

## Raleigh Street Lace Factories by Graham Woodward



This article is about lace factories. A lot has been written about Nottingham lace and I do not intend to repeat that material. Instead, this article looks at a collection of lace factories on a 17 acre (6.8ha) site in the Hyson Green & Arboretum Ward of Nottingham, centred around Raleigh Street, Newdigate Street, Russell Street and Gamble Street off the northeast side of Alfreton Road. The area has fourteen former lace factories of various sizes, built between 1850 and 1900 and the aim here is to record the heritage of these important buildings. Raleigh Street is perhaps best known as the location where the Raleigh Cycle Company first began, although many people are unsure whether the company was named after the street or vice versa (the street came first). Before we look at the individual factories it is worth covering briefly how the lace industry developed to a point where they were necessary.

The invention of the Stocking Frame by William Lee in 1589 mechanised hosiery production, but lace was still produced by hand as it was a very complex process. In 1764, point net was produced on a modified stocking frame, but it was not until John Heathcote invented his bobbin-net machine in 1809, nicknamed 'Old Loughborough' after the town where he worked, that mechanised lace production became commercially viable. The machine was still powered by the operator's hands and feet but could produce one-thousand meshes a minute compared to six a minute by a skilled hand-lace maker. However, it was too big to be placed in a domestic setting and factories were needed instead.

In 1813 John Leavers in Nottingham developed a twist net machine that, with many modifications, remained in use until the 1960s. It was still worked by hand and could only produce plain net, but in 1841 Hooton Deverill successfully added a Jacquard to control the threads, enabling the production of sophisticated patterns of decorative lace.

The next significant development was the change to rotary motion, and the addition of steam power. By the late 1840s, steam power had been applied successfully to hosiery production, but it was not until the late 1850s that most lace making machines were powered by steam. The average Leavers machine was now three metres long, weighed more than seventeen tons and had 40,000 moving parts. Larger factories were needed to house these beasts, with some, like The Boulevard Works in Radford, housing 234 standings.

The effect of these changes on lace workers was enormous. Instead of working from home they now worked in large, noisy and dangerous factories. In 1914 Birkin's factory in New Basford employed over 1,500 workers and it has been calculated that in 1907 there were over 35,000 men and women in Nottingham employed in the lace and hosiery factories.

Information about many lace factories is scattered and sketchy. The names of the architects are rarely recorded, even where the factories are listed buildings. Wright's Trade Directories show details of the tenants, street by street, factory by factory, but it is hard to picture the places mentioned. Sheila A. Mason's excellent book, *Nottingham Lace 1760s-1950s* has a wealth of detail including the owners and the number of tenants by year, but few pictures. This article tries to fill that gap by linking this information to pictures of the factories.

The map below shows the major lace factories that are either still standing or were key sites that have now been redeveloped. Dates in brackets are when a factory was built. There were a few other factories in the area, but this guide concentrates on those that produced lace, hosiery or lace making machines.



1. Ayr Street Works (early 1880s), Hemsley's lace embroidery works.
2. Woodroffe's Lace Factory (1876), later Butler's Lace Factory (demolished).
3. Clarke's Factory (1870), Forest Road Mill and J.B. Spray's Factory, tenement lace factory, later Raleigh Cycles (Grade II listed).
4. Albert Mill (1893), tenement lace factory.
5. Willoughby's Factory (c.1875), lace factory, now Bertrand Russell House.
6. Victoria Lace Mill (c.1880), Adcock's tenement lace factory (demolished).
7. Thoroton Street Works (1876), tenement lace factory (demolished).
8. Russell Street Mills (c.1876), tenement lace factory, now Ristes' Garage.
9. Elsey's Factory (1864), later Barnes' Factory and then Russell Street Works, tenement lace factory.
10. Provident Works (1860?), tenement lace factory (Grade II listed).
11. Burton's Factory (c.1850), later Provident Works, tenement lace factory, (demolished).
12. Foster's Factory (1881), later West's Factory and Bagley's Factory, tenement lace factory.
13. Gamble's Factory (c.1854) and Raleigh Street Works, lace machine and tenement lace factory – incorporates the original Raleigh Cycles site.
14. Raleigh Works (c.1872), John Jardine's lace machine factory (demolished).
15. J & J. Kirk's Factory (1872), then Robinson & Barnsdale and Thomas Hill's Newdigate Works, tenement lace factory (Grade II listed).
16. Portland Works (1870), lace machines, bobbins & carriages and tenement lace factory.

