

PETER GASKELL (1824-1896)

This article is taken from the recent 2010/11 genealogical and pewter research of collectors who wish to remain private, and the genealogical/Patent and newspaper research of Christine Ellis of Sydney Australia, various articles, and readings of the UK Pewter Society Data base and Provincial Pewterers by David W Hall and R F Homer (published 1985)

The story of Peter Gaskell is a little sad. He was born in the Cheetham district of Crumpsall on the outskirts of Manchester, as it was then.

His family worked in the textile industry at the lower end of skills. In 1841 his father, also called Peter, was a Cotton Dyer, while Peter (Jr) was a Warehouseman at age 15 – another word for a labourer in the textile warehouse. One brother was a Machine printer, another a plumber, plus two other younger brothers and a sister.

However towards the end of 1848 Peter (Jr) married Ann Maggs Morgan, the eldest surviving daughter of Joseph Morgan, Pewterer. They had two children, a son, Joseph, and daughter Susannah Morgan before the middle of 1851. (Susannah died in 1852).

Peter must then have been working with his father-in-law although on the 1851 census at age 26 he is still a warehouseman (textiles or pewter?). However in 1852 he is shown on Joseph Morgan's patent application (for a steam and cooling bath manifold for the candle making machine Joseph had invented) as a joint applicant and called a "Gentleman". He could not be called a pewterer, if only because he had not served an apprenticeship, but there is no good information as to what work he did then.

(Manchester 1860-65. This time was a calamity for the workers. There was a gratifying support from every direction including the government in London But for 500,000 in Manchester and districts nearby, on pitiful wages with cut hours, or out of work, this was truly a huge problem. The owners upgraded their machinery and this did help but it was a very dramatic time for all. Entire Manchester neighbourhoods seem to be taken over as shelters for the unfortunate, according to the census reports. Manchester lost status, production did rise afterwards, but now with the cotton grown elsewhere throughout the world and production processes likewise spread to the winds the seeds of strong competition were sown. This time was known as the Cotton Famine, amongst other names.)

Peter and Ann have had more children in Manchester in the 1850s, Ada, Ernest and Edward. Peter does not appear on Joseph's 1859 patent application and sometime between 1858-1860 Peter and Ann moved to Birmingham to set up a Pewter and Brass foundry business with their last daughter, Agnes, born there in the latter half of 1860.

Peter possibly becomes Joseph's partner in 1860 as relates to this partial move of Joseph Morgan's business to Birmingham. The Birmingham business named Joseph

Morgan & Co., Pewterers and Brass cock founders, at 60&61 Stafford Street first appears first in the 1861 The Corporation General and Trades Birmingham directory so we can be sure that Joseph Morgan is financing this move. But this year of 1861 is a difficult year for Peter, as his wife Ann dies early in that year, several months after the birth of Agnes whilst living in Aston on the edge of Birmingham in Warwickshire. In April 1861, Widower Peter lists himself on the census as – Pewterer and Brass cock founder employing 17 men, 6 Boys, Partner.

Birmingham had been established because it was on dry site on a south-east facing slope, with a good supply of spring water, the convergence of many roads and with access to a wide range of economic products – there was also the benefit that, with absentee and disinterested landlords, there were no restrictive trade guilds. Of course by the time Frederick Engels visited the city in the 1840's the city, like many others, was suffering the effects of the Industrial revolution and with a population in 1838 of 186,000, it had been the scene of Chartists riots in 1839. By 1851 the corporation of Birmingham had taken over the responsibilities of sanitation, lighting and roads but the city was expanding dramatically and the quality of life for its citizens varied considerably. Acts of the 1860's and 1870's were designed to improve housing conditions but did not solve all the problems as quotes from an article of 1876 show; *“Nowadays... the closely packed houses of the older districts are deserted by the rich... and, when in a state of decay...are tenanted by the very poor, who crowd these tenements to an extent never contemplated by those who built them.... Birmingham has in its central districts a miserable region of damp, dilapidation and decay where the deaths are twice as numerous as in Edgbaston...young children die especially fast...”*

No wonder Peter Gaskell chose to live out of the immediate centre of the city although not far from Stafford Street in nearby Aston, and why Joseph Chamberlain, responsible for many later municipal improvements, said on becoming Mayor of Birmingham “The town shall not, with God's help, know itself.”

Birmingham, being a diverse and in-demand commercial powerhouse, didn't suffer the same effects as Manchester from the American Civil War, so Joseph Morgan's timing is nearly impeccable with the move there of his daughter and husband Peter Gaskell. Stafford Street, where Joseph Morgan & Co., operated from in Birmingham, was right at the heart of everything good and bad. It was a great location near to the Great Western Railway depot, the main roads North and East, and the main canal.

