

# RETTFORD AND NEIGHBOURHOOD. A SERIES OF HISTORICAL PAPERS.

## MANUFACTURERS—PAST AND PRESENT. NO 7.

### SUTER'S HAT MANUFACTORY.

Once more we uplift the curtain in disclosing the industries of ancient days, and the view is—hats! One's "tile" seems a comical subject to introduce. No matter! Hats once upon a time formed an important item in the town's trade and consequently cannot well be omitted. Besides, hats of various shapes and sizes are introduced in many places under wildly diverged circumstances, and under pretences of a frivolous kind. We, however, have a very strong reason for bringing forward the subject of hats, inasmuch as that important and desirable fabric constituted—a local manufacture. They were made of felt. As a rule the costly "beaver" was beyond the reach of ancient Retford. To make a hat in those days required the exercise of considerable judgment and ingenuity in securing the exact dimensions required. The wool and hair needed careful and exact preparation for the elements of fire and water, blocks and sieves, and a dexterous hatter was a man of consequence. Hats were first worn in England in 1400. At first they were received with no small disfavour, and the clerical element were forbidden to wear them under pains and penalties. At present, even in hard times, every man, clerical or lay, sports a hat. The proper "make" is sometimes a momentous study, and gives rise to anxious thought and the "make" and maker prevalent in Retford a century ago may provide an item of interest. "Suter's" was the "make" and Suter the maker.

The Suter's family originally came from Tideswell, Derbyshire, and made their appearance in Retford shortly before the middle of the eighteenth century. They first resided in a house in Bridgegate, then existing on the site of the premises belonging to Mr. Councillor Bettison, and now occupied as the post office. The first of the name was Mr. John Suter, who established a hat manufactory at the place named on an extensive scale. Mr. Bettison can even now point out the identical place at the back of his property where the articles were made. Mr. Suter subsequently married a Miss Wheat, then of a respectable family in Retford, by whom he had two sons and six daughters, namely:—

John Suter, born in 1732, who lived a bachelor, and died at the family residence in Bridgegate, on the 24th May, 1823, in the 92nd year of his age.

George, born in 1762, subsequently married a Miss Ann Parker, of Huntingdon, by whom he had two sons and four daughters, viz:—

Elizabeth, born 25th March, 1775. She subsequently married a Mr. Booth, by whom she had one surviving daughter.

GEORGE, born 6th May, 1777, died in infancy.

FRANCES, born 7th Dec., 1778, died unmarried.

GEORGE PARKER, born 18th October, 1780, (see below).

ANN, born 26th July, 1782, married Mr. Gould, by whom she had a numerous family; and

MARY, born 26th June, 1786, married Mr. Joseph Naylor, of Winterton, near Brigg, and still living.

The hat business was carried on upon the site of the present post-office until the year 1789, when Mr. Geo. Suter, the proprietor, purchased the house in the opposite side of the street now in the occupation of Dr. Housley. Here he erected commodious shops, and gave employment to a moderately large number of hands. He conducted the manufactory for a few years; then retired to his daughter's residence at Winterton near Brigg, where he died on Oct. 20th, 1829, aged 87 years. Mr. Geo. Suter was followed by Mr. George Parker Suter, his son, of whom see above. This gentleman is well remembered by many of the inhabitants now living, who have repeatedly pointed out to us the site of his old workshops by the side of the river Idle, where they remember the men at work, and being taken as children to Suters' do rejoice in the possession of a "brand new hat." The Mr. Suter of whom we are writing added the trades of a sacking manufacturer and tanner; but the business of a hatter being superseded in the country by the London and Paris manufacturers, Mr. Suter retired from business. On the resignation of Miss Elizabeth Barker, in 1837, he succeeded as postmaster of Retford. Soon after the death of Mr. William Pearson, apparitor, Mr. Suter was appointed his successor, and continued to hold both these situations until his death on the 1st of August, 1843. Mr. Suter married Elizabeth, one of the three daughters of Mr. Joseph Allison, of Bilby, by whom he had three sons—Henry Allison; George Allison, and William Allison—and one daughter—Emily.

As the hat manufactory was conducted for nearly half a century on the site of the residence now occupied by Dr. Housley, a glance at its history may not be out of place.

The house and premises are situate in the confines of the borough, and adjoins the river Idle. There was formerly a tannery around which were several old cottage houses of a description the most wretched that almost can be imagined. Principally erected of timber and covered with ling, one story high, and having doors and windows constructed so wretchedly small as nearly to prevent ingress or egress either to man or to the light of heaven. Situate in a low swamp, and subject to the then frequent floods of the river, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the ague should then be so prevalent, or that the plague should so frequently visit a spot so invitingly caressive of

*Copied from the  
Retford & Gainsborough  
News Aug 2nd 1878*