The text below is arranged in the same order as the numbers on the map.

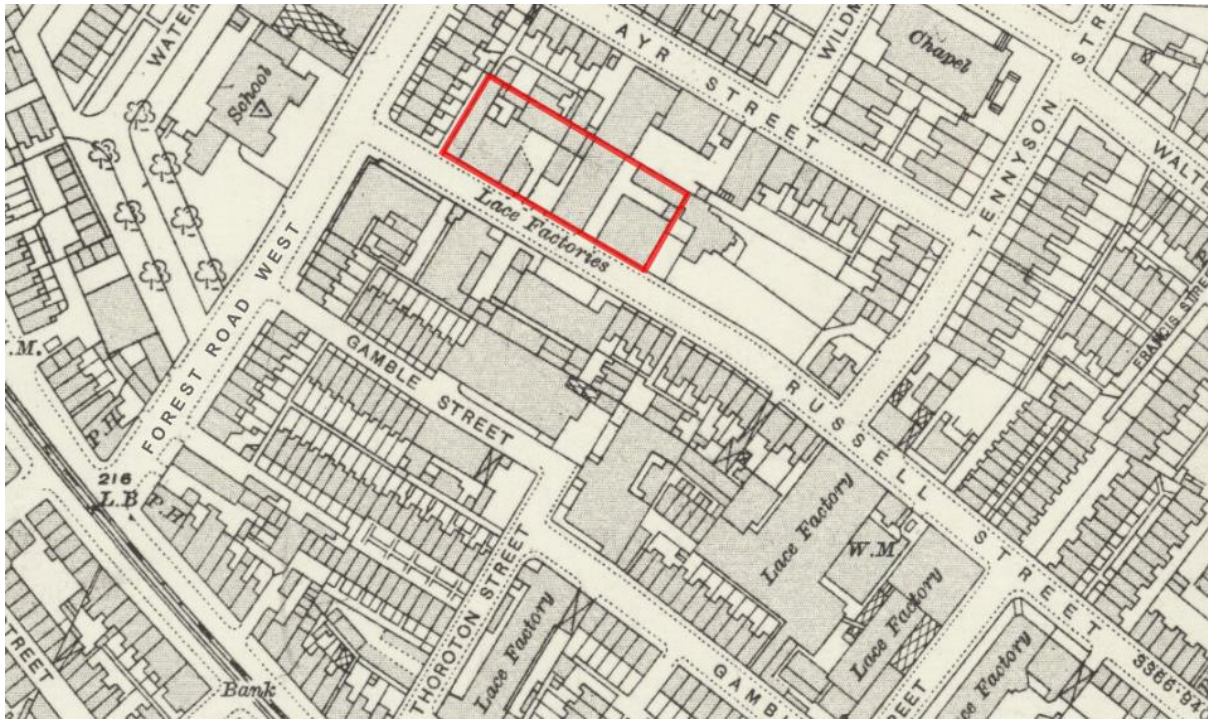




1. The Ayr Street Works was owned by Hemsley & Co Ltd, and was built sometime in the early 1880s - it is shown on an 1885 City Map. It was a lace embroidery works and was the only large factory on the southwest side of the road; no other lace factories were built in the street. Hemsley & Co were still in occupation in 1915. It is now industrial units.