For Joseph Morgan and Peter Gaskell, Birmingham was not easy as early Manchester had been. There were a lot of pewter and brass manufacturers including the substantial Yates family of businesses; Joseph Morgan & Co., had to diversify very quickly to compete and survive.

In 1867 Peter remarries a Fanny Letitia Gibbs. There is no sign that this helps the relationship with Joseph Morgan. A daughter from his first marriage, Ada, dies in 1869. In the 1871 census he now calls himself a Brass Founder, and he and Fanny have four children from his first marriage living with them, with sons Joseph a Match Maker and Ernest a Clerk. Fanny's long widowed mother is also living with them as well as a visiting Wesleyan Chapel Minister.

It is not until 1873 that Morgan and Gaskell appears as a company name, while during 1876,1877 and 1878 Joseph is advertising in Birmingham for Pewterers to work at the Ducie works in Manchester.

The Morgan & Gaskell partnership is dissolved in 1878 as can be seen from the following notice; signifying the end of Joseph Morgan's business interests in Birmingham and his imminent retirement.

1878 London Gazette

NOTICE is hereby given, that the partnership heretofore subsisting between us the undersigned, Joseph Morgan and Peter Gaskell, in the trade or business of Pewterers, carried on under the firm of Morgan and Gaskell, at 60 & 61 Stafford-street, Birmingham, is dissolved, on and as from the 9th day of January, 1878, by mutual consent. All partnership debts will be received and paid by the said Peter Gaskell. - Witness our hands this 18th day of February, 1878. *Joseph Morgan Peter Gaskell*

Noticeably the debts of the former business are all Peter Gaskell's according to the notice. Very significantly then, Peter Gaskell appears to be on his own in Birmingham after this date, though he often uses the Morgan name with his own in the trading style; continuing business as a Pewterer, Bar fitter and Beer engine maker until 1892 when the business was absorbed into Gaskell and Chambers. (according to Provincial Pewterers).

Once operating the business on his own, Peter, then living at 3 Westminster Road Handsworth, appears to have had financial problems. Under the Bankruptcy act, arrangements for 'Proceedings for Liquidation by arrangement or Composition with Creditors' had been initiated in April 1883 with liabilities of £3590 and with two interim injunctions to restrain proceedings by creditors granted and a receiver appointed.

The Freehold premises at 60 &61 Stafford Street were put up for auction in June 1883, as was the good will of the business of Bar fitting and ale machine and publicans requisites, including all the machinery, tools, dies and patterns etc..

The details of the arrangements which followed are unknown but while the Liquidation process is still ongoing at the end of 1884, Peter is, according to Directory entries, continuing to operate from Stafford Street until 1892. It is possible, that it whatever arrangements had been put in place resulted in the creation of Gaskell and Chambers in late 1892, about the same time the partnership of Merritt and Chambers was dissolved.

Before and during the operation of the Birmingham business, Peter Gaskell had patents for a variety of different inventions, in 1853, 1863, 1865 (for which he won first prize at the Birmingham Industrial Exhibition) and 1870, which had nothing to do with the trade of Pewtering or beer engines. In 1894 when he was no longer involved in his company, he was still inventing. His inventiveness was carried forward to his son whom he must have inspired, as he was also granted various patents so maybe they were an 'inventing' family.

In 1896 Peter dies, without leaving a will. His widow leaves 29 Aston Lane and moves in with her widowed niece Emma and Emma's son. She also dies intestate.

So after their financial problems it appears that they both die with little (if any) substance to pass on.

The great shame of this is that Peter Gaskell, whilst he took himself upward in the world by his first marriage and appeared to be hugely inventive, technically far ahead of any training he appears to have had, with a lively mind, he was not successful in business.

Peter Gaskell's own talents show in his patent applications –

1853 Patent number 1612 Carriage Springs Peter Gaskell Manager of Manchester

1863 Patent number 2989 Cab Indicators Peter Gaskell Walsall Road Birmingham

1865 Patent number 3058 Rotary coupling Peter Gaskell of Birmingham

1870 Patent number 2552 Cab indicators Peter Gaskell Walsall Road Birmingham with Henry Moon.

1872 (Provisional 190) – Improvements in apparatus for drawing off liquids Peter Gaskell of Stafford Road Birmingham

Strikingly not long before he died Peter Gaskell (listing himself as out of business) of 29 Aston Lane Perry Barr Birmingham (his address in 1891) applies on the 1st December 1894 for a patent on

'Improvements in Self-registering Money Tills'.

So to the end he is still trying.

Peter Gaskell's son, Edward Morgan Gaskell, started his working life as a Cabinet maker in 1881 but by 1891 is a Brass Founder perhaps helping his Father.

