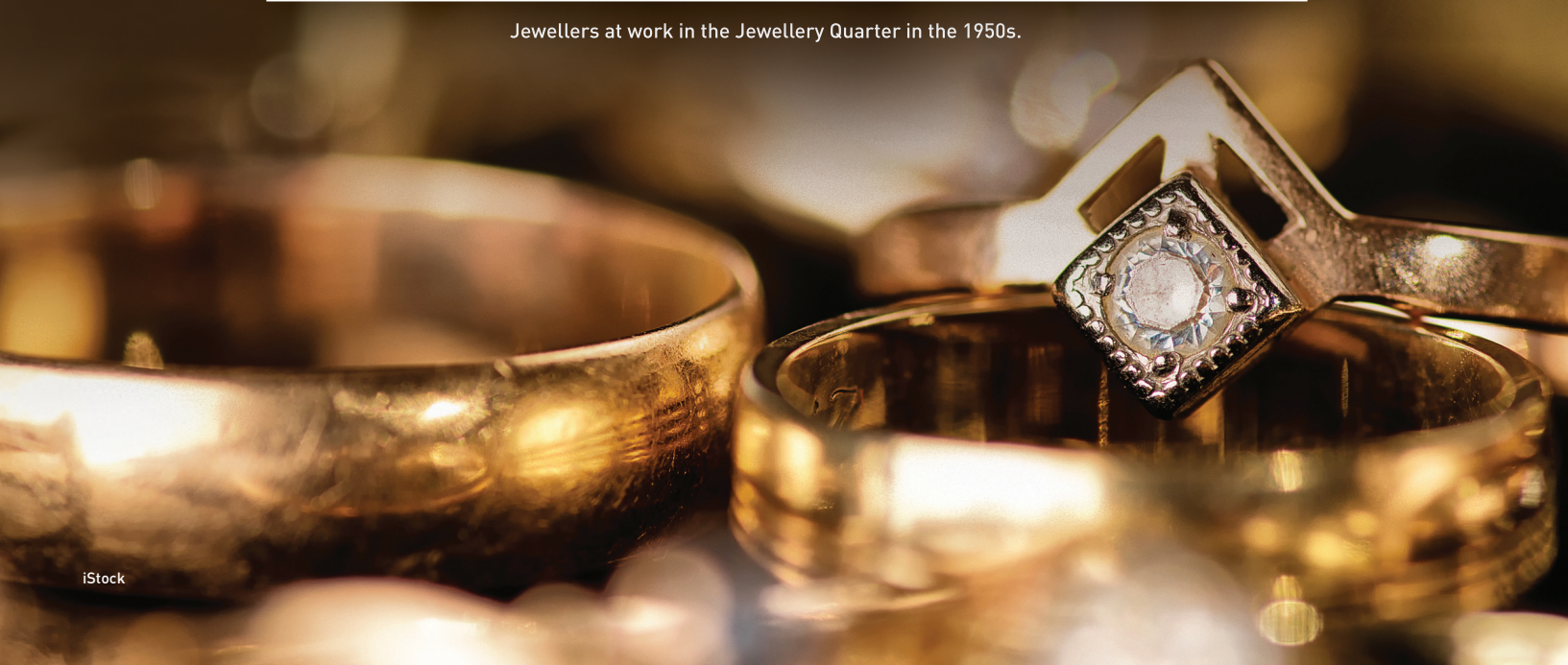
AN INDUSTRIAL HIVE:
BIRMINGHAM'S JEWELLERY QUARTER

Carl Chinn

Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter is famed nationally and internationally but locally its importance can be taken for granted or even overlooked – as can that of the jewellery trade itself which has a longstanding connection with our city. That lack of attention is not a new phenomenon. By the mid-nineteenth century, jewellery making was regarded as one of the four main Birmingham trades. Along with the brass trade and the manufacture of guns and buttons it flourished above the rest but very little was written about it. That is surprising for such an important industry which remains prominent in modern Birmingham and which has such a fascinating history covering more than 200 years.

Birmingham Lives Archive

Jewellers at work in the Jewellery Quarter in the 1950s.



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Goldsmiths

Although the origins of the modern Jewellery Quarter lie in the eighteenth century, the working of precious metal in Birmingham can be traced to the later Middle Ages. Dick Holt's research uncovered a tantalising reference from 1308 to 'Birmingham pieces' in an inventory of the possessions of the Master of the Knights Templar. He believed that the objects were doubtless small, although of high value, and seem to have been precious ornaments of some kind. What is certain is the presence of goldsmiths in that period. In 1382, a document noted a John Goldsmith – at a time when such a surname usually indicated the person's trade. He is mentioned again in 1426 and then in 1460 a John Blakwyn, a goldsmith of Birmingham, was recorded as owing a debt of the large sum of £10.

However, goldsmithing was an elite trade that required a significant amount of capital and highly specialised tools. By the early sixteenth century it seems that there was only one man locally who had the wherewithal to fashion the precious metal. In her fascinating and detailed account of jewellery making in Birmingham, Shena Mason revealed that in 1524, the household accounts of Lord Middleton of Tamworth referred to the goldsmith of Birmingham. He is unnamed but in 1565, the will of Edmond Wilson gave him as a goldsmith. He left all his workshop tools to his nephew, Robert, upon him reaching the age of 21, so long as he applied himself to the goldsmith's craft.

It is not known if he did so, but by the late sixteenth century, the Pembertons had emerged as the goldsmiths of Birmingham. The first of the family associated with the trade was Roger, who married at St Martin's Church in 1584. His son, Thomas, was also a goldsmith, according to his will of 1640, although his descendants moved into the iron trade. Some later became wealthy landowners, although others remained in manufacturing. They included Samuel Pemberton, who was identified as a jeweller in Pearson and Rollason's *Directory* of 1781.

The corner of Livery Street with Great Charles Street (right) showing the former brass foundry of Thomas Pemberton and Sons. This family was connected to the sixteenth-century goldsmiths of Birmingham. The photograph was taken after 1894 when the business was taken over.

Toy Makers and Jewellers

From the mid-seventeenth century, there is a gap in information on the working of precious metal in Birmingham. Indeed in 1866, in his discussion of the jewellery and gilt toy trades, J. S. Wright stated that there was no record of when jewellery making became one of Birmingham's industries. However, in the same year when discussing the town's industrial history, Samuel Timmins highlighted a connection with the trade in toys and small metal goods. He explained that "a century ago, before gold was common, or silver comparatively cheap, steel goods for male and female wear were highly fashionable and the 'toy trade' of that age represented and anticipated the extent of the jewellery trades of the present time".

Shena Mason believed that the larger-scale manufacture of toys, in both precious and base metals, had begun to take off in the later seventeenth century. She suggested that the impetus was the return of King Charles II from exile in France, where elaborate buckles and buttons were the height of sophisticated fashion. He brought with him French buckles and jewellery and remarked that the Birmingham manufacturers were equal to copying them. Support for her claim is given by William Hutton, in his *History of Birmingham* (1781), in which he identified the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660 as the principal watershed in the town's development. He declared that this divided the ancient and modern state of Birmingham:

> for though she had before held a considerable degree of eminence, yet at this period the curious arts began to take root and were cultivated by the hand of genius…now her growths will be amazing, her expansion rapid, perhaps not to be paralleled in history. We shall see her rise in all the beauty of youth, of grace, of elegance and attract the notice of the commercial world…

Amongst these curious arts was the making of guns, toys, shoe buckles, buttons and steel goods. Their development also heralded the diversification of Birmingham's manufactures, whilst a marked feature was the transferability of their skills. This allowed artisans to adapt and move between trades, depending upon the economic climate and the vagaries of fashion. Consequently there was an overlap between the manufacture of buckles, buttons and toys and as Wright discerned, jewellery making then arose "partly in consequence of the skill which our artisans had acquired as workers in metal". This is emphasised by Sketchley and Adams' *Tradesman's True Guide and Universal Directory* of Birmingham in 1770. Under the heading of Toy Makers it pronounced that:

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A view of Newhall Street, between Charlotte Street and Brook Street in mid-1963. The Assay Office is the building in the background with the columns at its entrance. It was moved here in 1877.