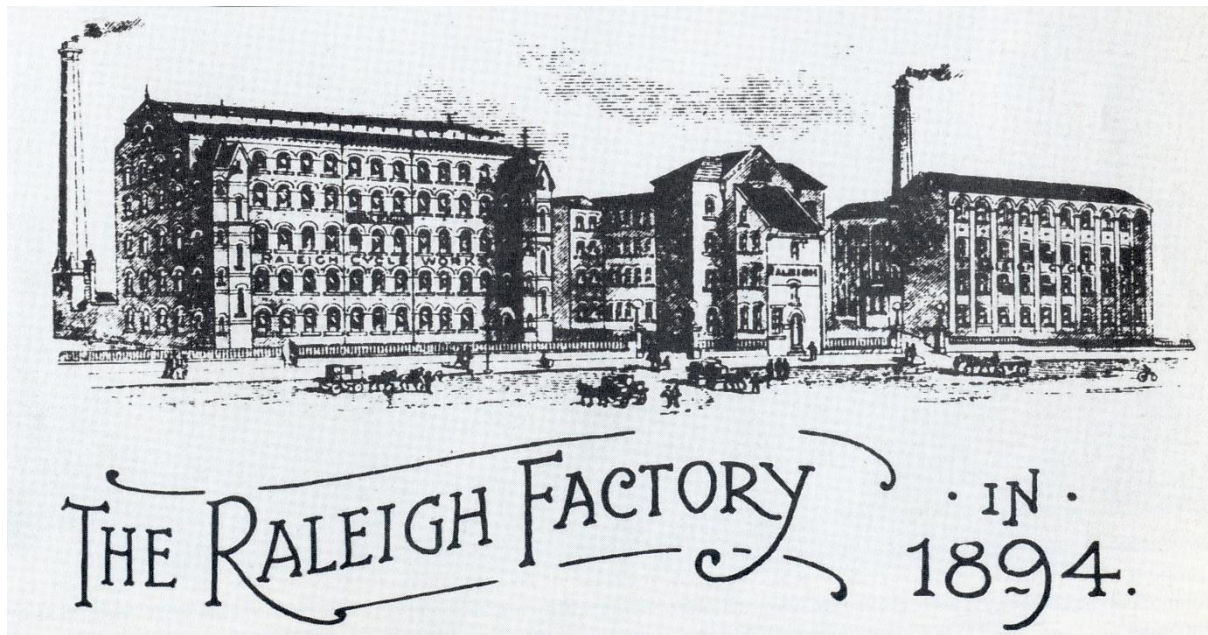


2. Solomon Woodroffe's factory stood on the northeast side of Russell Street near the junction with Forest Road West. The site is shown edged red on the extract of the 1915 OS Map shown above. The factory was built about 1876 and had access from Ayr Street. Woodroffe was originally a partner in the firm J. & S. Woodroffe Ltd based in Little Hampton Street. By 1876 he was on Russell Street, a lace maker and lived at Southey Street off Forest Road. In 1885 Samuel Butler & Co. Ltd, lace and curtain makers, acquired the factory.

In 1892, part of the site was occupied by Raleigh Cycles, and by 1905 it was used by the Albert Laundry, worked by Meredith & Gamble. I could not find any pictures of these old buildings, which have all been demolished and replaced by the apartment block, Russell View, shown below.







3. Clarke's Factory on Russell Street was built in two phases: the northwest section near Forest Road West (above, right) was built in 1854 and the southeast part (above, left) was built in 1887. The Forest Road West section was owned and occupied by William Clarke Snr, a lace trimming manufacturer who, in 1862, also had a site on Plumptre Street in the Lace Market. Part of the factory was rented to four tenant lace makers and one pattern reader/card puncher company. It has now been demolished and replaced by flats.

The southeast section, shown below, was owned by J.A. Clarke & Co, trimming manufacturers, but in 1891 was occupied by Raleigh Cycles Ltd, as Frank Bowden expanded production at his newly acquired Raleigh Cycle Company. Raleigh moved to Lenton in 1896 and for a while the building became Pegg's hosiery factory, before being occupied in 1910 by J.B. Spray & Co. who made shirts and women's blouses. Lace was also produced at the factory until 1915 when a bedding manufacturer moved in. Production ended at the site in 1925. Spray's nameplate was still on the factory when this photo was taken in 2010 although they had long since vacated the building.







(Above) In 2010 Clarke's Factory was occupied by a commune but has now been converted into flats and has a new name, Trivelles Regency. This photo was taken from the site on the northeast side of Russell Street where Woodroffe's Factory (2) stood, but which has now been demolished and replaced by the Russell View flats.