This son Edward was also inventive (this is Joseph Morgan (II)'s Grandson) as the following notices show - at the time of these applications in 1894/95 he lists himself as an Agent/Commission Agent and he is living at 50 Weaman Street in Birmingham (not far from Stafford Street).

Birmingham Daily Post Friday, August 3, 1894

New Patents - Patents sealed July 24, 1894

Edward M. Gaskell - battledores and shuttlecocks : January 8, 1894.

Birmingham Daily Post Friday, February 15, 1895

New Patents - Patents sealed February 5, 1895

Edward M. Gaskell battledores and shuttlecocks and manufacture of the same 25 Jan 1894

Edward M. Gaskell manufacture of artificial feathers and other like articles 25 Jan 1894

Birmingham Daily Post Friday, April 5, 1895

New Patents - Patents sealed March 26, 1895

Edward M. Gaskell - battledores for the use with shuttlecocks, also applicable to racquets and bats for use in the game of lawn tennis and for other like purposes ;
March 14, 1894

During the same period he made another patent application for '*Improvements in Hair Curling, Crimping, or waving pins*'. Same address and same occupation but he has a co-applicant of the name of Samuel Lawrence a Tool maker.

The company operated by Edward Morgan Gaskell as Gaskell & Co. (manufacturers of Battlecocks, shuttledores, curling pins and other articles) at Angelina Street Birmingham, in a partnership with Robert Roberts was dissolved in 1895.

Strange things happen in Edward Gaskell's marriage as his wife is listed as his widow in 1901 living in Surrey, (in a slightly better neighbourhood than Peter's widow - Joseph's money?). This Widow has remarried by 1911 and had a 'nephew' named Harry Gaskell Lawrence living with her in 1901 and 1911.

In June of 1922 Edward Morgan Gaskell of Southampton Hampshire, Joiner (he has gone back to his original occupation) applies for a patent on a '*Trouser Press*'. The Death registration of Edward M. Morgan in 1930 is the correct person (so his wife was not a widow when previously declared.) Likely matters of money continued to be difficult for the son as they were for the father.

The address last lived in by Peter, and his second wife Fanny, at 29 Aston Lane has long gone. When they lived there it was right on the very edge of the city while now it is either part of the A4040 main road, or developed over by adjoining small factories.

Contrast that with Joseph Morgan's last home which in 2008 was the subject of a planning application for 16 three storey houses, on the site of the now boarded up house, within its own grounds, on the outskirts of Manchester.

The great irony being that under Cornelius Chamber's management the name and business of Gaskell and Chambers was indeed substantial and respected.

In 1897 the three directors of the newly incorporated Gaskell & Chambers (Gaskell must still have been a useful name...perhaps due to its Morgan connection) were Cornelius Chambers, James D Prior and George Stephens – we have no idea who had the money.

Cornelius Chambers, who may well be the subject of another article, went on to acquire the businesses of John Warne & Co, Samuel Mason, John Nichols, F H Matthews and Yates & Greenway (which gave him all James Yates remaining Moulds etc.)

So in a touch of irony thus was the name of Peter Gaskell, always a mystery to Pewter collectors. However in 1941 his name outlasted that of his wealthy father-in-law, in a Museum that Gaskell & Chambers promoted but which was bombed and destroyed in that year of WWII. In 1921 Gaskell & Chambers traded in Portsmouth, Leeds, London, and Cardiff. It sold its pewtering business in 1971 and continued

trading until 1983, although the company Joseph Morgan created did carry his name, albeit after 1903 not pewter related, until 1978.

Notes – BIRMINGHAM BUSINESS

Kelly's and other Directory listings for Joseph Morgan & Co, Morgan & Gaskell & Peter Gaskell - all at 60/61 Stafford Street :

1861-1872 Joseph or J. Morgan & Co.

1873-1878 Morgan & Gaskell

1878 Peter Gaskell, late J. Morgan & Co.

1879 Peter Gaskell, late Morgan & Gaskell

1882 Peter Gaskell

1883/84/1888/1890 and 1892 all list Peter Gaskell late Morgan & Gaskell

(Note - 1882 Joseph Morgan died)

It is hoped to develop an article at a later date showing some of the pewterware and pewter marks used by Peter Gaskell – both trading as Morgan & Gaskell and as Gaskell. (Gaskell and Chambers will also be another article).

There is however a small mystery here. No example has been seen by this writer that carries the name GASKELLS that is likely to predate the 20th century. That probably means (as unlikely as it reads) that Cornelius Chambers continued to use the name long after any Gaskell family connection ceased. It also implies that there exists very little, if any, pewter or brass ware, marked by Peter Gaskell with his name only, from 1878 – circa 1892. Should any collector have such pieces this website would be interested to know about them.

Meanwhile a few meagre examples –





A punch seen in Birmingham in 2009

