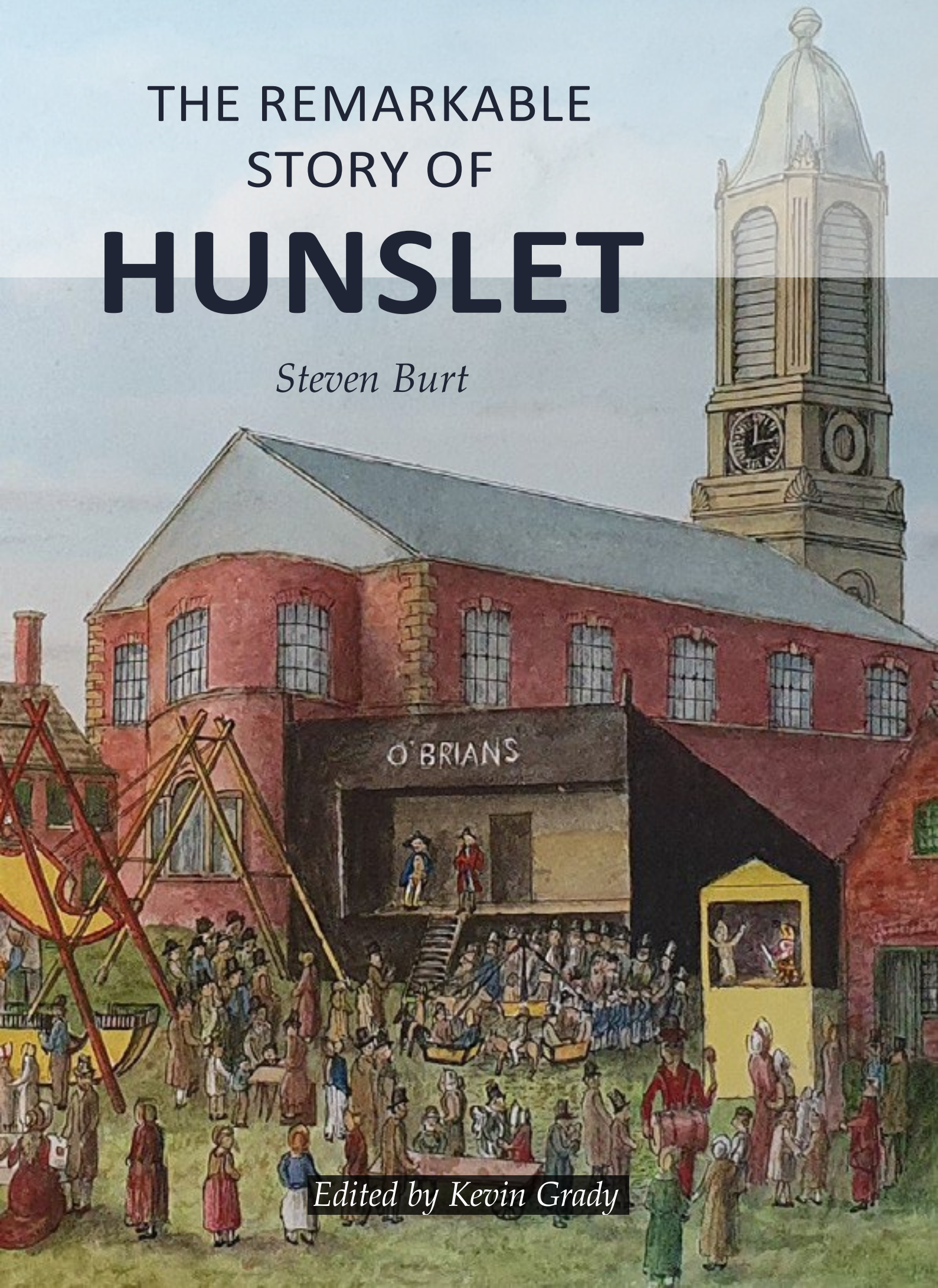


THE REMARKABLE  
STORY OF  
**HUNSLET**

*Steven Burt*



*Edited by Kevin Grady*



## COVER ILLUSTRATION

This beautiful watercolour by Peter Brears is based on a painting entitled 'Hunslet Feast in 1850' by an unknown artist. The original has been lost, but fortunately it was photographed for a lantern slide which survives today in the collections of the Thoresby Society. The artist, a talented amateur, sketched the scene on Church Street from a first-floor window. In the background are two, three and four storey brick-built buildings of the eighteenth century with their fine sash windows and stone roofs. The large number of chimneys indicate that each room was heated; a sign of the wealth of the inhabitants. The building to the far left is of a later date and has a slate roof. To the right of the picture is the Parish Church of St. Mary the Virgin, which had been enlarged in 1744, and the tower with its clock, built by subscription in 1832-3. The cottage to the far right was known as Stocks Hill as the village stocks were located next to it. The feast was a highlight of the year and time of great celebration. Preparations started about seven days before and was known as 'liver and whitewash' week as people freshly whitewashed the walls, scrubbed and polished the furniture and ensured that the metalwork around the fireplace was burnished to a high gloss. Hunslet wives would exclaim 'Ah mun