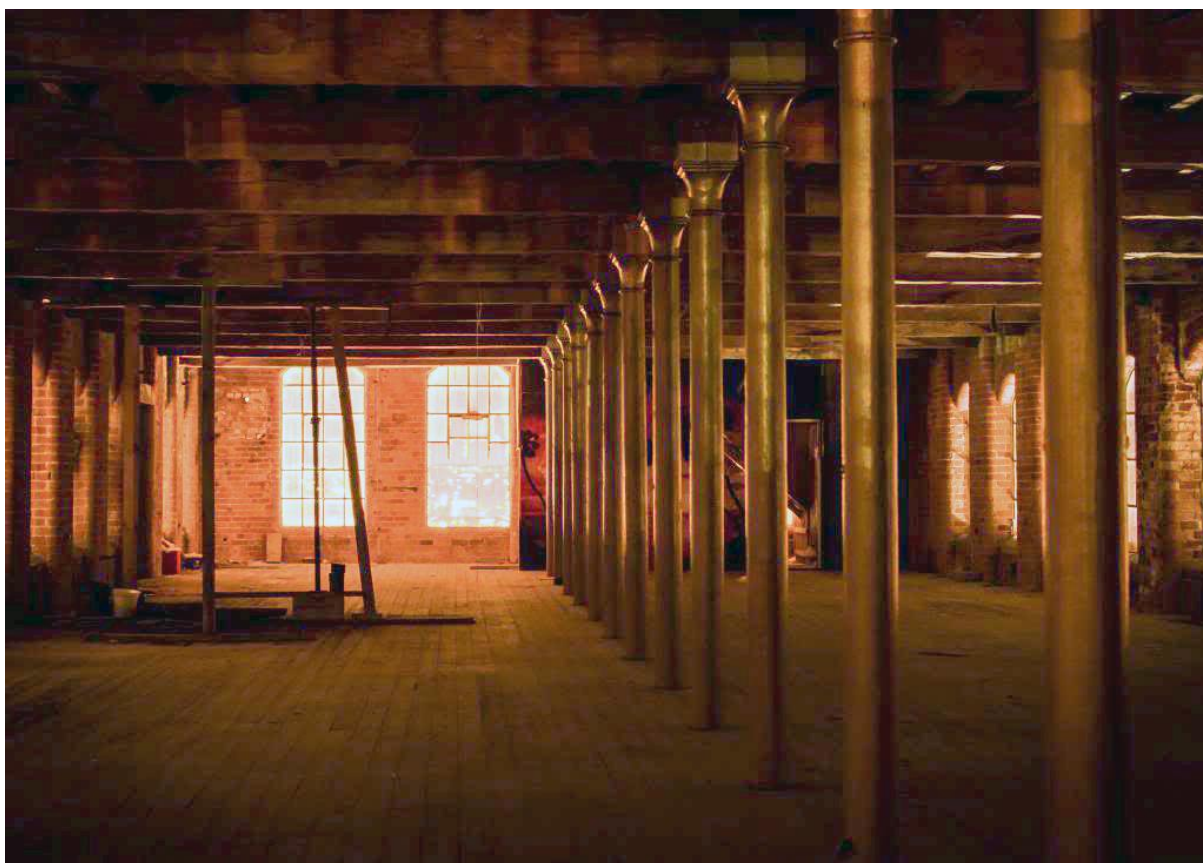
(Below) Clarke's factory as it looks now (2020). It is a Grade II listed building. The Albert Mill (4) on Gamble Street can be seen in the background.







(Above & below) The inside of J.B. Spray's lace factory on Russell Street before it was converted into flats.







4. The Albert Mill on Gamble Street was built in 1893 and backs onto Clarke's Factory (3) in Russell Street. It was originally owned by John Woodhouse Bagley, a lace maker, but was mainly occupied as a tenement lace factory. In 1894 it housed five tenant lace makers, with two of them still in situ by 1904 along with four other tenants and a company called Miller & Paget, brass finishers.

The building was used for lace making as late as 1922, but by 1932 it was occupied by a bobbin and carriage repair company and four non-lace production companies. It has now been converted into flats and renamed the Royal Albert Mill.



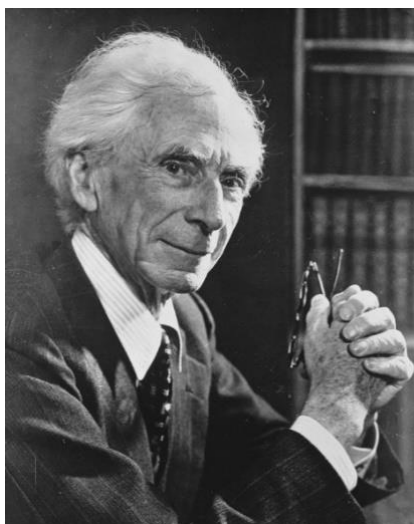




5. Willoughby's Factory, on the southwest side of Gamble Street, was built about 1876 by Charles Willoughby, a lace maker. The top-shop windows at second floor level are the most obvious sign of the building's original use. By 1895 it was in the hands of W. & J. Moore, bobbin and carriage manufacturers who were also bicycle 'machinists'.