> An infinite Variety of Articles that come under this Denomination are made here, and it would be endless to attempt to give an Account of the Whole, but for the Information of Strangers, we shall here Observe, that these Artists are divided into several Branches, as the Gold and Silver TOY MAKERS, who make Trinkets, Seals, Tweezers, Tooth-pick Cases, Smelling Bottles, Snuff Boxes and Philligree Work, such as Toilets, Tea Chests, Inkstands, &c. &c. The Tortoise TOY MAKER, makes a beautiful Variety of the above and other Articles; as does also the Steel, who make Cork Screws, Buckles, Draw and other Boxes, Snuffers, Watch Chains, Stay Hooks, Sugar Nippers &c. and almost all these are likewise made in various Metals, and for Cheapness, Beauty and Elegance, no place in the World can vie with them.

As for Birmingham's jewellers "these Artists held the First Rank among the Mechanicks, for the Elegance of their Work: they are the Makers of Necklaces, Ear-Rings, Rings, Buckles, Sleeve-Buttons and Studs, Seals, &c". There were 23 of them, one of whom was a woman – Elizabeth Merry. Significantly eight of them had an additional trade such as filigree worker, toy maker, button maker, metal roller and watch chain maker. Two of the jewellers were also lapidaries. Along with eight more in that trade, they cut and polished large stones for snuff boxes, knife handles, cabinets, seals, rings, buttons and other items.

Despite the interchange between the trades, the jewellers were becoming a distinct group, although they were spread across Birmingham and not gathered in one locality.

Their emergence is substantiated in Pearson and Rollason's *Directory* of 1777. Along with 35 jewellers it named four ring makers, and sixteen watch chain makers – later a branch of the jewellery trade. There was also an entry for a company making tools for jewellers and it is apparent that these craftsmen were increasingly becoming associated with Birmingham.

There were also four silversmiths and two silver rollers in the *Directory*, whilst it is likely that some buckle, button, toy and candlestick makers worked in silver. But the largest producer of silver goods was Matthew Boulton – first at his works at Snow Hill and then at his Soho Manufactory in Handsworth. A man of many parts, he employed artists and commissioned designers to fashion expensive silver ware that appealed to the wealthy. Concerned that his silver products had to be assayed at Chester and that silversmiths there might steal his designs, Boulton led a campaign for Birmingham to have its own office for assaying silver. An astute publicist, he realised that if the worth of Birmingham's precious goods was assured through rigorous testing and hallmarking then their appeal would be enhanced. Boulton was successful and in 1773 the Hallmarking Act founded the Birmingham Assay Office, for which the anchor was chosen as the hallmark.

An Expanding Trade

Although recognised as a Birmingham trade by the end of the eighteenth century, jewellery making was not yet one of the town's main industries. The astute observer Wright explained that at the commencement of the nineteenth century:

> it is probable that some four hundred artisans were employed in ten or twelve manufactories: those working in gold made principally seals, keys, and watch chains, whilst the silver workers produced shoe, knee, and other buckles, as well as considerable quantities of comb ornaments set with conspicuous paste or imitation stones.

Still, the trade prospered – in spite of buckles going out, and other freaks of fashion, as Wright expressively called it – so much so that one Birmingham jeweller also had a showroom in London. He was Joseph Taylor who placed an eye-catching copper-plate advertisement in *Bissett's Magnificent Directory* of Birmingham in 1808. He described himself as a gold and

Author's Collection

The advertisement for J. Taylor in *Bissett's Magnificent Directory* of 1808.

silversmith, jeweller, and gilt and general toy manufacturer – and in so doing emphasised the strong connections between these trades. In the background of the engraving is a ship, signifying Taylor's trading links; whilst to the left is an elephant and in the foreground is a tortoise, animals which provided ivory and shells for his boxes. Laid out on the ground in the front are jewellery boxes, articles of precious metal and a sheet of paper upon which is written the words diamonds and pearls.

Birmingham's jewellery trade was expanding rapidly and in 1819 one contemporary described the town as the nation's great manufacturing market of jewellery. He added that in reality it was from there that came most of what passed for London-made jewellery. By then according to *Wrightson's Directory*, there were 74 jewellers locally. Five years later, in 1824, the slow but sure increase in the production of gold articles in Birmingham led to the passing of an Act which permitted the town's Assay Office to mark gold as well as silver jewellery. It is important to be aware, though, that when used in reference to the trade, the term jewellery included not only those working in precious metals but also those making goods for personal adornment, table ware in silver, electro-plate and other metals.

Then, according to Wright, in 1825 the great catastrophe which fell upon commerce generally in Britain almost annihilated the jewellery trade so that it did not revive to any considerable extent for ten years. The evidence, however, suggests that the revival was swifter, as made clear by a court case in Lancashire in 1828. It involved a Mr Edwards, probably Joseph Edwards, a jeweller and pearl setter of Summer Lane, who had £500 worth of jewellery stolen whilst staying at an inn in Lancashire. A highly respectable manufacturer, the *Manchester Mercury* reported that he travelled to various towns, "carrying with him considerable quantities of jewellery, either samples or for immediate sale to persons who dealt in such articles". In giving evidence, Job Sherriff of the Birmingham Assay Office informed the court that he had assayed for Mr Edwards "about 150 ounces of gold, in the first six months of the present year and about 170 ounces during the last year. The value of that gold is about £4. 17s per ounce." This ensured that Mr Edwards did more than double the business in gold with the Assay Office than any other jeweller in Birmingham.

Wrightson's Directory of 1829-30 provided further evidence of the quick upturn in Birmingham's jewellery trade. It listed 150 manufacturing jewellers along with 40 goldsmiths and working jewellers – although there was some crossover between the two. In addition there were five gold beaters, two jewellery stampers, 23 lapidaries and 37 silversmiths. Amongst them was John Morton of Moland Street who was advertised as a manufacturer of gold and gilt jewellery with an agent in Hatton Garden, London. Edward Day of Bristol Street was in the same trade and he also had premises in the capital.

A Struggling Trade and Royal Patronage

The jewellery trade continued to grow throughout the 1830s but by the turn of the next decade it was struggling. It seems that it was faced with two inter-connected problems. According to the *Birmingham Journal* in September 1844, locally-made jewellery was unfashionable amongst the nobles and wealthy of the land who preferred the taste and elegance of the French or German artists. The reason for that lack of appeal was made plain later by *Showell's Dictionary of Birmingham* (1885) which decried as old-styled ugliness the Birmingham jewellery of that time. With their trade in a depressed condition and the livelihoods of an estimated 5,000 families threatened, some of the local artisans decided to take action by securing royal patronage.

This was not a new idea for Birmingham's manufacturers. In 1840 a similar deputation had presented splendid specimens of gilt buttons to Prince Albert in the hope of securing his patronage to revive that trade. One of its prominent members was Joseph Stinton, the licensee of the 'Grand Turk' in Ludgate Hill. An advocate of Birmingham's industries, it was at his premises that a group of gold and gilt jewellery workers met in the summer of 1844. They resolved to present to the Queen specimens from the various branches of these trades, strenuously urging that she would be graciously pleased to patronise them. A committee of nine was appointed to approach the employers to gain their support and financial backing. Their chairman was a skilled man, Samuel Nicklin, and along with Stinton he would also be in the deputation that met with Prince Albert.

The leading firms were supportive and the specimens for the royal couple were made. Importantly, it was decided that the style of workmanship should be that of a national design in preference to one purely classic. This was felt to be more appropriate for gifts from the working men of Birmingham to their Queen. As the date for the reception of the deputation approached, excitement grew in Birmingham. Then at the beginning of May 1845, the almost finished goods were exhibited in the Town Hall for two days. So immense were the crowds that went to see them that hundreds were not able to gain admittance. Consequently a third display had to be held on Monday 5 May. The celebratory nature of the event was highlighted by the appearance all day of the band of the Sixth Enniskillen Dragoons.

