

The following pieces are from Shropshire author, Keith Pybus.

Bedstone Ripley

In the affairs of men, and women, there come those dramatic turning points; moments when even great empires take the wrong turn and then head towards their inevitable destruction.

The Royal Navy and the tides of history had carried this country to world leadership. Britannia ruled the waves and in her wake followed our traders and the manufacturing might of the Industrial Revolution.

From the destruction of the Armada via Trafalgar to 1850, for almost 300 years the Navy had been unbeatable. Yet one morning the Admiralty woke up and all our certainties, all our expertise, all our pragmatism at building the mighty Wooden Walls were threatened by the winds of change. Brunel was building ships of iron. Steam was beginning to replace sail in merchant ships. The British Broadside and our men who could out-gun any fighting ships in the world might be made obsolete by the turret gun.

The memorial to the 18 year old Alfred Ripley in Bedstone church, lost aboard HMS Captain, an experimental ship, belongs to this moment in our history. Alfred was the sixth son of the Yorkshire wool dyer and politician Sir Henry William Ripley and his wife Susan.

The ship had been designed with remarkably little freeboard of 8 feet. When the ship was completed, additional, unplanned, weight forced her to float still lower in the water. The freeboard was half that of comparable ships. It was a risk the designer and builders could not afford to take but they did. The conditions off Cape Finisterre, when a south west gale blew up, with stronger squalls, would fatally expose that weakness. The current was also running against the storm - a most dangerous sea condition. Other ships reported waves in excess of 24 feet high.

At midnight a squall struck the ship's port side, she lurched heavily to starboard and she did not right herself. Fears about her stability were justified. From the time the ship was struck, to her going down, only five to ten minutes elapsed. She settled on the ocean bed, one mile down.

The loss of a child is at all times and ages tragic. Imagine how many times worse the situation would be if he had joined the vessel in question due to your influence. Alfred's father, Henry William Ripley, was one of the most prominent businessmen in Bradford. When the PM came to lay the foundation stone of the new Bradford Wool Exchange, Ripley had entertained Lord Palmerston for three days in his home.

There is no end to the agony. His mother had gone down to Portsmouth, a few days earlier to greet the return of ship and her son, a midshipman. It is said she intended to persuade him to quit the Navy. It was there she learned of the loss of the vessel and the death of her son.

There is no grave, no headstone, no body. The young man who drowned had joined the fatal vessel four days before it foundered. The Royal Navy placed a buoy to mark the exact location where *HMS*

Captain sank. For many years, Her Majesty's ships, when passing through the area would fire their guns in salute in honour of the victims of Coles's ship, whilst in 1874 the English Channel Fleet gathered in the area to pay their respects.

HMS *Captain* was one of the Navy's greatest peacetime losses of a crew of over 500 only 18 survived. She was lost because an attempt was made to combine too many radical solutions in one vessel. The designer was an arrogant man who brooked no advice from others. No one emerged with credit.

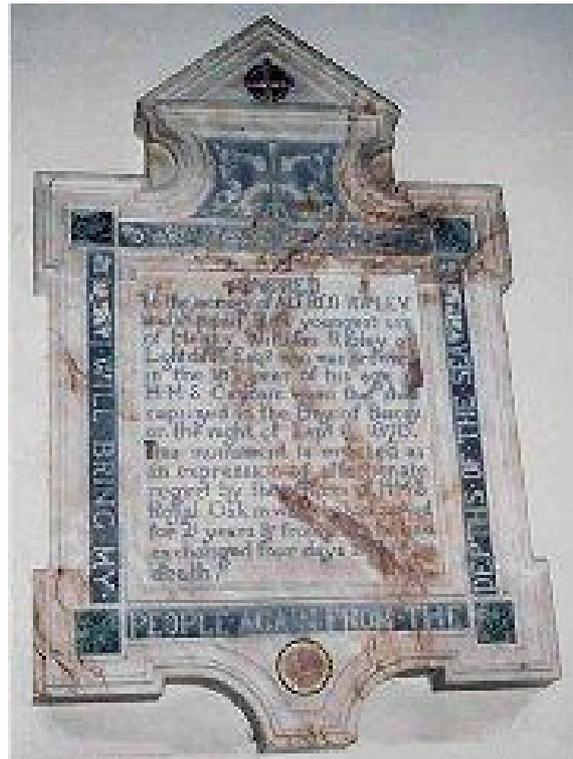
The Royal Navy did not repeat the mistake. Alternative experimental ships led directly to the new battleships – the dreadnoughts.



