



Hawley Collection

@ Kelham Island Museum

The Life and Achievements of Ken W Hawley

Ken W. Hawley dedicated his life to the industrial heritage of his home city and was the determined champion of all things Sheffield. He amassed the internationally-recognised Hawley Collection over his lifetime. His dogged determination, to the point of obsession, and his vision, drive and enthusiasm for the city's industrial heritage are evident in everything he did and achieved.

His legacy is an extraordinary and unique collection which tells the story of the manufacture of edge tools, measuring tools, cutlery and silversmithing in Sheffield and South Yorkshire as well as charting the history of Sheffield manufacturers and celebrating the work of the craftsmen and craftswomen.



Ken Hawley looking through an exhibition saw at Mappin Street

Early Life and Work

Kenneth Wybert Hawley was born on 29th June 1927. His father, Walter, was a wire-goods maker, who set up his own company, Wire Products Ltd., making bespoke wire safety guards for machinery in Sheffield's manufacturing industries.

In 1940, at the age of 13 he started at Sheffield Junior Technical College but his formal education was halted in 1941 by the war. Able-bodied men had been called up to serve in the armed forces resulting in a shortage of labour so Ken left school to go and work for his father. It was here that he amassed a large bank of knowledge of the way things were made on which he was able to call to explain manufacturing processes and identify tools and machinery and was the foundation on which he built his later expertise.

In 1945 he was called up for military service. After basic training he was assigned to the Army Pay Office in Leeds. He put in a transfer request for overseas service but it came back with a posting to Bradford! When he was demobilised in 1948 he took a job briefly with Wilks Brothers ironmongers on Norfolk Row. He then moved on to work at Joseph Gleave, tool merchants in Manchester (still in existence today), returning to Sheffield every weekend.

A year later in around 1949 he moved back to work in Rotherham for another tool merchants, J. Rhodes & Son, where he became shop manager.



Ken (left) on a Joseph Gleave & Son stand

Ken with Mr. Rhodes in the Rotherham shop



In 1959 he set up in business on his own as a specialist tool merchant in Button Lane, with his wife Emily helping out.

The Shopkeeper

Ken's shop, K. W. Hawley (Tools), was a specialist tool merchants (not ironmongers!) which traded firstly at 43 Button Lane then from 1961, at 6 Earl Street off the Moor in Sheffield when it became a limited company. He retired and closed the shop in 1989. Famously, there was a sign on the door/in the shop window "We sell nowt' but tools"!, well-known amongst his customers.



Ken outside the shop on Earl Street

Talking to his customers increased and consolidated the network of people he knew in the local steel and tool making industry and with whom he remained in contact over the years.

The custodian

As well as running his shop, Ken was custodian for 40 years of Wortley Top Forge, a former finery forge and ironworks believed to be the oldest surviving water-powered heavy iron forge in the world dating back to at least 1621.

Wortley Top Forge had closed in 1912 and the site was bought by Sheffield Trades Historical Society (STHS) in 1953. It was officially opened as a future industrial museum on 9th July 1955 and the Friends of Wortley Society came into being. Ken was invited to join the Society in around 1963 and he placed an advert in the Sheffield Star asking for volunteers adding - 'NO PAY'.

With Ken they had about six volunteers who started cleaning up the site. Around 1968 Ken became the Honorary Custodian or Manager of the Forge, directing the skills of the volunteers, contacting people and acquiring what they needed for the restoration.

He was keen to restore the Forge to how it looked around 1900. Under his leadership, as well as de-silting the dam, the wall and the culvert underneath it that fed the Forge Blower Wheel were rebuilt, the bridge across a second culvert strengthened to allow access to the site by vehicles, cottages were converted to use as a mess room and a workshop, the Foundry, Foreman's Office and West shed were rebuilt and more machinery acquired - forging hammers, and engines including a 30 foot high steam engine restored to full working order.



Ken talking to visitors in the Foundry at an Open Day

Fellow volunteers at the Forge knew him as 'our Ken' and an abiding phrase they heard him shout was, "Now let's get this 'ere shifted.". Ken had a heart attack in 1979 whilst digging a hole at the Forge. After this time he became less involved in the heavy physical work at the Forge but continued as Custodian driving forward the restoration until stepping down in 2002.