By 1915, the factory belonged to John Moore & Co, bobbin and carriage manufacturers, but bicycle production had ended. This was probably because by that time Raleigh Cycles had become the country's largest cycle producer, killing-off at least fifteen smaller local bike manufacturers along the way.

The factory soon proved to be too small for serious lace production and could not compete against the larger factories in the area.



After production ended, the building was occupied by W.H. Morley & Co, book-binders and printers and then, much later, by a publisher, Spokesman Books. The building is now named Bertrand Russell House.

Bertrand Russell (left) (1872-1970) was a philosopher, historian, political activist and Nobel laureate. Spokesman Books' website states that they are '*the publishing imprint of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation*', hence the name of the building. They publish books on politics, disarmament, history and philosophy.

Spokesman Books are no longer at this site, which is now flats, but are currently located at Colwick.





6. The Victoria Lace Mill was on the northeast side of Gamble Street, opposite Thoroton Street. In the photograph above the mill is on the right behind the Austin Cambridge car.

Victoria Mill was built in 1880 and owned by James Wright Adcock, a lace maker. In 1894 part of the factory was occupied by two bicycle manufacturers, Litchfield & Co and W. Soars & Co. The Victoria Lace Company used part of the building from 1894, and the rest was let out as a tenement lace factory. Lace production ended in the 1950s and in 2000 the building was demolished and replaced by the Royal Victoria Court apartment block shown below.







7. The Thoroton Street Works on the corner of Gamble Street and Thoroton Street was built in 1871 for John Hardy, a machine holder from Peveril Street, Radford. It was used for lace making for 50 years. The original factory ran almost the whole length of the southeast side of the street down towards Alfreton Road. Between 1876 and 1904 it had seven tenant lace makers including the Maximum Knitted Underwear Company!

Lace was still being produced here in 1915 along with Jacquard cards and hosiery. The section along Thoroton Street was demolished about 1922 and became J.T. Ball's builder's yard. The part fronting Gamble Street, (below) was kept, and is now the Bentinck Art Studio.







8. The Russell Street Mills cover an area of over 3500sq.m. between Russell Street and Gamble Street; the two pictures shown here are of the Russell Street entrance. The complex was built about 1876 by the Nottingham Manufacturing Company, the successor company to Hine & Mundella Ltd.



Hine & Mundella Ltd had a large factory on Station Street, Nottingham, built in 1851. It was the first steam-operated hosiery factory in Nottingham. A.J. Mundella was a Chartist and a Liberal MP who believed in worker's rights. The new Station Street factory had many features that improved the working conditions of the employees, including wide and spacious workrooms lit by large gas lights instead of candles. The factory burnt down in 1859 and in 1860 its replacement was designed by the architect TC Hine, a member of the Hine hosiery family and whose grandfather, Thomas Chambers, was once a member of the firm Chambers, Wilson & Morley that later became I & R Morley & Co.



In 1876 the Nottingham Manufacturing Company occupied the Russell Street Mills with four other lace makers, and the interior adopted the same standards as at Station Street. Lace was produced on the site until 1895, accompanied by other related trades: a point, spring and needle manufacturer (E. Castledine & Co); a Jacquard card puncher (Benjamin Toone); machine holders (John Butler and H. Russell) and a surgical hosiery manufacturer (Glover & Sons). In 1891 the Raleigh Cycle Company rented space in the factory.

Just before World War One, Nottingham Manufacturing Company closed its Nottingham operation and concentrated production at its Loughborough factory where it continued production until the 1960s. Their factory on Station Street, Nottingham, now the site of Loxley House, became Boots the Chemists' main factory and head offices. The Loughborough factory was later taken over by the Djanogly Bros of Mansfield Hosiery Mills who supplied Marks and Spencer and did not close until 1996.



Russell Street Mill is now the home of Ristes Motor Company Limited, a Bentley and Rolls Royce specialists.







Ristes' original garage (above) was on Forest Road East next to the old post office at Mount Hooton. The firm was set up in 1945 in what they describe as, '*a small garage in Nottingham*'. The photographs shown here were taken in 1981. Below is a fine example of a rare 1931 Bentley 4.0 litre 2-seater Tourer waiting outside the garage for a service.







