1900 and to the Albert Road terminus on 1.11.1900; this route was later extended further.