get cleaned dahn for t'feast' before buying liver and onions to feed the family cheaply so that there was money to 'put on a spread' on the feast day itself which was held annually on 3 August. Trestle tables for stalls were laid out in the area known as Penny Hill and these were crammed with oranges, brandy-snap, nuts and gingerbread. The children liked the toy stalls, roundabouts, swing boats and the Punch and Judy show. The fair was famed for its dreadful dramas which were run by the O'Brian's. In the already crowded scene, a tall drummer in a crimson suit is 'banging up business.' The painting captures the fashion of the age with everyone in their 'Sunday best'; the females in long dresses with bonnets on their heads; the men wearing long trousers, shirts and long coats and their heads crowned with fine hats. To the far left of the picture, in the foreground, is a West Riding four-wheeled waggon with 'shelvings' that extended round the edge of the cart for big loads; the farmer in his frock coat and wide-brimmed hat leaning against it.

**The author acknowledges the fantastic support of:**



And a substantial donation from a generous benefactor who has had a long association with Hunslet and its people.

---

# THE REMARKABLE STORY OF HUNSLET

*Steven Burt*

*Edited by Kevin Grady*

---

# CONTENTS

*This book is dedicated to my endlessly patient wife, Lynda,  
whose love and tireless work behind the scenes is so appreciated.*