The Collector and his collection

Ken's collecting began in 1955 when he visited an undertakers whilst working for Rhodes tool merchants in Rotherham. He had been sent to demonstrate an electric portable planing machine for coffin making and spotted an old iron brace on the wall. (This was later dated to 1880.) He was taken by this and asked if he could have it. This became the first piece in the Ken Hawley collection and started a lifelong mission to preserve the history and craftsmanship that had made Sheffield famous as toolmakers to the world.



Ken with the brace

Through the contacts his father and he had made in the trade, and through his shop, he heard what different firms were doing and when any were closing down or moving. In these circumstances, he was always proactive, and took every opportunity to add pieces to his collection which he viewed as important to preserve Sheffield's tool heritage. He also had the forethought to tape-record or film manufacturing processes on the verge of extinction. As well as products he collected whole workshops, catalogues, daybooks and ephemera of all sorts, from letters to photographs and designs.

He gathered his collection at his home in a large shed at the top of the garden and the garage. When space began to run out, he had an extension built on top of the garage but still ran out of room so acquired several outhouses to store more material.

A chance meeting at the Ruskin Gallery in 1991 with Janet Barnes, then the Curator, led to a major exhibition of fourteen showcases displaying a representative sample of his collection at the Ruskin in 1992 - 'The Cutting Edge'. His enthusiasm for his subject was infectious, the exhibition was a great success attracting a record-breaking 26,000 visitors.

An Action Group was formed, led by Jack Jewitt Chairman of Footprint Tools, to look into ways of preserving the collection for future generations, and the Ken Hawley Collection Trust was formed in August 1995 to raise funds to acquire the collection and ensure that it stayed in the city.



Ken at the 'The Cutting Edge' exhibition at the Ruskin Gallery

The collection also attracted the interest and support of Professor Gareth Roberts, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sheffield. The University offered to refurbish a building on Mappin Street, which was renamed 'The Hawley Building' and in 1995 this became the home for the collection.

Hawley Building



Major grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the MGC/Science Museum Prism Fund allowed the collection to be acquired by the Trust in December 1998. By 2002 the ever-expanding collection achieved full Accredited Museum status, and in partnership with the Sheffield Industrial Museums Trust (SIMT), and a major Heritage Lottery Fund grant in 2008, the collection was re-sited at Kelham Island Museum providing a public gallery supported by improved storage and research facilities. The Hawley Gallery at Kelham Island Museum opened in March 2010.



*Opening of Hawley
Gallery in March 2010
John Hamshire, Ken
Hawley and Sir Neil
Cossons*

A further extension was completed in 2013, financed by the River Don Millowners' Association, to provide more conservation storage enabling all the collection to now be on the Kelham Island site as well as extra workspace and library and research facilities for the increasing number of volunteers.

Alongside this collection of everything relating to tools and their manufacture Ken also had a personal collection of steam engines and railway ephemera and was passionate and knowledgeable about railways.

He continued collecting to the end of his life following the premise he outlined in an article in Yorkshire Life (June 2006) when asked whether he wanted someone's tools: "There might be something we haven't got, or warrants a place in the collection. The most unlikely items can turn up in someone's workshop or garden shed. Sheffield guaranteed that."

The Expert and Historian

In 1971/72 Ken was one of the judges on the BBC Television 'Chronicle' programmes, a series of industrial archaeology competitions. He also appeared as an expert on the BBC2 Animal Vegetable and Mineral programme and on one of the series – Industrial Grand Tour – which focused on Sheffield. This was testament to his reputation as an important historian of the tool, cutlery and iron and steel trades.

Ken also wrote many letters and articles for society magazines, e.g. Sheffield Trades Historical Society and the Tools and Trades History Society, and gave talks to a myriad of local and national groups and societies.

He was a founder member of the Tools and Trades History Society which was set up in April 1983 to advance knowledge and educate the public in the history of tools and the trades which used them. In 2003 he became President of the Society and remained so until his death.

Ken kept up to date to the end of his life with changes in technology and the latest manufacturing techniques through his industry contacts.