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Bedstone St Mary

"Alfred Ripley, midshipman R.N who was drowned in the 18th year of his age in H.M.S. Captain when that ship capsized in the Bay of Biscay on the night of Sepr. 6 1870. This monument is erected as an expression of affectionate regret by the officers of H.M.S. Royal Oak in which he had served for 2½ years & from which he had exchanged four days before his death."



Henry made his name as a practical dyer building on innovations in black dyeing, made by James Murgatroyd (Firth G 1990 :164) and his father, to solve the key problem of the time; how to dye mixed worsteds 'in the piece'.

Until then animal and vegetable fibres had to be dyed separately before weaving. Under Henry's direction Bowling Dye-works and the firm of Edward Ripley & Son became for a significant period the largest dyers of worsteds anywhere in the world.

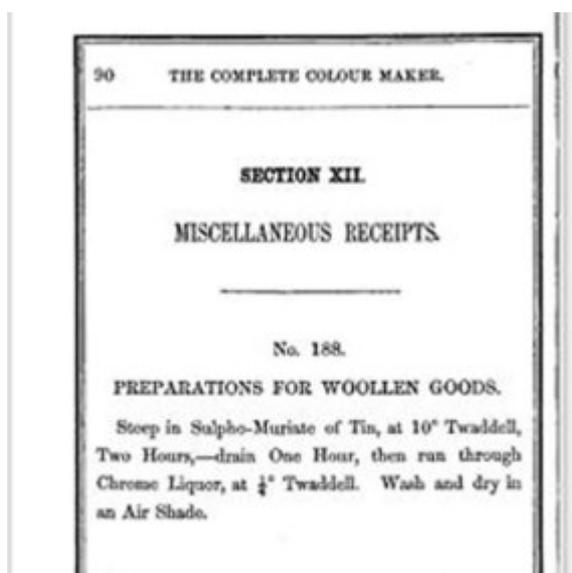
Over time Henry diversified his and the 'Ripleys' interests to include commercial and industrial land and property in Bowling, central Bradford and to the south of the Borough.

The rise in his personal wealth can be traced through the homes, each with increasingly large land holdings, in which he, Susan and his growing family lived.

- From a shared home in west Bowling,
- Henry moved to Holme House in Lightcliffe,
- Acacia in Rawdon, inherited through his wife from Robert Milligan,
- Finally to Bedstone Court, a mock Tudor mansion and 'Calendar House' in South Shropshire.
- If Ripley's role as Director and later chairman of one of Bradford's bank is taken into consideration, it becomes clear why he has been called **one of Bradford's foremost capitalists.**

Dyeing mixed worsteds

At Bowling Dyeworks the innovations in worsted dyeing that are usually given most attention are those led by Henry William Ripley as a young 'practical dyer' that allowed the dyeing 'in the piece' of mixed worsteds. These were worsted cloths that mixed vegetable and animal fibres; initially cotton and wool. The innovations are variously stated as occurring in the mid 1830 or as late as 1841.



This suggests that the breakthrough, which removed a bottleneck in the production of Bradford worsted cloths, may have been the result of lots of contributory changes rather than based in one big jump in a dyeing technology.

So innovations in cloth preparation – in the making and use of mordants – in the dyes and their use and then in the finishing of the cloth may all have contributed to the production of worsteds with market-leading qualities. Any innovations would also need to be applied to a range of cloths and fibre mixes and across the colour range.

One of the more successful types of cloth were the 'lustrous orleans', coming on the market around 1841. These mixed mohair, angora, or most famously, at Salts Mill, alpaca fibres with cotton.

