

Samuel Fox of Bradwell: the bicentenary

In his book *Methodism in Bradwell* Seth Evans tells us that ‘in the bosom of a soldier slain at the battle of Waterloo in 1815 there was found a bible, in which was written “A present from Bradwell Sunday”’. Just one day before the soldier lost his life a baby was born in a cottage on Water Lane, Bradwell. Just opposite where St Barnabas would be built 50 years later (the cottage carries a sign commemorating the birth). The baby was Samuel Fox the son of William who was a maker of shuttles for weavers. By 1841 he was apprenticed to Samuel Cocker & Son, wire drawers of Hathersage. Around 1845 Fox moved to Stocksbridge where he developed a small existing factory into a major wire drawing business. Fellow apprentice at Hathersage, Joseph Hayward (from the now drowned village of Derwent), was one of his first employees, acting as a draughtsman. Fox’s appreciation of the loyal Joseph Hayward is shown in an old story. One day a worker found Hayward sitting with his head in his hands; the man hurried to tell the boss that Hayward was sleeping on the job. Fox told the informant to mind his own business with the words, “Thee go and mind thy work, he’s worth more to me asleep than thou art wakken”. Fox’s faith in Haywood was amply repaid when Joseph developed a revolutionary process for producing the collapsible umbrella patented under the name Paragon in 1852. With its trademark of a running fox the Paragon was famous throughout the world. Profits from umbrella sales enabled Samuel Fox to concentrate on other products, especially crinoline wire. Crinoline dresses were the height of fashion and their enormous wide skirts depended on a strong, light frame. Fox’s profits from crinoline wire alone reached £80,000 (about £3.5m in current money). Until his death in 1887 Sammy Fox remained a benefactor of Bradwell, finding jobs at Stocksbridge for a number of Bradwellians and making anonymous donations supporting the poor of the village. The source of these donations remained unknown in the village until a few years before his death. Bradwell enjoyed another Fox benefaction when his niece Mrs Fanny Jeffery donated a peal of eight bells and carillon, chimes to the clock and an electrical ringing apparatus. She even met the cost of strengthening the church tower required to support the bells. In 2020 well after the bicentenary of his birth Sammy Fox’s steelworks remain in production. In 2011 £6.5 million was invested in boosting the site's ability to produce aerospace steel.