Finally on Thursday 28 May 1845, the deputation of jewellers waited upon Prince Albert to present to him and Queen Victoria what the *Illustrated London News* pronounced were beautiful specimens of Birmingham jewellery. Especial praise was lavished on an armlet given to the monarch, the centre of which was described as being:

> the most splendid thing ever produced in the town. It displayed a diamond sprig upon blue enamel surrounded with nine splendid pearls in blue enamel settings, each setting surrounded with an oak leaf, the leaf and the acorn gracefully and uniquely forming the border. The band part of the armlet consists of blue and gold enamel, with the emblems 'Peace, plenty, for ever!' the rose, thistle, shamrock, and leek filling up the different compartments. Each compartment moves upon a flexible joint; and diamonds and rubies form the *tout ensemble* of the clasp.

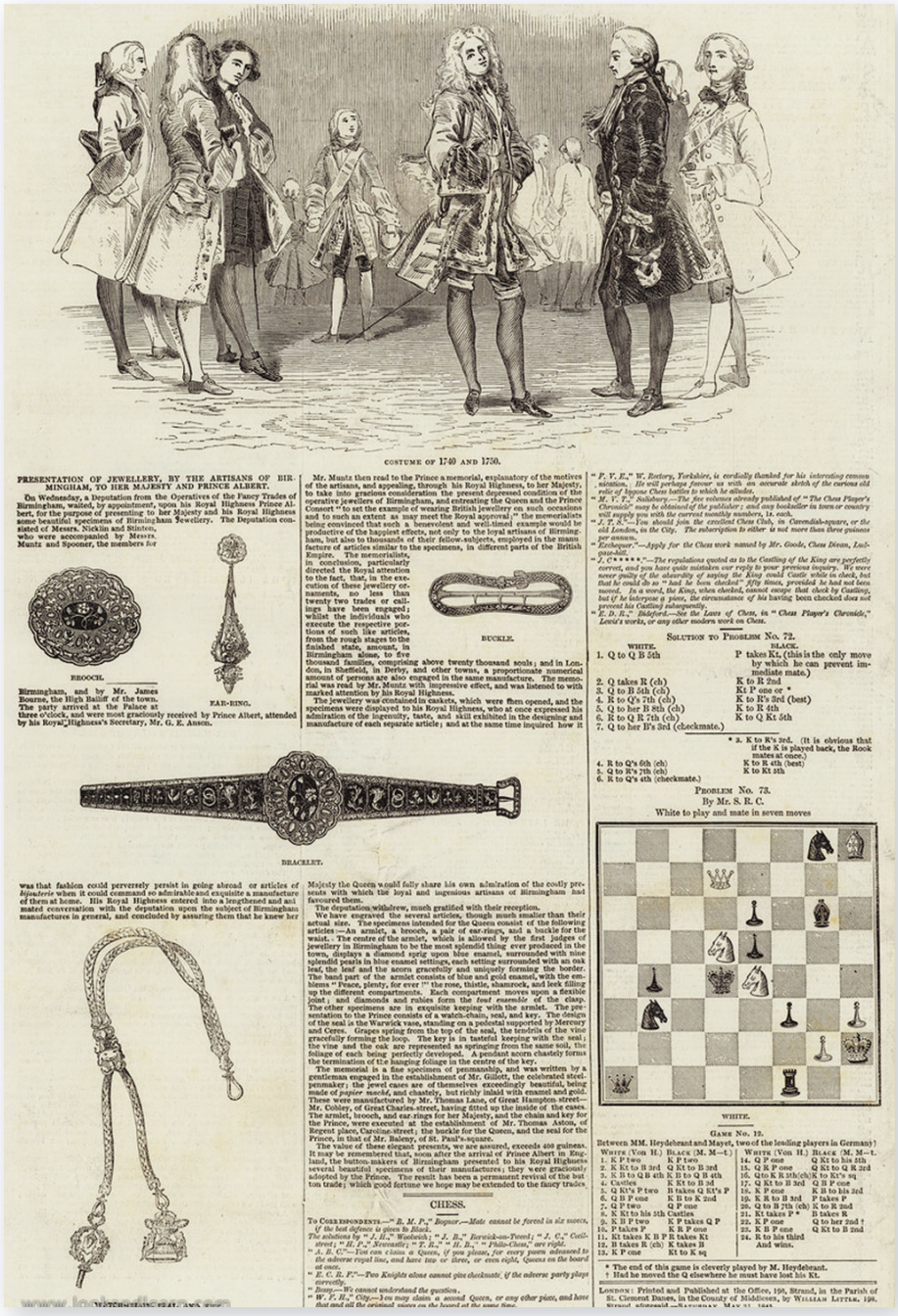
The other specimens for the Queen were a brooch, a pair of ear-rings, and a buckle for the waist, all of which were as exquisite as the armlet. As for the Prince, he was presented with a watch-chain and key and a seal designed as the Warwick vase. This stood on:

> a pedestal supported by Mercury and Ceres. Grapes spring from the top of the seal, the tendrils of the vine gracefully forming the loop. The key is in tasteful keeping with the seal; the vine and the oak are represented as springing from the same soil, the foliage of each being perfectly developed. A pendant acorn chastely forms the termination of the hanging foliage in the centre of the key.

The chain, key, armlet, brooch and ear-rings were executed at the premises of Thomas Aston, jeweller of Regent Place, off Caroline Street, with the buckle and seal at the St Paul's Square business of John Balleny, gold, silver and black ornament manufacturer. It was stated that the value of these elegant presents exceeded 400 guineas. They were presented in what were described as exceedingly beautiful jewel cases made of papier mâché and which were chastely but richly inlaid with enamel and gold.

Birmingham Lives Archive

Looking down Ludgate Hill from the junction with Great Charles Street – where the moving car is. In the background is St Paul's Church. The 'Grand Turk' of Joseph Stinton would have been past the large building in the foreground on the right and before Lionel Street, where the line of cars begins.



COSTUME OF 1740 AND 1750.

PRESENTATION OF JEWELLERY, BY THE ARTISANS OF BIRMINGHAM, TO HER MAJESTY AND PRINCE ALBERT.

On Wednesday, a Deputation from the Operatives of the Fancy Trades of Birmingham, waited, by appointment, upon his Royal Highness Prince Albert, for the purpose of presenting to her Majesty and his Royal Highness some beautiful specimens of Birmingham Jewellery. The Deputation consisted of Messrs. Nicklin and Stinton, who were accompanied by Messrs. Muntz and Spooner, the members for Birmingham, and by Mr. James Bourne, the High Bailiff of the town. The party arrived at the Palace at three o'clock, and were most graciously received by Prince Albert, attended by his Royal Highness's Secretary, Mr. G. E. Anson.

Mr. Muntz then read to the Prince a memorial, explanatory of the motives of the artisans, and appealing, through his Royal Highness, to her Majesty, to take into gracious consideration the present depressed condition of the operative jewellers of Birmingham, and entreating the Queen and the Prince Consort "to set the example of wearing British jewellery on such occasions and to such an extent as may meet the Royal approval;" the memorialists being convinced that such a benevolent and well-timed example would be productive of the happiest effects, not only to the loyal artisans of Birmingham, but also to thousands of their fellow-subjects, employed in the manufacture of articles similar to the specimens, in different parts of the British Empire. The memorialists, in conclusion, particularly directed the Royal attention to the fact, that, in the execution of these jewellery ornaments, no less than twenty two trades or callings have been engaged; whilst the individuals who execute the respective portions of such like articles, from the rough stages to the finished state, amount, in Birmingham alone, to five thousand families, comprising above twenty thousand souls; and in London, in Sheffield, in Derby, and other towns, a proportionate numerical amount of persons are also engaged in the same manufacture. The memorial was read by Mr. Muntz with impressive effect, and was listened to with marked attention by his Royal Highness.