9. Elsey's Factory on Russell Street, built in 1864, belonged to Edward Elsey, the owner of the largest number of curtain lace machines in Nottingham. He began in partnership with Benjamin Walker in Beeston before building this factory in Radford. By 1877 he employed over ninety men at the site but in 1904 the company went into liquidation and the factory was taken over by Frederick W. Barnes, a lace curtain maker who also had machines at the Anglo-Scotian Mill at Beeston. The factory was later called the Russell Street Works. Frederick Barnes continued production until 1941, letting parts out to tenant lace makers and one hairnet maker. The building is now a block of flats. Historic England include this factory as part of the Grade II listing for the adjoining Provident Works, calling it a "*later extension*".





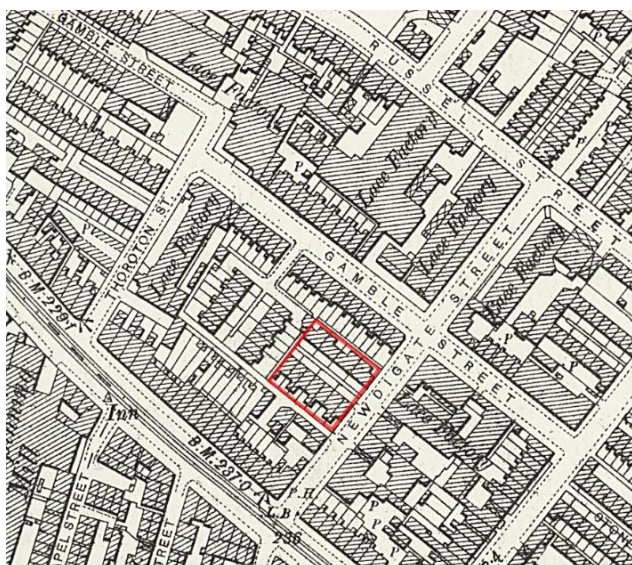


10. The Provident Works on Newdigate Street is a Grade II listed building but was not built in 1860 as the listing data states. It does not appear in any directory before 1895. The one mentioned in the directories from 1858-85 was an earlier factory of the same name(11) first mentioned in the 1876 Post Office Directory, but it was on the south side of Gamble Street, near Alfreton Road and was demolished in 1895. During WW2, the new works produced camouflage netting and in 1999 it was converted into nine offices. In 2018 it was converted into 56 studio flats.





11. Burton's Lace Factory stood on the northwest side of Newdigate Street, opposite Foster's Factory (12). It is now the site of Newdigate Villas, shown on the map below.



The original works was one of the earliest lace-making factories in the area and in 1862 was owned by Jonathan Burton who lived on Arboretum Street. By 1876 it was called The Provident Works and was extended in 1877. It was occupied by seven tenant lace makers.

In 1881 it was occupied by eight lace makers, but production at the site had ended by 1894. It was demolished and replaced by Newdigate Villas shown below. The houses survive today as two rows of three-storey villa-style houses with brick-built bay windows at ground floor level and through-gable dormers.







12. Foster's Factory on the southeast side of Newdigate Street was built in 1881 for the lace machine manufacturer, John Foster, although he is shown in a directory as being on Newdigate Street as early as 1862. In 1885 he shared the factory with two lace making firms, W. West & Son, who remained in occupation until 1904, and G.W. Bagley.

By 1904 it was called West's Factory and was owned by Thomas and James West, machine holders. Arthur Foster was a tenant, a machine holder, along with four other tenants, including G.W. Bagley. By 1915 it was used by a Swiss embroiderer, a pinafore maker and a steel bar manufacturer and by 1932 it was known as Bagley's Factory. The photo below, taken in the 1980s, shows the factory, behind the lorry, very much as it appears today. The building in the foreground, The Sherwood Press, has been demolished, leaving only the walls at ground floor level to form a secure car park for the flats in Gamble's Factory (13).







The original part of Foster's factory on the far right in the picture above has ten bays with large segmental arched, thirty pane windows at ground, first and second floor level and pointed attic-dormers in the roof. The four bays to the left of the main building (next to the silver car) are a later addition, built in about 1899 in a similar style but with slightly different arched windows and gables linked together by short brick arches (below).

The two factory parts each had carriage entrances into a yard at the back. The entrances have now been sealed, but the steel lintels are still in place. By the start of World War Two, the building was empty. The two bays on the left in the picture above are part of Gamble's factory (13).







13. Gamble's Factory on the corner of Gamble Street and Newdigate Street was originally a lace machine factory, but it later became intrinsically linked with the Raleigh Cycle Company.