His Achievements and Legacy

Ken treated everyone in the same way, from Dukes to craftsmen, and would give endlessly of his time to anyone who showed an interest and respect for his collection or any of his other passions, and loved to have a laugh and a joke with everyone he met. In his eyes if you didn't come from Yorkshire you were a 'foreigner' and you were never allowed to forget it!



Ken at opening of extension in 2013 instructing the Duke of Gloucester

However, he was always very modest about his own knowledge and capabilities, constantly reminding everyone that he was '...only a shopkeeper you know!'. Yet he was able to talk in a direct, authoritative way, making the most technical and mundane objects interesting and accessible to all. His phenomenal memory, along with his intelligence and enquiring mind, allowed him to make sense of the processes he had seen in the many workshops in Sheffield whilst working for his father and recall them at will. He showed great attention to detail, constantly asking questions and searching for the answers.

He is quoted as saying in 1966 that:

“One day I should like to see a museum of tools and tool-making here in Sheffield. Meanwhile, I’ve got fifty years of knowledge in my head that needs cataloguing and I’m still learning.”

He achieved his first aim with the move of the collection to a purpose-built Gallery at Kelham Island Museum and some of his knowledge has been translated into a variety of publications which he has worked on with different people over the years.

In 1995 Ken was awarded an Honorary Fellowship by Sheffield Hallam University for his achievements in preserving the city’s industrial heritage through his work at Wortley Top Forge and his tool collection, and in 1998 was appointed MBE, the presentation taking place at the University of Sheffield by the Earl of Scarbrough on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen. He also received one of ten medals awarded by the University of Sheffield in 1999.

He became President in 2003 of the Tools and Trades History Society and was also President of the South Yorkshire Industrial History Society (formerly the Sheffield Trades Historical Society) on two occasions.

By the end of his life, Sir Neil Cossons believed he had become “the nation’s most prolific and inexhaustible source of knowledge and wisdom on the edge tool and cutlery trades of Sheffield...”, known and respected across the world; and, “His collecting zeal has meant a major pillar of the city’s reputation for high-quality skills and craftsmanship has been preserved for future generations.” - Keith Crawshaw, Chair of the Ken Hawley Collection Trust.