The jewellery was contained in caskets, which were then opened, and the specimens were displayed to his Royal Highness, who at once expressed his admiration of the ingenuity, taste, and skill exhibited in the designing and manufacture of each separate article; and at the same time inquired how it was that fashion could perversely persist in going abroad or articles of *bijouterie* when it could command so admirable and exquisite a manufacture of them at home. His Royal Highness entered into a lengthened and animated conversation with the deputation upon the subject of Birmingham manufactures in general, and concluded by assuring them that he knew her Majesty the Queen would fully share his own admiration of the costly presents with which the loyal and ingenious artisans of Birmingham had favoured them.

The deputation withdrew, much gratified with their reception.

We have engraved the several articles, though much smaller than their actual size. The specimens intended for the Queen consist of the following articles:—An armlet, a brooch, a pair of ear-rings, and a buckle for the waist. The centre of the armlet, which is allowed by the first judges of jewellery in Birmingham to be the most splendid thing ever produced in the town, displays a diamond sprig upon blue enamel, surrounded with nine splendid pearls in blue enamel settings, each setting surrounded with an oak leaf, the leaf and the acorn gracefully and uniquely forming the border. The band part of the armlet consists of blue and gold enamel, with the emblems "Peace, plenty, for ever!" the rose, thistle, shamrock, and leek filling up the different compartments. Each compartment moves upon a flexible joint; and diamonds and rubies form the *boaf enamelle* of the clasp. The other specimens are in exquisite keeping with the armlet. The presentation to the Prince consists of a watch-chain, seal, and key. The design of the seal is the Warwick vase, standing on a pedestal supported by Mercury and Ceres. Grapes spring from the top of the seal, the tendrils of the vine gracefully forming the loop. The key is in tasteful keeping with the seal: the vine and the oak are represented as springing from the same soil, the foliage of each being perfectly developed. A pendent acorn chastely forms the termination of the hanging foliage in the centre of the key.

The memorial is a fine specimen of penmanship, and was written by a gentleman engaged in the establishment of Mr. Gillott, the celebrated steel-pen maker; the jewel cases are of themselves exceedingly beautiful, being made of *papier maché*, and chastely, but richly inlaid with enamel and gold. These were manufactured by Mr. Thomas Lane, of Great Hampton-street—Mr. Cobley, of Great Charles-street, having fitted up the inside of the cases. The armlet, brooch, and ear-rings for her Majesty, and the chain and key for the Prince, were executed at the establishment of Mr. Thomas Aston, of Regent place, Caroline-street; the buckle for the Queen, and the seal for the Prince, in that of Mr. Baleny, of St. Paul's-square.

The value of these elegant presents, we are assured, exceeds 400 guineas. It may be remembered that, soon after the arrival of Prince Albert in England, the button-makers of Birmingham presented to his Royal Highness several beautiful specimens of their manufactures; they were graciously adopted by the Prince. The result has been a permanent revival of the button trade; which good fortune we hope may be extended to the fancy trades.

BROOCH. EAR-RING. BUCKLE. BRACELET.

CHESS.

SOLUTION TO PROBLEM No. 72.

WHITE.	BLACK.
1. Q to Q B 5th	P takes Kt, (this is the only move by which he can prevent immediate mate.)
2. Q takes R (ch)	K to R 2nd
3. Q to B 5th (ch)	Kt P one or *
4. R to Q's 7th (ch)	K to R's 3rd (best)
5. Q to her B 8th (ch)	K to R 4th
6. R to Q R 7th (ch)	K to Q Kt 5th
7. Q to her B's 3rd (checkmate.)	

* 2. K to R's 3rd. (It is obvious that if the K is played back, the Rook mates at once.)

4. R to Q's 6th (ch)	K to R 4th (best)
5. Q to R's 7th (ch)	K to Kt 5th
6. R to Q's 4th (checkmate.)	

PROBLEM No. 73.
By Mr. S. R. C.
White to play and mate in seven moves

WHITE.

GAME No. 12.

Between MM. Heydebrant and Mayet, two of the leading players in Germany†

WHITE (Von H.)	BLACK (M. M—t.)	WHITE (Von H.)	BLACK (M. M—t.)
1. K P two	K P two	14. Q P one	Q Kt to his 5th
2. K Kt to B 3rd	Q Kt to B 3rd	15. Q R P one	Q Kt to Q R 3rd
3. B to Q B 4th	B to Q B 4th	16. Q to K R 8th (ch)	K to Kt's sq
4. Castles	K Kt to B 3rd	17. Q Kt to B 3rd	Q B P one
5. Q Kt's P two	B takes Q Kt's P	18. K P one	K B to his 3rd
6. Q B P one	K B to K 2nd	19. K R to B 3rd	P takes P
7. Q P two	Q P one	20. Q to B 7th (ch)	K to R 2nd
8. K Kt to his 5th	Castles	21. Kt takes P *	B takes R
9. K B P two	P takes Q P	22. K P one	Q to her 2nd †
10. P takes P	K K P one	23. K B P one	Q Kt to B 2nd
11. Kt takes K B P	B takes Kt	24. R to his third	
12. B takes R (ch)	K takes B	And wins.	
13. K P one	Kt to K sq		

* The end of this game is cleverly played by M. Heydebrant.
† Had he moved the Q elsewhere he must have lost his Kt.

LONDON: Printed and Published at the Office, 198, Strand, in the Parish of St. Clement Danes, in the County of Middlesex, by WILLIAM LITTLER, 198.

Illustrated London News 31 May 1845.

These were manufactured by Thomas Lane, of the royal papier mâché and patent pearl glass works, by special appointment to her Majesty and his royal highness, in Great Hampton Street. However, the inside of the cases had been fitted up by James Cobley, a pocket book and dressing case manufacturer of Great Charles Street.

The deputation that presented these splendid articles included James Bourne, the High Bailiff of the town, and its two MPs, Richard Spooner and George Frederic Muntz. Spooner was Birmingham's only Conservative MP between 1832 and 1886, but he had long been a defender of Birmingham's trades. So too was the Liberal MP Muntz who impressively read the memorial to Prince Albert from the artisans of Birmingham's jewellery trade. In itself this was "a fine specimen of penmanship, and was written by a gentleman engaged in the establishment of Mr. Gillott, the celebrated steel pen maker". It explained the motives of the skilled workers and appealed:

> through his Royal Highness, to her Majesty, to take into gracious consideration the present depressed condition of the operative jewellers of Birmingham, and entreating the Queen and the Prince Consort to set the example of wearing British jewellery on such occasions and to such an extent as may meet the Royal approval; the memorialists being convinced that such a benevolent and well-timed example would be productive of the happiest effects, not only to the loyal artisans of Birmingham, but also to thousands of their fellow-subjects, employed in the manufacture of articles similar to the specimens, in different parts of the British Empire.

In conclusion it was emphasised that in the execution of these jewellery ornaments, no fewer than twenty-two trades or callings had been engaged.

Prince Albert listened to the memorial with marked attention. Then the caskets were opened and the specimens were displayed to him. He expressed his admiration of the ingenuity, taste, and skill exhibited in the designing and manufacture of each separate article; and inquired how it was that fashion could, as he put it, perversely persist in going abroad for articles of bijouterie when it could command so admirable and exquisite a manufacture of them at home. Prince Albert concluded by assuring the Birmingham men that he knew that the Queen would fully share his own admiration of the costly presents with which the loyal and ingenious artisans of Birmingham had favoured them.

The Jewellery Trade's Revival

The backing given to the working men by the employers, leading political figures and the people of Birmingham emphasised how important the jewellery trade was both to the economic well-being of the town and to its reputation for beautifully crafted wares. And it seems that the presentation did have positive effects. It showed that Birmingham's most noted jewellers could make stylish and elegant

jewellery comparable with the best from the Continent and that such jewellery could appeal to the Royal family and members of the Court. Favourable national attention was thus gained but there was another enduring result: a recognition of the importance of design. This encouraged more manufacturing jewellers to enhance their own designs. They were successful in doing so and by 1849 *Allen's Pictorial Guide to Birmingham* could stress that:

> the precious metals are here wrought into a vast variety of elegant forms – seals, pencil cases, brooches, chains, and every article comprehended by the term Jewellery are manufactured in a style that, for solidity and elegance of design, cannot be excelled. The quantity of silver used in the manufacture of pencil cases, thimbles, chains, &c, may be estimated at about 3,000 ounces weekly or 160,000 ounces per annum.