Private publication  
2022

Copyright © Steven Burt and Kevin Grady 2022

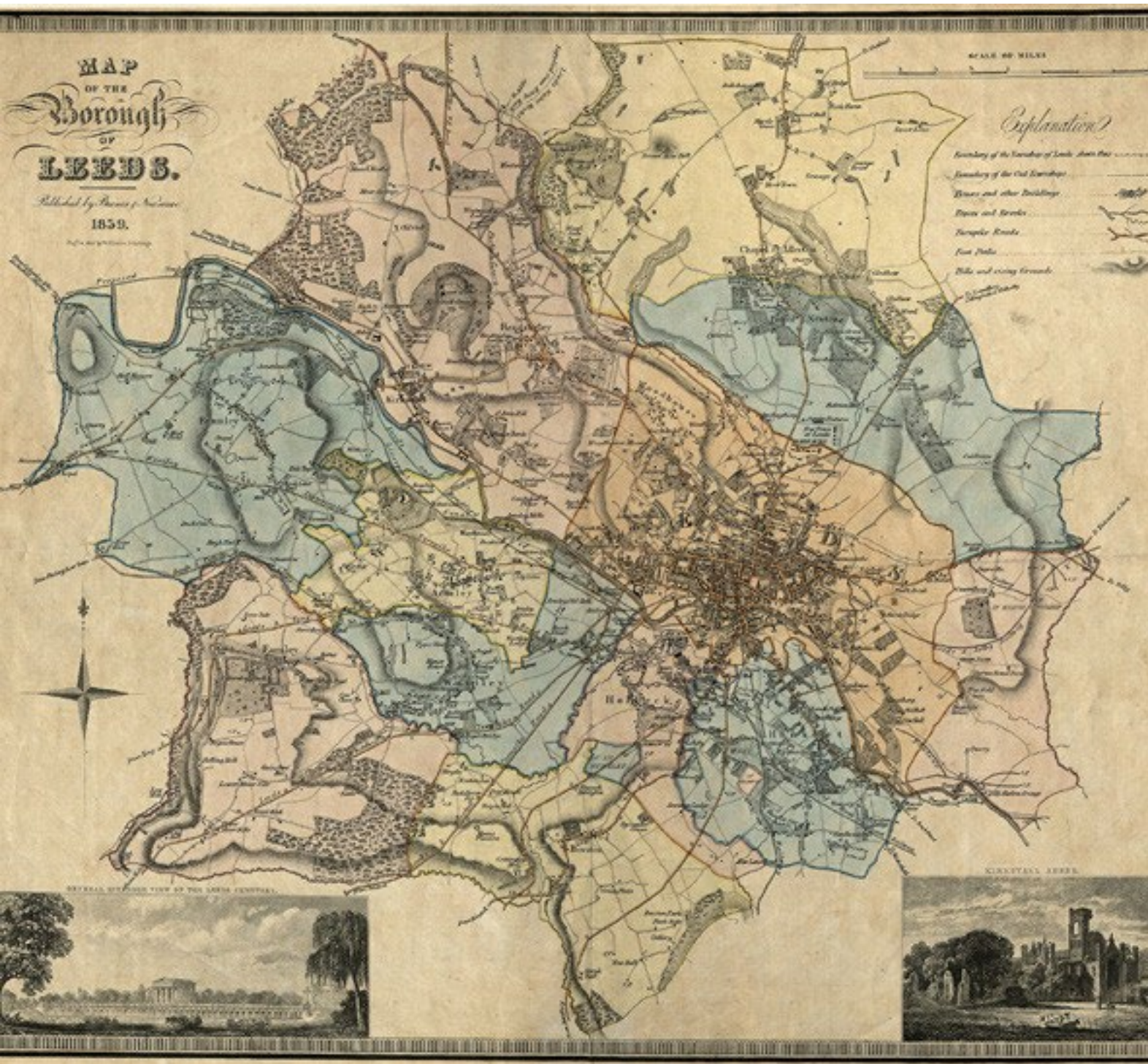
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission, in writing, of the copyright holders, nor be otherwise circulated in any form or binding or cover other than in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent publisher.

ISBN XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Printed and bound by B&D Print Services

CHAPTER 1: IN THE BEGINNING <i>1086 - 1600</i>	10
CHAPTER 2: CLOTHIERS, COLLIERS AND THE CAREY'S <i>1601 - 1700</i>	26
CHAPTER 3: PROSPERITY, PROPERTY AND POWER <i>1701 - 1790</i>	38
CHAPTER 4: THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION <i>1790 - 1837</i>	76
CHAPTER 5: EARLY VICTORIAN HUNSLET <i>1837 - 1860</i>	133
CHAPTER 6: A WORKSHOP OF THE WORLD <i>1861 - 1900</i>	174
CHAPTER 7: RUNNING OUT OF STEAM <i>1901 - 1945</i>	227
CHAPTER 8: BULLDOZERS, BUILDERS AND PLANNERS <i>1945 - 2000</i>	271
CHAPTER 9: HUNSLET TODAY <i>2001 - 2020</i>	299
APPENDIX <i>The Survey of The Manor of Hunslet, 1570</i>	319
REFERENCES	321
BIBLIOGRAPHY	333
INDEX	3XX





## 01

# IN THE BEGINNING

*Hunslet: 1086-1600*

*Hunslet is a very populous and extensive village, on the south side of the Aire, little more than a mile from Leeds. It belonged successively to the De Lacys, the Gascoignes, and the Nevilles. Sir John Nevile being accused of having joined in the rebellion with the Earl of Westmoreland, in the 12th of Elizabeth, the estate was confiscated, and given by the Queen to Sir Richard Carey, by whose son and grandson all the lands, mills and wastes, were sold to the inhabitants and is, in real importance, superior to most market towns in the kingdom.*

E. Baines, Directory, General and Commercial of the Town and Borough of Leeds (1817)

In the Middle Ages there was nothing to suggest that Hunslet was by 1817 to be 'superior to most market towns in Britain', still less that in the Victorian age it would become 'one the foremost industrial powerhouses of England'. Before that story unfolds, we must begin with a brief account of its medieval and Tudor antecedents – of events perhaps not quite so colourful, but none-the-less intriguing and curious, and essential to our understanding of how the township of Hunslet evolved.