South Bradford spinning and weaving Mills and by the 1880s Bowling Dyeworks also were majoring in mohair cloths.

Henry Forbes, a partner of Robert Milligan, dated the successes starting with wool and cotton fibres and the 'dyeing of blacks' to 1837, with other dark colours and then the lighter colours following.

source:- H Forbes 1852 Lecture to the Society of Arts

Victorian Ripley Ville : super-profits and superfluity

Innovations can generate super-profits. Detailed work remains to be done to find out exactly how the various groups or individual buildings in the industrial model village of Ripleyville were paid for. The firm of Edward Ripley & Son had already had the block of Mills between Spring Mill Street and Upper Castle Street built and were renting most of them out.

Through his wife, Henry Wm Ripley had inherited property and land at Rawdon, from Robert Milligan. So it wasn't necessarily ring-fenced Dyeworks profits that paid for the land, houses, schools building and almshouses of Victorian Ripley Ville. Profits from Bowling Dyeworks in the 1840s and 1850s were the original source of H W Ripley's wealth, however.

A letter to the editor of the Bradford Observer in late 1868, in a not too disguised reference to H W Ripley's election strategy and maybe a bit of a backward swipe at Titus Salt, complained of how rich men funded good works from their 'superfluity' and then felt entitled to success in the election on that basis.

The promotion of the [scheme for workmen's dwellings](#) at a meeting in the warehouse of the Patent Melange Works and the administration of sales or rental through the main works made the closest of ties between the firm and village. It was acting in a way that gave it clear 'ownership' of the project to create Ripley Ville in the early period 1865 – 68, when the houses and schools building were planned design and built. By 1871, at the time of the Census someone with an occupation related to dyeing trade lived in 31 of the houses in Victorian Ripleyville.

So whether it was from super-profits or H W Ripley's superfluity, the connections between the innovations in dyeing at Bowling Dyeworks and the Patent Melange Works and the industrial model village of Ripleyville need to be explored.

Working the Chemistry

Dyeing mixed worsteds : Holy Grail

At Salt's Mill, Titus Salt kept a day book. The holy grail for this strand of the rediscovering Ripleyville project would be to find Henry William Ripley's Day Book for his experiments in the late 1830s/early 1840s for the dyeing of mixed worsteds at Bowling Dyeworks. They could show how much a growing knowledge of chemistry or the older tradition of trial and error – or a mix of the two – lay behind the successful experiments and innovations.

It would then be interesting to know how Bowling Dyeworks adapted to the shift to aniline dyes, from 1862 onwards, after H W Ripley's purchase of the firm's first consignment of aniline dye from Reynard Freres in France.

The creation of new premises with appropriate technology, in what became the Patent Melange Works in the Spring Mill Street/Upper Castle Street block, from 1862 onwards was clearly part of that response.

Key question and invitation

So the key question in this strand of the rediscovery of the industrial model village Ripleyville is:-

- **How was a growing scientific knowledge, particularly in chemistry, applied in Bowling Dyeworks and the Patent Melange Works?**

Or to put it another way,

- **How did they go about 'Working the Chemistry' ?**

There are difficulties to be overcome. One is that the readily available local sources cover the late Victorian period, after 1875.

The Laboratory Record Books for Edward Ripley and Son for the period 1877-1892 are available at Bradford's 'Colour Experience' (formerly Bradford Colour Museum) based at the significantly named 'Perkin House' .

The trade journal 'The Dyer' dates from 1879 but the Journal of the Society of Colourists and Dyers was not published until the end of 1884, after the Society was established between February and June of the same year.

source:- Tordoff M, 'The Servant of Colour' (1984, p 2)

All of the receipts used as illustrations on this page come from an edition of a book published in 1849 in Glasgow called the '[Dyer and Colour-maker's Companion](#)' and digitised by Google Books.

An article by Keith Pybus.

<http://www.shropshireremembers.org.uk/price-ruling-waves-marking-centenary-battle-jutland/>