An informed writer from the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* of 29 October 1908 recognised that the early jewellery trade had indeed suffered severe vicissitudes and spasmodic periods of depression which had checked its growth, but from about 1850 it expanded rapidly. New firms sprang into existence; more capital was invested; more highly skilled labour was drawn in; and new branches of the trade began. Most importantly "a new generation of jewellers arose in whom a sense of the beautiful was fortunately planted; and after a time, a system of art teaching was successfully inaugurated, with gratifying remits".

University of Birmingham

The factory of Pitt & Swatkins Ltd, metal spinners and pressworkers, at 12 St Paul's Square in 1953. The car is parked in front of Kavin Silverware Ltd, manufacturing silversmiths. This was still an industrial location as it had been in 1845 when John Balleny had his works at number 44.

© Historic England Archive

A view from Graham Street in the south. Vittoria Street is in the middle of the photograph and Frederick Street is on the left, with Regent Street running between the two. The works of T. and J. Bragg were at number 18, Vittoria Street, just past Regent Place, which is above the car park on the right.

The significance of design and the application of art methods was highlighted in September 1865 by a knowledgeable commentator in the *Daily News* in an appraisal of the Birmingham jewellery trade from a London point of view. He had personal experience as he had visited the town that year with the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Drawing a clear distinction between the 'real' and the sham trade, he stressed that the Birmingham men involved in the latter "do not for a moment attempt to palm off their imitation gems and gilt settings as jewels to the first water and pure gold. They simply make these things to get fair profit".

As for the real trade, in no place other than Birmingham was there a wider employment for students of design. That was made clear at the large manufacturing jewellers' establishment of T. and J. Bragg, in Vittoria Street where there were usually between 30 and 40 apprentices. All of them had to show some amount of skill in drawing and each was bound through their indentures to attend the Birmingham School of Art and Government School of Design, founded in 1843.

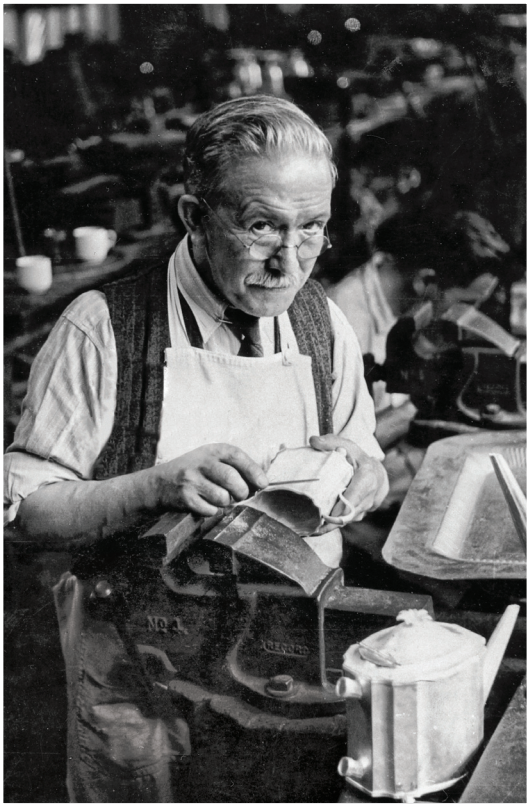
The value of design at Bragg's was underscored by the constant employment of a special artist to make new designs, and the London correspondent recognised many which were familiar to him in the shop windows of Regent Street and Bond Street. One in particular was the design for the brooch presented to the Princess of Wales by the ladies and gentlemen of Wales, which was exhibited at one of the great jewellers in London. The result of such an investment in design was an improvement in the quality of Birmingham's jewellery, both artistically and intrinsically.

This development was reflected in the increase in every branch of the trade. It had employed about 500 people in the 1830s but by 1865, Wright reckoned that there were between 500 and 600 masters and 7,000 workers. They were employed in various sections, of which the jewellery trade proper was the most numerous. This embraced the production of gold and silver lockets, links, rings, bracelets, pins and necklaces. There were four other branches: gold and silver chain manufacturers; silversmiths; gilt toy makers; and box makers, die sinkers and workers in other subsidiaries. To their number could be added about 1,000 electro-platers who made ornaments and table ware.

Together, according to the London commentator, these workers provided about half of all the ornamental jewellery required in the United Kingdom, whilst in the Warstone Lane factory of W. and J. Randall alone, almost £30,000 worth of gold watch chains were made every year. As for jewellery, that of the best class had risen in price not because of the gold used but due to the increased amount of beauty bestowed upon the work. Consequently, good gems had increased immensely in value: an amethyst which was once worth about £1.50 could now fetch about £80. Pearls and turquoise had also advanced in value because of the fashion for setting them in bosses.

> The jewellers of Birmingham often buy their own jewels, travelling all over the world for the purpose, their pearls and amethysts perhaps at Ceylon, their turquoise Alexandria. Their cameos are purchased largely at Borneo and Naples, where also they buy coral in large quantities . . . The more costly gems, however, are constantly sent to Birmingham to be set, and I saw to-day, at Messrs. Braggs, several very splendid brooches set with brilliants and enamelled, the value of which … would be from four to seven hundred pounds.

There were other factors influencing the remarkable rise of the jewellery trade in Birmingham. These included the discovery of gold in Australia and California; the vastly increased wealth of England and her colonies, particularly with regard to the rapidly expanding middle class; and a desire for personal adornment. This had been boosted from 1854 by the legalisation of lower standards for gold alloys which magnified the market for less costly jewellery.



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A silversmith at work at Adie Brothers, manufacturing silversmiths of Soho Hill and Great Hampton Street in about the 1930s. He worked in a highly skilled trade.

Characteristics of the Trade

As Wright affirmed, the result was an unparalleled prosperity to the jewellery trade. By 1866, it now gave employment, directly and indirectly, to a larger number than any other in Birmingham. As a result, he asserted, it was a poor workman who could only earn £1.25 a week. Rather the average wage could be considered as between £2.50 and £4 a week, with some men earning much more. These were very high wages considering that as late as 1900 the poverty line was given as around about £1 a week for a husband, wife and moderate family of three children.

As a rule, according to Wright:

> the working jewellers occupy a higher social position than other artisans. They reside in comfortable dwellings; their clothes are generally good, and do not betray the 'working man'. This may be attributed to the cleanly nature of their work. They are not given so much to dissipation as some classes. Quiet and continued application, rather than muscular strength, is necessary (a steady hand being indispensable), and all tend to the formation of more orderly habits.

Wright also drew attention to the great number of small but independent manufacturers with between five and 50 workers – a phenomenon that was a peculiarity of Birmingham's trades in general and which lent itself to social mobility. A keen observer, Wright thought that nine out of ten of the master jewellers then in business had originally been workmen. In fact, the principals of twelve contemporary independent concerns, each employing a number of workers, had all been employed as apprentices or workmen in a manufactory which itself had been established within the previous 25 years.

This progression was facilitated by the relatively small sum required to start up as a master, for all that was needed was:

> A peculiarly-shaped bench and a leather apron, one or two pounds worth of tools (including a blow-pipe), and, for material, a few sovereigns, and some ounces of copper and zinc. His shop may be the top-room of his house, or a small building over the wash-house, at a rent of 2s or 2s. 6d. per week, and the indispensable gas-jet, which the Gas Company will supply on credit. With these appliances, and a skilful hand, he may produce scarf-pins, studs, links, rings, lockets, &c, for all of which he will find a ready market on the Saturday among the numerous 'factors' whose special business it is to supply the shopkeepers throughout the country.