Above: Baines and Newsome's Map of Leeds produced in 1839 shows the location of the out-township of Hunslet in relation to other settlements within the bounds of the parish of Leeds. (Thoresby Society)



## 03

## PROSPERITY, POTTERY AND POWER

*Hunslet: 1701 - 1790*

The most remarkable aspect of the development of Hunslet during the eighteenth century was the phenomenal growth in its population. In 1650 there had been around 200 families in the out-township, but in just over a century it had quadrupled to 800 (perhaps 4,000 inhabitants). By the time of the census in 1801 its population had reached 5,799 and exceeded that of several regional market towns including Dewsbury, Pontefract, Wetherby and Barnsley.<sup>62</sup> Hunslet approached in size Wakefield, Huddersfield or Halifax, and had become a magnet for those seeking employment.



Above: The Coloured Cloth Hall designed by John Moxon opened on 22 August 1758 provided a ready market for cloth produced in Hunslet. Today it is the site of City Square. One of the fifteen trustees in charge of building this magnificent structure came from Hunslet.

## ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

### THE WOOLLEN INDUSTRY

This growth had to a large extent depended on the success of the woollen cloth industry. Hunslet was originally a purely agricultural community but, as we have seen, when Leeds became a key market for the sale of woollen cloth, it was natural for agricultural labourers to take up spinning, weaving and other cloth making activities, as a form of additional employment. Leeds became 'the busiest cloth making centre in the county'.<sup>63</sup> During the eighteenth century the West Riding's output of woollen cloth grew eight-fold, while its share of national output rose from under 20% to around 60%. Leeds was at the very heart of a local industry experiencing phenomenal growth. By the 1770s local merchants handled approximately one-third of all woollen cloth exported from England, which in a good year amounted to £1,500,000 per annum.

Leeds became the sun around which Hunslet orbited, its clothiers selling their cloth to merchants every Tuesday and Saturday in the street markets and cloth halls, and its farmers selling their produce in its corn, livestock and fruit and vegetable markets. It was also the place where people obtained their essential supplies, including the raw wool from the wool staplers of the town. Hunslet, along with Churwell, Morley, Batley, Dewsbury, Guiseley and Baildon, specialised in producing coloured or mixed broad cloth – cloth made from wool that had already been dyed. In 1758 Hunslet clothiers, along with others in the out-townships and outlying villages involved in the domestic system, jointly financed the building of the Coloured Cloth Hall, where a large proportion of the locally produced cloth was sold. Hunslet clothiers helped to run it and appointed one of the fifteen trustees, a role they were to fulfil into the 1830s.<sup>64</sup>



Above: Interior of the Coloured Cloth Hall in 1814 from a watercolour painting by George Walker (1781-1856).



In the period 1700 to 1790 the majority of master clothiers making broad cloths in Hunslet were men of relatively small capital. They would probably own their own premises, a few cottages, a close or two of land, and were independent craftsmen who enjoyed a good standard of living. They were not averse to embracing new technology, particularly if it helped them boost their output. The flying shuttle, which was patented by John Kay (1704–1779) in 1733, was one of the key developments in the industrialisation of weaving. It allowed a single weaver to weave much wider fabrics than the previous hand process. Where a broad-cloth loom previously required a weaver on each side, it could now be worked by a single operator, and so halved the workforce. Until this point, the textile industry had required four spinners to service one weaver. Kay's innovation, in wide use by the 1750s, greatly increased this disparity and led to shortages of spun yarn. Salvation came in the form of James Hargreaves' hand operated spinning jenny, invented around 1764, which was a multi-spindle spinning frame which permitted one spinner to spin at least eight threads of yarn at one time. It was cheap enough for a clothier to afford and small enough to fit in his cottage.

