

THE CANDLE FACTORY

Although the date on John Howe's now sadly demolished Candle Factory, formerly behind Tallow Cottage, was 1874, tallow candle making has rather a longer history in Brinklow. The earliest form of candle was made by dipping dried plant stems into tallow (mutton or beef fat), although later, cotton fibres were used for wicks. Until the 18th century, most candles were made by the people who actually used them, and housewives saved fats from the kitchen to make them. Since the beginning of the 19th century however, candle-making on a commercial basis began as a cottage industry, and later took place in factories. The process involved boiling the tallow with acid - treated water to separate the fat from fibrous matter, then heating it with steam and slaked lime and mixing it with paraffin wax to reduce guttering when lit. It was inevitably a smelly business, and everyone in The Crescent must have been painfully aware of it, although perhaps grateful that it brought much needed work to the village.



In the 1841 census for Brinklow, John Howe, a Brinklow man and his wife Martha, born in Wolvey, were living in The Crescent with their baby son, John, and are recorded as Tallow Chandlers. There is nothing to show that at this time John Howe was a Master Chandler, as several other residents in the village in the same census give the same occupation.

In 1851, there are still some tallow chandlers recorded, but no John and Martha, although an Ebeneza (sic)Howe, book keeper, was living in what seems to be the same address, so perhaps the couple were simply away from home. (An Ebenezer Howe appears on the 1837 Glebe Map, owning land next to that of John Howe, but it doesn't seem to be the same one, although possibly it may be his father or even grandfather.) Certainly in 1861, although John is not present on census night, Martha is, and so is her daughter, another Martha, aged 18, and her son Robert, who is now doing the book keeping. This census shows that by then, John Howe was employing 5 men, 2 women and a boy. The presence of a book keeper suggests that the tallow chandlery was in operation in perhaps a small way back as far as 1851. In that year, there was also a Sarah Howe living in the village, an infant teacher aged 22 and born in Manchester, who may or may not be a relation; she could be John's sister, as the name Sarah does crop up in the family again.

By 1871, John's son, another John, living with his wife Selena and his three children, had already expanded the business to the point where he employed 16 men and occupied 16 acres, so clearly the site of the factory was in use, even if the building that was only demolished in the 1980s had not then been constructed. The first reference in a census to "The Candle Factory" is in 1881, and John, Selina, their children Olive, Annette and Ann, and Ebenezer, now revealed as his cousin, are still living at the site, almost certainly in Crook House, although the house is not named in any census, and its full history remains to be

researched. In 1891, Martha Howe, John's mother and a widow, was living in Dunsmore House with her unmarried daughter Sarah, aged 46, running a private boarding school, and her granddaughter Selina aged 20, clearly the second John's daughter. (Sarah cannot be the same one as the 1851 Sarah, as the ages and places of birth do not tally).

Some older residents remember Miss Sally Howe as a somewhat eccentric old lady who made schoolchildren do jobs for her, setting little traps to "test" their honesty by leaving sixpences on the shelf, and driving her donkey cart to Coventry. The donkey, according to Mr. Bill Smith (senior) eventually drowned "in the cut".

There is no mention of the candle factory in the 1891 census, and clearly by then it had closed. In 1912, it belonged to a Mr. Podmore, was clearly disused for manufacture, and was subsequently used as accommodation for the Adult School.