

THE JEWELLERY TRADE IN BIRMINGHAM

This trade was confined to the even-nowadays-termed “Jewellery Quarter” near St Paul’s Church. In the 1820s most of the jewellers lived in this pleasant district in the city centre. Living above their tiny workshops, the close proximity of the skilled artisans was explained by the high likelihood of theft when transporting their semi-finished wares between the manufacturers before sale. Sources of supply and demand were kept geographically close. About 8000 people were employed in the trade as a whole in 1866, including gold- and silversmiths, chain and toy makers, die sinkers and subsidiary trades.

The Harborne1 chart shows Ebenezer (1847-1921) a die sinker, stamper and piercer based in Augusta St and Vyse St in just the area described above.

The power machine known as a stamper was run by steam power from the 1840s replacing the anvil. Both large and small articles were stamped using the newer machinery, but the skilled handicraft used in making fine jewellery could not be replaced. It was much in use, however, for the manufacture of brass chain links.

The work was performed on a bench with apron, a few tools, a blow-pipe and a gas-jet. Parts were produced by the stamp before being completed by the maker. Processes are recreated today when visiting the museum at the Jewellery Quarter – see the Links page.

Ref: “The Industrial Development of Birmingham and the Black Country 1860-1927” by G.C. Allen, Cass 1929.