John Mantle personified the upward mobility of many jewellers. The *Birmingham Daily Gazette* of 7 October 1908 explained that in 1838, having thoroughly learned his craft, this young jeweller gathered up the savings which had accumulated from the first hours of his apprenticeship, and set up in business for himself in Unett Street, thus founding John Mantle and Sons, Limited. When he had started:

Jewellers at work on their 'peculiarly-shaped' benches on the first floor workshop of Alabaster and Wilson in Legge Lane. On some of them are old gas light fittings and horizontal gas jets in brass – known as Birmingham sidelights.

Women press workers at the silverware factory of J. W. Evans in Albion Street in the late nineteenth century.

> the making of guard chains was quite a junior branch of the trade … Silver chains were only first made about a hundred years ago, having been preceded by brass wire cut in a single pattern and finished by being silvered or gilt. Following the silver guard chain came that of gold and by the advent of the forties the chain trade had become an important department of the industry as a whole. To the development of this branch of the trade John Mantle contributed no little by his strenuous activity and perseverance with the satisfactory result to himself that at the comparatively early age of fifty he was able to retire from active participation in the business which he handed over to his sons.

He did so in the late 1860s, by which time the business was making gold chains in a new factory in Warstone Lane. Built specifically for the company and properly equipped for jewellery making, it was more characteristic of the manufacture of the gold, silver and gilt chain trade. Within its small factories, machinery allowed the use of semi-skilled and unskilled workers and women – all of whom were paid less than skilled men.

Modern techniques had affected other branches of the trade. In the past the whole article had been made by one man, ensuring its costliness but now, as Wright explained:

> owing to the sub-division of labour, and the use of machinery, articles formerly made in units are now produced in hundreds. Let us take a common ear-ring, or locket, for example. Under the old system the gold would have been beaten out by hand to the thickness required, and then forced into the proper shape by repeated hammering; the edges of the back and front, filed that they might join correctly, after which it would be soldered and finished – all this being the work of one person. Now, a die is cut or engraved, the gold rolled at the steam mill to the requisite gauge, then blanks or discs are cut out by a screw-press, stamped and cut to the exact shape desired (also by the press), all this being done so rapidly, that twenty are produced in the same time as one was formerly made.

Still, die sinking and the rolling of gold leaf for gilding were skills in themselves and there were other specialisms such as engraving, case making, jewel mounting, jewel setting, and polishing. These skills were often carried out by the many independent outworkers or craftsmen in small workshops.

There was one facet in which the jewellery trade did differ from so many in Birmingham. Unlike the pen, button, pin and other industries, few women were employed. Wright thought that their lack of widespread involvement was somewhat singular and contrary to what might have been expected, given that jewellery work was clean and required delicate manipulation – aspects which would appear to have suited women. Nevertheless, they were only employed in the making of guard chains and in ordinary work on fly presses, where they cut out or formed the 'roughs'. By contrast, outside the workplace a considerable number of women indirectly obtained their living through the work of jewellers by making the paper and leather boxes used to protect and set off the finished article.

The Development of the Jewellery Quarter

The revival and rapid expansion of the Birmingham jewellery trade was accompanied by one other noticeable feature: the emergence of a Jewellery Quarter to the north west of Birmingham town centre. This was located in that part of Hockley between Great Charles Street in the east and Icknield Street in the west and Great Hampton Street in the north to the line of Summer Hill Road, the Sand Pits and the Parade in the south. Much of this land was owned by the Colmores and it was developed slowly from the late eighteenth century,

especially after the opening of St Paul's Church in 1779. By Kempson's Map of 1810 some buildings had appeared up to George Street and Hall Street and by *The Plan of Birmingham of 1832* streets on the Carver Estate between Fredrick Street and Summer Hill Road had been cut out. This was soon followed by building on the Vyse Estate between Warstone Lane and Great Hampton Street.

Out of 150 manufacturing jewellers listed in *Wrightson's Directory* of 1829-30, just over half were in the emerging Jewellery Quarter. Twenty-one years later, *White's Directory* included over 200 jewellers and goldsmiths, a handful of stampers, and 31 silversmiths and manufacturers of fancy articles. The great majority were gathered close to each other. This concentration was encouraged by three main factors. First, the sub-divisions and specialisms of the jewellery trade meant that articles had to be passed from one hand to another, and that process was made easier, quicker and more cost-effective if the various skills were close to each other. Second, much jewellery was sold through factors and it was beneficial for them to reach the different specialist manufacturers in one location. And third, the preponderance of small masters meant that most preferred to live in houses, behind which were their workshops.

From the 1850s, the affluence of such men allowed many of them to do this and to join the bigger employers who had already been drawn to the pleasant locality around St Paul's Square, where there were sizeable and well-built residences, upon the gardens of which could be built workshops or small factories. In December 1865, for example, a capital front dwelling house at 53 Vyse Street was advertised for sale in the *Birmingham Daily Post*. It came with a "spacious and well-lighted three-story manufactory (to accommodate about eighty pairs of hands) with enclosed yard and appurtenances; the whole forming a most compact and desirable jeweller's premises".

The desire for master jewellers to live and work in an attractive setting on the edge of town was quickly recognised by the owners of the large houses which were dotted around the district, encouraging them to advertise them for sale or to let to jewellers – as indicated by an advertisement in the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* from July 1867. This offered "37, Vyse Street, suitable for jeweller, or any light trade. The shopping is newly built; the house just thoroughly cleaned, painted, and papered." Four years later, in December 1871, a larger house in Vyse Street was advertised. With a width of twelve yards, it was double-fronted and boasted six rooms and two kitchens, whilst it was also very suitable for the erection of light and eligible shopping, the term then used for a workshop.

In 1851, 26 Frederick Street was the grand home of William Elliott, his wife and two servants. Aged just 25, he was the manager of the family's button works a few yards away on the corner of Regent Street and Vittoria Street. In 1881, the building was lived in by Matilda Greenberg, her four children, a cook and housemaid. She was 50 and a jewellers' factor from London. A decade later, the premises was occupied by the Berndorf Metal Works.

94 Vyse Street when it was the premises of Frank Clissold Ltd stampers and piercers. It is a fine example of a large house that was turned into industrial premises. In 1873, Hyman Samuel lived there. With his sons, he was a goldsmith and manufacturing jeweller whose work premises were at 20-21 Hylton Street and 55 Vyse Street, where the family also occupied the house. By 1882, 94 Vyse Street was occupied by Wolffe Brothers, watch manufacturers.

In her major study of jewellery making in Birmingham, Shena Mason interviewed the niece of the prosperous jeweller Edward John Clewley. She recalled that he had started making gold brooches and such like at his home at 111 Vyse Street. His office and long workshop were at the back and:

> He did very well for himself. He and auntie lived at the house there; it was a big house, but I don't remember there being any garden. There was a stable at the back and the stableman let me take sugar to feed the horse. Uncle had a lovely trap and a beautiful high-stepping horse . . . At the house they had a cook and a housemaid. There was a great big billiards room.

In the 1860s, this house and workshop had belonged to John T. Holden, an electro-plater. It was then taken on by various jewellery manufacturers until Clewley moved there in the early twentieth century when he was noted as a locket maker.

As an identifiable neighbourhood, Birmingham's jewellers' quarter was first mentioned in 1860 by the author Walter White. In *All Around the Wrekin* he stated that for the most part Birmingham was a town of workshops, through which a person might walk from street to street noting the change of aspect with the change of trade. Thus, amongst the pearl button makers there was a suspicion of makeshift, but by contrast the jewellers' quarter looked clean and respectable. Six years later, Wright found it curious how the jewellery trade had so located itself in the St. Paul's district that there was scarcely a workshop to be

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100 Vyse Street in the late 1950s or early 1960s when it was the base for several small jewellery businesses. Built between 1851 and 1861, by then it was the home of a government clerk at the Royal Mint living with his wife and baby daughter. Ten years later, a jeweller and his wife were in occupation; and by the 1881 Census, Ambrose Earp was there with his wife, five children and a servant. He was a jeweller employing one man and three boys, whilst his oldest son was also a jeweller and his oldest daughter assisted in the warehouse. According to the *Kelly's Directory* for the next year he also occupied 101, next door, as a cameo brooch maker.

found anywhere else – all the more so as a generation before, this area had been covered mostly by the guinea gardens that then surrounded much of Birmingham.