John Gamble started his company about 1839, and soon became famous for his bobbins and carriages. He began in Duke Street, New Basford, but in 1858 he and William Gamble moved to Raleigh Street to form Gamble, Osborne & Co, with John and Joseph Osborne. By 1862 the site was called the Raleigh Works. Later, there was another factory of that name further down the road (14) that belonged to John Jardine Ltd, but the Raleigh Works mentioned in the 1862 directory was next door to number 13 Raleigh Street, close to Alfreton Road, whereas Jardine's factory was on the north side of Gamble Street.

By 1862 the Newdigate Street end of Gamble's factory was rented to six tenants, all involved in the lace industry and by 1885 there were twelve tenants in the factory, a number that remained fairly constant until the 1930s. John retired or died before 1885, as the factory was then run by Richard B. Gamble, still a bobbin and carriage works. Part of the works was used by Richard J. Ball, a bicycle maker.

In 1885, demand for lace fell dramatically and sales of lace machines declined. To bring in some income, Richard Gamble turned to bicycle production, making parts for Richard Woodhead and Paul Angois who set up a bicycle company at 13-15 Raleigh Street with their financial backer, William Ellis. They all had roots in the lace industry. They first advertised their Raleigh Safety bike in 1887. William Ellis also rented premises on Russell Street before Frank Bowden bought-out his shares in 1888 and took control. Ellis then started the Robin Hood Cycle Company at 71 Parliament Street, Nottingham, later (1905) acquired by Raleigh.

The slump in lace demand was over by 1890 and Gamble occupied two wings of the main factory, again making lace machinery. By 1891 Raleigh Cycles had moved to Clarke's Factory (3) on Russell Street with Frank Bowden as managing director, Paul Angois as head of product design and Richard Woodhead as factory manager. Gamble's factory was now owned by H & T Gamble Ltd and by 1910 the Raleigh Street site was now called Gamble's Factory. Lace-making tenants were still in occupation at the Newdigate Street end and part of the factory was also occupied by the Central Plating and Enamelling Company, electro-platers, later called the City Electro Plating Company.





(Above) These two properties at 13 & 15 Raleigh Street are where Raleigh Cycles were first made in 1886/7. (Below) The arched entranceway between the houses gave access to Gamble's Lace Factory, and the site was once called the Raleigh Works.







The section of Gamble's Factory fronting Newdigate Street (above) was fully occupied for the whole life of the factory. It adjoined Foster's Factory (12) and had a loading bay at third-floor level, but no vehicle access from the road, (the gates are a recent addition). The corner site was occupied by a small factory known as Wilkins' Factory and later as Morley's Factory, which is often listed as a separate factory, although it was almost certainly a part of Gamble's complex. John Wilkins, a textile manufacturer, was a tenant of Gamble in 1876, and Wilkinson & Morley, glove lining manufacturers, were tenants in 1894, which is where the names came from.

By 1915 the factory housed thirteen tenants. These included J.M. Wright & Co, blouse manufacturers, and twelve lace-making firms. By 1928 the factory only had one tenant, a bobbin and carriage repairer and the records show that in the 1930s the building was occupied by seven non-lace tenants.



(Left) The whole complex has now been converted into flats and a new section added on the corner of Gamble Street.

The houses on Raleigh Street, where the original Raleigh Cycle works stood, have been demolished and the site is now part of Raleigh House owned and run by Metropolitan Thames Valley, a London based housing association.

The main site on Gamble Street and Newdigate Street is now called Raleigh Square and includes fully equipped apartments run by PRIM Short Stays.





14. The Raleigh Works on the corner of Gamble Street and Raleigh Street was owned by John Jardine Limited, a lace machine manufacturer. It had no connection with the Raleigh Cycle Company. Jardine came to Nottingham from Hull in 1842, apprenticed to a clock maker, but by 1852 he was a partner in a lace machinery firm in Radford. In 1872 he formed a partnership with William Hooton making Leavers lace machines at the Raleigh Works, but the partnership did not last. Jardine then continued production alone but also had lace factories in Chapel Street and Duke Street, New Basford, and the Wycliffe Mill on High Church Street, Basford. By 1912, the firm's 2,500 workers had built over 3,000 machines.

John's son, Ernest Jardine, set up the Colwick Industrial Estate in 1917 and later became President of the Nottingham Chamber of Commerce. In 1927, now Sir Ernest Jardine, he became chairman of the board at Thomas Adams Ltd on Stoney Street, Nottingham, a position he held until 1930. John Jardine Limited continued to make lace machines until the 1950s, but also made Bar-Lock typewriters and ready mixed concrete machinery. The factory on Raleigh Street has been demolished and replaced by a housing complex (below).