As production rose, so did the demand to have the cloth full in a timely manner. There had been two fulling mills attached to the ancient corn grinding mill at Hunslet since at least 1542, but by 1700 demand had risen so sharply that additional facilities had been built at Thwaite Mills and Low (Knotrop) Mills, further down river in Rothwell.<sup>65</sup> Increased cloth production led many Hunslet clothiers to use the nearby moor on which they planted wool-hedges (on which dyed wool was left to dry) and constructed tenter frames (on which the cloth was stretched to the correct size). Most had no legal right to do so and this brought them into conflict with the lords of the manor.<sup>66</sup>

Demand for cloth was rising so rapidly that 'pinch-points' in production emerged. It became increasingly profitable to mechanise the tedious preparatory processes by employing new textile machinery. Initially machines that carded the wool after it had been washed were used in a clothier's own premises,

powered by hand or horse.

Employment of these machines proved inadequate to keep up with demand and scribbling mills were constructed to house larger, more efficient machines that could process the wool at a speed unimaginable a generation before. Public scribbling mills, often powered by the latest steam engines, were a great aid to the domestic clothiers, and were very soon accepted and appreciated. It gave them access to expensive equipment which enabled them to work more efficiently. There were also slubbing billies to twist and draw out the yarn into a long soft rope with a slight twist in it, ready for spinning. Rovings could then be used for a weft or be spun by hand-powered jennies for warp thread. In addition, there was the willey which beat the raw wool in order to remove dirt and straw. In 1786 Hunslet witnessed the introduction of one of the first steam-powered scribbling machines in the country. A local pioneer of this new technology was Burrow Copley, a cloth maker of Hunslet, who owned several of the new scribbling machines. He was naturally keen to promote these changes but these machines proved extremely unpopular with the workers who had previously undertaken this laborious task by hand. On 13 June 1786 a petition appeared in the *Leeds Mercury* which claimed that their introduction had put thousands out of work.<sup>67</sup> Copley wrote a response to this petition suggesting that it greatly exaggerated the situation. He asserted that 'out of 170 machines perhaps 120 or 130 are very small, and the small ones will not do more work than four men' rather than the estimated average of twenty which the petition claimed. He did not dispute the fact that this had led to some unemployment, nor did he deny that the new machines were run night and day, but argued that 'I know very well, in a dry season like this, there are some machines that cannot work more than four hours in twenty-four and very few more than half their time, if they are drove by water'. He felt that improvements like the spinning wheel and fly shuttle had increased the rate of production and that it was beneficial to all if other stages of production were speeded up, noting that 'a water-woolley will clean and mix as much wool in one hour as four men could formerly do in a whole day'.

Although Copley had written anonymously to the paper he was soon unmasked and admonished for his views. A correspondent argued that Copley's view was shared by only about nine of the 1,700 clothiers who attended the cloth halls of Leeds. Copley took out an insurance policy with the Phoenix, listing his mill as being worth £200 plus an identical sum for the steam engine. By 1788 his scribbling mill was rated at £20 - a huge amount of money.<sup>68</sup> Business boomed and three years later his son, William, paid £28 rates for this mill and a further £24 for similar premises located across Low Road that he rented from the Couplands.<sup>69</sup>

Meanwhile, the Garnetts based at Hunslet Mill, continued to rely on water power but added a scribbling mill to their corn grinding and fulling facilities. Clothiers from as far away as Morley travelled to use these facilities. There was also a smaller mill on Balm Beck which in 1791 was assessed at £30. Two years later it was advertised for sale with 'five machines and billy worked by a fire engine and two billeys, scribbler and carder worked by water power'.<sup>70</sup> This scribbling, carding and slubbing mill was insured by the tenants, Hinchcliffe, Rainforth and Hodgson, for £500, and was housed under the same roof as Hodgson's forge.<sup>71</sup>



Above: A section of Charles Fowler's plan of 1844 showing Hunslet Mills. (Thoresby Society)