

Chapter 21: Edward Borrows, Locomotive and Steam Crane Builder

From the front of the house where I was born, at 64 Edgeworth Street, and through the gap, adjacent to both Haddock's house and Davie's milk business was the Show Field. Directly in front of this was the Phoenix Brewery, founded by Jane Barrow and later owned by Charles Wilcox and Son. They produced Harvest Ale at all prices.

Next to the brewery was the home and enclosed grounds of the Borrows family. It lay between the brewery and Fisher Street. It was walled in on all sides and was extensive enough in area to provide space for Edward Borrows to establish his own Locomotive Engineering Works, which he called the Providence Foundry.

Edward Borrows was born in Parr of humble parents in the year 1823. He must have shown an ability in engineering early on, so he was apprenticed to a Liverpool engineering firm, called Mellings. When he was approximately 44 years old, he became acquainted with John Smith, a building contractor, and a big name around those parts involved in the early days of locomotive and railway building

John Smith was also the benefactor responsible for the creation of the old St. Anne's church, now demolished due to subsidence, and the land surrounding it, on which the schools were built. John Smith lived in the old building called St. Anne's Villa, which was situated to the rear of where I now live. The building has since been taken down to make way for St. Anne's Junior School.

Several branches of the Smith family resided in Sutton, and I remember one of the old people saying that John Smith had only to lift and open his windows at his villa for £1 notes to come floating in. John Smith was looked upon as being successful, wealthy, and mainly responsible for putting the Roman Catholic Church of Sutton on a firm basis.

In 1871, Edward Borrows was 49 years old, and was Chief Superintendent of the St. Helens Canal and Railway Co., later to become the St. Helens and Runcorn Gap Railway, which in turn was acquired by the London and North Western Railway in 1864.

The engineer for the St. Helens railway was a James Cross, who formed his own company and built the first two locomotives for use in the railway sidings around Sutton. They were named the "Ant" and the "Bee". The last named did a period of seventy years shunting work around the local sidings.

Edward Borrows, however, took over the firm of J. Cross & Co. He had a workforce of 26 men and 7 boys and his three sons, Thomas (aged 25), Edward (aged 23) and William (aged 20), making a total workforce of 37, including himself. One of these workmen was a moulder, so moulding must have taken place in the grounds of his house.

Two years later, in 1873, he produced his first locomotive, and was also reputed to have invented and built the first steam crane. One of these was in full use at Bold Colliery when I worked there in the 1920s. Having become the leading locomotive builder

around this area, he decided he wanted a new location close to the St. Helens railway, so he moved to Station Road. This enabled him to have railway sidings inside these new premises, and to run west to the St. Helens Junction to Shaw Street Railway. He also called this works the "Providence Foundry".

After years of striving to perfect his business, Edward Borrows died at the age of 58 in 1881. He was succeeded in the business by his son William Borrows, who carried on the business until 1900 at the age of 50 years.

Augustine Borrows succeeded William and formed a joint partnership with H. W. Johnson & Co., a name I was familiar with when I was young. I knew it as "Johnsons", and later "Allan Bartons".

Around about 40 or 50 locomotives of the Borrows type were built, in addition to the Borrow Steam Cane. The last two were supplied in 1921 to Pilkington Brothers. They were the Kelvin and Patience. Patience because of the lengthy period it took to produce them. I also had the privilege of seeing some of the old wooden patterns used for moulding shown to me by Richard Dean, known in Sutton as Dick Dean,. He was the Chief Foreman for Silk Worms and later British Sidac Cellophane Manufacturers at the site of the old glassworks at Lancots Lane. I should imagine he was the last link in the production of the old Borrows type of locomotive at Sutton.

The Borrows house had its frontage in Peckershill Road, opposite the Prince of Wales public house. Although the four boundary walls remain, the house itself has been demolished, as was the old Phoenix Brewery some years previously. Phoenix House still stands. It was occupied by Dr. Campbell. A great many years he resided there, and held his surgery there. Later, Mr. A. Thomas took the house over and lived there. At the entrance to the old St. Anne's churchyard lies the vault belonging to the Borrows family, where all members of the family lie interred.