A Major Birmingham Industry

This Jewellery Quarter had developed quickly after the difficult years of the mid-1840s, when the future of the Birmingham jewellery trade had been threatened. By proactively staving off depression, the town's manufacturing jewellers had transformed and expanded their trade through the development of their skills, their ability to adapt to changing fashions, their success in publicising their craftsmanship, their keenness in embracing design, their adoption of new production techniques and their aptitude for hard work. These features continued to play a vital role in the growth of the jewellery trade. By 1881 it had become a very important industry, as John Alfred Langford expressed in his *Handbook of Birmingham*. In good times:

> it gives employment to over 8,000 persons, and consumes yearly from £600,000 to £700,000 worth of gold and from £100,000 and £150,000 worth of silver. It has almost appropriated one part of the town to itself, and the districts of All Saints' and St. Paul's, have become quite a colony of jewellers. The master jewellers number about 600, and the excellence attained by many of them in the best work has done much to banish the title of 'Brummagem' once so unscrupulously applied to its wares.

Always susceptible to the vagaries of fashion and downturns in the national economy, the high-class trade in gold and jewels was hit badly at the start of the long depression of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. To an extent, this was offset by the ongoing demand for silver jewellery and cheaper goods, although these declined in popularity in the mid-1880s. By contrast, other branches were unaffected throughout the slump. They included the manufacture of watch cases, official insignia and electroplated ware.

There was one positive outcome from the difficulties facing many firms – the recognition of the need to come together and not operate solely in an individualistic manner. Thus in 1887 the Jewellers' and Silversmiths' Association was formed. It had a number of objectives such as watching legislation affecting the trade, assisting in the development of exports and seeking the removal of restrictions on the trade. It also sought to promote art and technical education and was successful in doing so. From 1888 the Association made arrangements for art instruction to be given to employees at the Municipal School of Art in Margaret Street. Two years later, the Vittoria Street School for Jewellers and Silversmiths was started in a former factory. It could take up to 460 students and it held courses for boys from the age of twelve and a half years, adult craftsmen and women. Today it is the internationally renowned School of Jewellery of Birmingham City University.

The increasing importance of art in jewellery making is reflected in the career of Jenkin William Evans, who started up at 54 Albion Street in 1881. He and his family lived there for nineteen years, whilst he worked in the workshop at the back. Tony Evans explains that his grandfather, Jenkin, was a keen artist. After an apprenticeship elsewhere in the Quarter, he used his talents as a die sinker, cutting dies and tools to produce a range of silverware stampings that he could sell to other manufacturers. He produced a huge number of dies, up to 330 a year in the Edwardian period, the boom time for the silver industry, particularly with regard to table ware for the burgeoning middle class.

With a highly successful business, Jenkin took over three adjoining properties and now his premises form the J. W. Evans Silver Factory of English Heritage. One of the most complete surviving historic factories in the Jewellery Quarter, it evokes a lost industrial world as in the workshops behind the frontages are the original drop stamps and fly presses as well as thousands of dies for the manufacture of silverware.

As the career of Jenkin Evans indicates, despite the long depression, the jewellery trade continued to grow and by 1908, according to the *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, it had become one of the largest industries in the Midlands. Its employers were numbered by the hundreds, the employed by the thousands and the dependents of the trade, direct and indirect, by the tens of thousands. The Jewellers' Quarter itself was an industrial hive, a vast producing centre, of which Vyse Street and Warstone Lane were the two great arteries. This district was singularly self-centred, "a town within a town, a community of craftsmen

AN INDUSTRIAL HIVE: BIRMINGHAM'S JEWELLERY QUARTER

By permission of Historic England Archive

Jenkin Evans is standing to the left of the door in this photograph taken with his workforce in 1893.

Birmingham Lives Archive

Looking along Warstone Lane to its meeting with Vyse Street at the Chamberlain Clock, erected in 1903. The building on the right is the old 'Rose Villa Tavern', which was replaced by the present splendid structure in 1919.

proud of the traditions of a great and ancient industry, proud of the unique place it occupies in the commercial life of the Midlands". And in this Quarter, "with its clannish unification of interests and wonderful variety of both separate and subsidiary trades", every man was a potential master and masters worked on familiar terms with their men.

Nevertheless, by the early twentieth century, more changes in production had become obvious. The introduction of gas engines had enabled processes like stamping, rolling, wire drawing and polishing to be carried on in one place rather than in several. Some firms had also begun to widen their manufacturing scope; automatic machines were now used in the making of chains; and bigger workplaces were becoming more apparent. One of them was that of Smith and Pepper, manufacturing jewellers at 77 and 78 Vyse Street. Opened in 1899, the factory and office space above was converted from separate dwellings and workshops so as to comprise several workshops around a courtyard.

The most successful period for Smith and Pepper came after it capitalised on the popularity for Ancient Egyptian styles following the discovery of the tomb of the Pharaoh Tutankhamen in 1922. Smith and Pepper became well-known for its snake-style bracelets and jewellery with Egyptian motifs. The firm traded until 1981 when its doors were shut, leaving the workers' overalls and coats hanging on hooks in the workshop. Today Smith and Pepper is the fascinating Museum of the Jewellery Quarter, which tells the story of the Jewellery Quarter and Birmingham's jewellery and metalworking heritage.

In more modern workplaces like this, the heavier processes such as stamping were carried out on the ground floor because of the weight of the stamps and the noise and vibration they made. Stamping involved dropping a heavy weight in an iron frame onto a metal blank to form a pattern. An imprint on the underside of the weight forced the blank into the pattern incised in reverse on a die. Originally the weights were hauled up by hand and then pulled down, but in the newer premises they were powered and if there were several, they were arranged in batteries with the operator standing in a pit. The rolling of metal into sheets also took place downstairs, whilst the chemicals for electroplating were kept in a separate workshop in the factory yard that was well-ventilated. The casting shop was also kept apart as there was a risk of fumes and fire from making the casts from molten metal.

On the upper floors were the lighter machines and fittings needed for the production of jewellery and small ornamental metal goods like badges. Here the distinctively-shaped jewellers' benches were placed below the windows to give the skilled worker plenty of light. Sitting on a stool in the hollowed-out part of the bench, the jeweller worked on the wooden block, or peg, that was alongside, using a side gas jet and specialist tools. Leather pouches hung beneath each bench to catch filings and off-cuts of precious metals so that they might be

Stamps and dies in the workshop at the Museum of the Jewellery Quarter.

The Gothic Works of Vaughton's, a grade 2 listed factory built in 1903 for the making of medals, badges and civic jewellery. In 1895, Aston Villa won the FA Cup and it was displayed in a shop in Summer Lane, from which it was stolen. Vaughton's made the replacement and interestingly, Howard Vaughton, the grandson of the founder of the business, had been a highly successful player for Aston Villa until he retired. Established in 1819, Vaughton's is now based elsewhere in the Jewellery Quarter manufacturing high-quality handmade insignia such as automotive badges, chains and jewels of office, civic insignia, corporate items, lapel badges, and cufflinks.

recycled. On the same level were draw benches for wire-drawing and fly presses for hand-pressing, along with space for soldering, engraving, enamelling and polishing.

War-Time Crisis

As with the trade itself, the Jewellery Quarter was also changing in the early twentieth century. The employers were moving out of their large houses to nearby residential areas like Handsworth and the rooms in their former homes were divided amongst a variety of outworkers, who remained numerous in the manufacture of gold rings and other smaller articles. By early 1914, the *Birmingham Daily Post* believed that about 37,000 people worked in the jewellery trade and watch and clock making. Precious metals employed the great majority, with a total of 21,000, whilst goldsmiths, silversmiths and jewellers accounted for almost 16,000.

