

THE MATCH INDUSTRY IN GLOUCESTER

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I have always been interested in collecting match labels since my schooldays and decided some ten or fifteen years ago to specialise in British made. It did not take me long to realise that even this was too wide a subject. I wanted to delve deeper and know more about the labels and their history instead of just collecting them.

I eventually decided to collect examples made in Gloucester as it was the nearest match centre to where I lived, even though I really had no idea what this involved. This decision was further strengthened, soon after, when I was lucky enough to be able to purchase an extremely attractive label called The Conqueror, with the address, County Works, Gloucester. This one label started endless letter writings, visits to Gloucester Library, the Record Office and Hackney Archives, London (Bryant and May's records). In my quest for knowledge it was soon apparent that much of the information produced by a well-known collector, and an authority on Gloucester firms, differed from some of the facts I was turning up. So, I decided to ignore anything else previously published and do my own researches starting from scratch.

William Taylor was a matchmaker from Birmingham and came to Gloucester as foreman to start the new match department of S.J. Moreland in 1867, at Tredwell's Yard, Bristol Road.(1) Samuel Moreland, a joiner and timber merchant since 1850, started the match making venture in partnership with Harry Jacobs who left two years later, having been bought out by Mr Moreland for £1000. A year later the match enterprise moved to a new site further up the Bristol Road and was to become a large and successful manufacturer, principally known, in later years, for its thousands of different England's Glory labels. Morelands became a limited company in 1913 at the same time that Bryant & May Ltd took a controlling interest.(2) It became a wholly owned subsidiary in 1938 and closed down in 1976.

William Taylor, according to the local press, was responsible for teaching about one hundred women and girls the art of matchbox making, on his arrival in Gloucester. He left Morelands and started early in 1871 for Belcher, Gee & Co, slate and enamelled marble merchants and manufacturers.(3) The partners started a matchworks adjacent to St Bartholomew's Hospital in Lower Westgate Street with William Taylor as manager. The extra business was too much for the partners who sold it to Henry Arnold and Thomas Gee, an elder brother, incurring a loss in all of £2000.

Henry Arnold was governor of the Manchester and Salford Reformatory (4) and Thomas Gee was superintendent of the local

Hardwicke Reformatory. (5) Arnold and Gee were described as good employers, providing work for several of the lads, from the institutions, enabling them to start new lives.(6) The view was also expressed that Mrs Gee, with her kindness and attention, had made a great difference and improvement on the behaviour and lives of many of the poor girls and women.

A disastrous fire occurred in September, 1872 which burnt for four days.(7) Most of the match works was destroyed and many were suddenly without work. The factory was rebuilt a year and a half later by public subscription. During this period William Taylor left to start on his own account, (8) just up the road and Thomas Gee bought out Arnold for £50. (9) Unlike the one surviving label of Belcher & Gee, no labels or boxes have been discovered from the Arnold and Gee enterprise.

Thomas Gee & Co, on the other hand, produced some thirteen different designs for their boxes, the majority of which are beautifully drawn and printed; (10) works of art that were a throwaway item. Although the first England's Glory label came from Thos Gee and the design used was that of HMS Warrior, this label may have originated from Arnold, Gee & Co. Only a very small number of these interesting labels have survived. Moreland's bought Thos Gee & Co in 1881. (11)

In 1873 William Taylor also had a bad fire at The County Match Works (a very grand name for not much more than a private house). (12) He moved to the unused St Luke's school off Bristol Road (13) and is only known to have produced two labels of which just two examples are known. He gave up the business in 1880 and an auction was advertised for all his stock and plant.(14)

The mystery company of Gloucester is one known as The Gloucester Match Company. This started in the late 1870s and produced nine known brands. The last one, registered in 1911,(15) must have been produced by Morelands as this was the only company producing matches in Gloucester at this time. It was probably used to sell matches at a discount to the company's usual prices.

The Standard Match Co of Hempsted was formed in 1920 and was to have been a valuable employer during the recession and a direct competitor to Morelands.(16) However under funding and eventually some squabbling amongst the directors set the company off to a poor start. Eventually it was purchased by the Morelands Group in 1926 and used by the British Match Corporation (formed that year) to produce and sell matches at a price with which competitors could not compete.(17) Losses were divided between the members of the corporation. Nearly fifty different labels or brands were produced by Standard.

Bryant & May entered into a trade agreement with Swedish Match during the 1850/60 period and over the next one hundred years



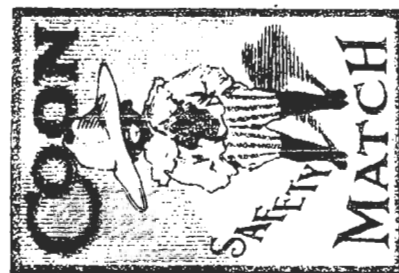
1872 - 75



1880s



c.1880



1921 - 1926

or so proceeded to swallow up the opposition where possible.(17) Ironically, during the last couple of decades, the ownership of Bryant & May has changed several times. The present owners are Swedish Match who have recently closed production in this country. We now import all our matches!

Editor's Note: Peter Champion is the author of the following: Matches from Gloucester, The Standard Match Co Ltd, and The Gloucester Match Company.

References:

- 1 Gloucester Journal, 26.3 1867.
- 2 Hackney Library, London, S.J. Moreland & Sons Ltd, Bryant & May Ltd.
- 3 Gloucester Chamber of Commerce, Review 1897.
- 4 1881 Census, Manchester.
- 5 1881 Census, Gloucester.
- 6 Gloucester Journal, October, 1872.
- 7 Gloucester Journal, 28.9.1872.
- 8 Gloucester Record Office (GRO) Rate Books.
- 9 GRO, deeds of St Bartholomew's Hospital.
- 10 Shown in "Matches From Gloucester".
- 11 See "Gloucester Match Co".
- 12 Gloucester Journal, 17.5.1873.
- 13 Gloucester Journal, 2.8.1879.
- 14 Gloucester Journal, June 1880.
- 15 Trade Marks Journal, Entry No 331719 Matches.
- 16 Gloucester Journal, 3.2. 1923.
- 17 Monopolies Commission Report, Match Industry 1950.