15. J. & J. Kirk's Factory on the corner of Russell Street and Newdigate Street was built in 1872. It is a Grade II listed building. The date is carved underneath the clock in Roman numerals (MDCCCLXXII). Between 1872 and 1884 the factory housed seventeen tenant lace makers. One of the tenants in 1876 was Spowages, bobbin and carriage manufacturers, who later built the Clyde Works on Denison Street, Radford. In 1885 Kirk's factory housed fourteen tenants, all involved in the lace trade.



The building was extended in 1879 and 1894 and judging by the pattern of the brickwork (left) this included the addition of seven bays on Russell Street, bringing the total to ten. It also has seventeen bays on Newdigate Street.

In 1892 the factory was taken over by Robinson & Barnsdale, cigar makers, but by 1910 it had changed hands again, and its name.

By 1910 the factory was known as the Newdigate Factory, occupied by Thomas A. Hill & Co Ltd, a hosiery manufacturer, and R. Thornton & Son, a lace maker. One website states that the Newdigate Factory name belonged to the Provident Works across the road, but the directories do not support that statement. Thomas A. Hill & Co remained in situ beyond 1915 and in the 1970s and 1980s the factory was used as a warehouse by Arthur W. Sowerby (Wholesale) Ltd. It has now been converted into flats and is known as Nottingham Square.



Robinson & Barnsdale, who bought Kirk's factory in 1892, produced a range of quality cigars, branded under the name *Colin Campbell Cigars*. They added advertisement cards to their cigar packs, and today these are highly collectable. Two examples from 1897 are shown below.



Colin Campbell became Field Marshall Sir Colin Campbell and led the Highland Brigade in the Crimean War (1854-56) at the Battle of Alma and the Battle of Balaklava. He was later appointed commander-in-chief in India during the Indian Mutiny and relieved a besieged garrison at Lucknow. In 1858 he was ennobled as Lord Clyde. On retirement in 1862 he was awarded a state pension of £2,000 per year, the equivalent of £118,250 today. At 2d and 3d each, that would have allowed for an awful lot of cigars!





16. The Portland Works on Portland Road was built about 1870 and backed onto a brass and iron foundry on Raleigh Street. Portland Works was owned by Humphrey, Botham & Wyer who made Leavers lace machines and they had their own foundry. Lace was also made at the factory by Gadsby, Pare & Willatt and Bollen & Tidswell. By 1885 the factory housed five tenants, all lace makers. Lace was made there until at least 1915 and Humphreys made lace machines until 1941. The building has now been converted into flats and is called Portland Square. The car park at the front was originally the site of Stoneleigh Terrace.





## Pubs

Several watering holes (pubs) served this heavily populated Industrial area of Nottingham.



(Above) Moog on Gamble Street and Newdigate Street was originally the Albion Inn, a Home Ales pub built about 1870. It is no longer a pub. (Below) The Portland Arms, built before 1881 on Portland Road, closed recently. The landlord in 1894 was John Ellis who may have been related to William Ellis from Raleigh Cycles on Raleigh Street.







(Above) The Sir Walter Raleigh pub on Raleigh Street has now been demolished and replaced by student flats, part of the Portland Square development. (Below) Elegant blocks of flats have now been built in the area, in brick and in a contemporary style. 📖





## Glossary

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| • bobbin               | two circular brass discs riveted together with a space between, into which yarn is wound.                              |
| • bobbin-net/twist-net | lace made on a Heathcote or Leavers machine.   |
| • card punching        | making holes in jacquard cards to control the patterns in the lace.  |
| • carriage             | a steel bar into which a bobbin is held in place by a spring.  |
| • grade II listed      | a building added to the list of historic buildings by Historic England.  |
| • hosiery              | stockings, worn on the feet and legs.  |
| • jacquard             | a machine attached to a lace machine that determines which threads are moved and how far, making patterns in the lace. |
| • lace maker           | someone who makes and sells unfinished lace.   |
| • machine holder       | someone who rents or owns a machine that makes unfinished lace.  |
| • point net            | a hexagonal type of net made on a modified stocking frame.   |
| • standing             | the area of a factory floor where a machine stands.  |
| • tenement factory     | a factory where several tenants rent one or more standings.  |
| • unfinished lace      | lace in its raw state, straight off the machine before it has been bleached, dyed and finished.                        |

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