Interestingly, there were just over 15,500 women – a high number that emphasised the increased mechanisation of the industry and the growth of small factories. The overall figure could be added to by including kindred trades such as tool making, die sinking, stamping and piercing. A few months later, the same newspaper asserted that the local jewellery industry was regarded by many as the most important of its kind in the world but now it was faced by a critical situation: war.

The trade was indeed badly affected by the First World War. There was a fall in demand, government restrictions were imposed on the use of precious metals, and many male workers moved into the armed services or munitions work, for the latter of which the jewellery trade was deemed unsuitable. This was because most firms did not have the means for the high-quantity production needed. Yet in January 1917, the *Birmingham Daily Post* reported on a surprising result of a jewellery trade census. The amount of munition work was considerably larger than was supposed. Only firms with practically no plant were not involved, yet many of them had hand presses and "therefore, the class of work the trade can undertake is work which can be done with the file, and work in which soldering is required". The census was carried out by the Emergency Committee of the Birmingham Jewellery Trade which suggested that for smaller businesses "instead of going to the Ministry of Munitions, it would be better to approach large controlled firms in the district and some of the large jewellers and electroplate manufacturers now doing munition work with a view to obtaining sub-contracts".

Amongst the war work carried on by the trade was the manufacture of gauges, safety shutters, water bottles, mess tins, trench lamps and small parts for shells, aeroplanes and magnetos. Such production was made possible by the installation of capstan lathes in workshops. A few companies also made patriotic jewellery, brooches and badges. Still, by 1917 there had been a big fall in the workforce, and the Committee suggested that "the labour now available, even including women and girls, does not exceed 20,000".

Inter-War Difficulties

According to G. C. Allen in his major study of the industrial development of Birmingham and the Black Country between 1860 and 1927, the jewellery trade was crippled throughout the war and it never recovered despite a short boom between 1918 and 1920. As a supplier of luxuries, it was always badly hit by industrial depressions but now it was also adversely affected by a combination of other factors. Women's involvement in active and outdoor amusements and their fashions precluded the

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The electroplating factory of B. & J. Round and Sons in Northampton Street, where Frederick Massingham and his brother had their small business in much smaller premises.

wearing of jewellery; the disposable income of the middle class was increasingly spent on motor cars like the Austin Seven; and imitation and ostentatious jewellery was no longer appealing to younger people. By 1927, the employment figures continued to hover around 20,000, and although there had been an increase in small factories, the little masters remained great in number.

One of them was the manufacturing jeweller, Frederick Massingham. His daughter, Avis Wilson, recalled that he started his own business in Augustus Street, later moving in with his brother, James, at 55, Northampton Street. Here "they had an upstairs 'shop', so dilapidated that the stairs were unsafe. The two rooms, one an 'office' and one a workshop, had more papers stuffed in the windows than glass. There was an open stove. I thought it marvellous."

Margaret Farrand's family were workers in the Jewellery Quarter in the 1920s. She remembered that when her father came back from the First World War, "his job as a musical instrument-maker had gone, so off he went to Vyse Street and thereabouts for work. My mother was book-keeper for Jabez Wolfe of Vyse Street and she'd tell me how all the floor sweepings were sifted for gold-dust each evening. Come 7 pm each evening, a messenger would take the post in a basket-carriage to the Post Office. Thousands of pounds and no security firms then!"

Marjorie Ell, née Shenton, lived in the Jewellery Quarter from 1918 until the outbreak of the Second World War. Her mother kept a shop on the corner of Hockley Street and Vyse Street. It was "a proper general stores. She used to make jugs of tea for the work people, ham and cheese sandwiches, cakes, bread pudding and dinners. I went to St. Paul's School and in my dinner time had to take the dinners to various workshops." When Marjorie left school she went to work at G. H. Johnstone's in Northampton Street. They made cufflinks and "I was taught to enamel them in stripes for the public schools and regiments. A man in the shop would paint the crest on the other side and when they were linked together it made a beautiful article."

"We had a gypsy party every year and a charabanc would come and take us in the country. When anyone was 21, the workers from the other shops in the factory would come to drum you out. They would bring dustbin lids, old saucepans and anything that would make a noise and beat it for five minutes. Every so often we had new floor boards so that they could burn the old ones to get the gold dust from them."

A Vital Business District

The jewellery trade remained at a low ebb through the years of the Depression, although in January 1934 the *Birmingham Daily Gazette* reported some optimism. Unemployment had considerably decreased and many works had gone from part-time to full-time employment. Yet the position was not as secure as might be hoped. The demand for high-class jewellery had not increased whilst the middle-class trade was practically non-existent. By contrast there was a high demand for cheaper goods and imitation jewellery, with women wearing beads instead of costly jewels. It seemed, then, that the upturn was based on the deteriorating political situation internationally, which allowed Birmingham's jewellers to recapture lines they had previously lost to European competitors.

As in the First World War, jewellery businesses again turned over to munitions work after the Second World War broke out in 1939. In particular, craftsmen in the jewellery trade manufactured tools, parts and intricate components for large firms. The effect was made clear in March 1942, at a luncheon of the Birmingham Jewellers and Silversmiths Association, when Ivan Short announced that "we have turned from tea-pots to tommy guns, from rings to wings, from bangles to bombs, and from bracelets to bullets". As a result, jewellers were now "gunmakers, aeronautical engineers and technicians who rejoice under the all-embracing name of subcontractors".

In the post-war years, the jewellery trade faced numerous difficulties as it was buffeted by recessions, the imposition of a Purchase Tax, and the growth of imports, whilst the Jewellery Quarter itself was threatened with destruction. In a period of widespread clearance of whole areas and of redevelopment fixated upon high-rise buildings and American-style freeways, some politicians and planners decried the district as obsolete. They believed that it needed to be scheduled as a redevelopment area so that the old buildings could be torn down and replaced with modern, efficient factories.

It seemed that the forces of destruction would win when part of Vyse Street was demolished and replaced with modern workshop units and the Hockley Centre.

The School of Jewellery in Vittoria Street in the Jewellery Quarter. It offers courses in jewellery, silversmithing, horology and gemmology and students are taught the full range of traditional techniques along with the School's cutting-edge technology.

Better known as the Big Peg, it opened in 1971 and is named after the wedge-shaped block of wood in the distinctive jeweller's bench. Fortunately, by then opinion had switched to conservation and renewal, and in the ensuing years any Victorian buildings have been restored whilst the Jewellery Quarter has managed to retain its identity as a distinct neighbourhood. There have been noticeable social and economic changes, though. The number of manufacturing jewellers has declined whilst that of retail jewellery shops, restaurants, bars, residential apartments and museums has risen. As a result, many people now regard the Jewellery Quarter as just a tourist destination. It is not and none should overlook the ongoing importance of the making of jewellery and its vitality as a business district.

In 2016, this was made clear by Gregory Fattorini, the Managing Director of Fattorini of Frederick Street, the renowned firm of gold and silver smiths, badge makers, medallists, sword makers, trophy makers and insignia makers. In the *Birmingham Economic Review* he explained that there is a business cluster in the heart of the Jewellery Quarter which is rarely understood as it is mostly invisible. This has deep roots and offers larger companies like Fattorini access to specialist craftsmen as well as to suppliers of raw materials and specialist machinery, tools and equipment. It also affords co-operation with other companies to service very large national and international orders. These benefits are enhanced by the presence of an internationally recognised School of Jewellery, an Assay Office and the National Association of Jewellers. Both for the economic well-being of Birmingham and its historical integrity the manufacturers of the Jewellery Quarter should be valued and encouraged in their business endeavours for the Jewellery Quarter is a unique neighbourhood built upon the skills of our city's jewellers over 200 years. ●

Professor Carl Chinn is a well-known author and broadcaster on the social history of Birmingham, the Black Country and the urban working class.

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Also listen to Carl Chinn's audio podcast: www.historywm.com/podcasts