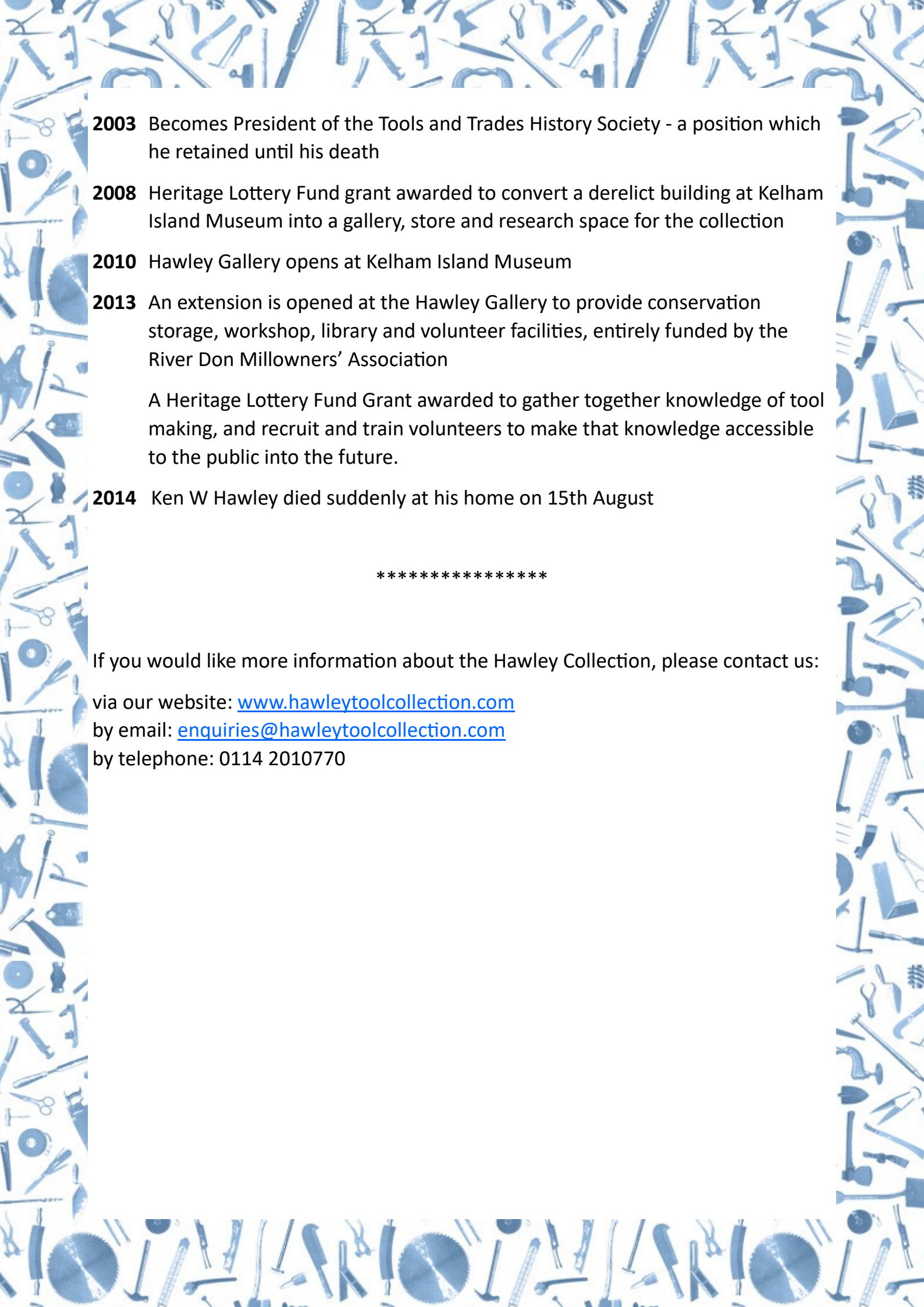


Ken in 2009 by Ian Beesley



Timeline

- 1927** Kenneth Wybert Hawley born on 29th June
- 1932** Family moved to Wadsley
- 1941** Ken left school and started work for his father
- 1945** Called up for military service
- 1948** Demobilised
- 1954** Ken married Emily in Greasborough on April 30th
- 1955** The start of the collection when Ken acquired the joiner's brace
- 1959** Ken set up his own tool merchant's shop on Button Lane in Sheffield
- 1961** The shop moved to larger premises in Earl Street
- 1968** Ken became Custodian at Wortley Top Forge
- 1971/
1972** Ken appeared as an expert on the BBC TV 'Chronicle' programmes
- 1979** Ken had a heart attack while at Wortley Top Forge
- 1983** Founding member of Tools and Trades History Society
- 1989** Ken retired and closed his tool shop in Earl Street
- 1992** 'Cutting Edge' Exhibition at Ruskin Gallery - the first public view of Ken's collection
- 1994** In April became a Vice-President of the Tools and Trades History Society
- 1995** Ken Hawley Collection Trust formed in August
- 1995** Collection moved to a building at the University of Sheffield on Mappin Street - named 'The Hawley Building'
- 1995** Ken awarded an Honorary Fellowship by Sheffield Hallam University for his service to Wortley Top Forge
- 1998** Heritage Lottery Fund grant in December which enabled the official purchase of the collection by the Trust
- 1998** Appointed MBE - presented to him by the Earl of Scarbrough
- 2002** The Ken Hawley Collection awarded full Accredited Museum status



2003 Becomes President of the Tools and Trades History Society - a position which he retained until his death

2008 Heritage Lottery Fund grant awarded to convert a derelict building at Kelham Island Museum into a gallery, store and research space for the collection

2010 Hawley Gallery opens at Kelham Island Museum

2013 An extension is opened at the Hawley Gallery to provide conservation storage, workshop, library and volunteer facilities, entirely funded by the River Don Millowners' Association

A Heritage Lottery Fund Grant awarded to gather together knowledge of tool making, and recruit and train volunteers to make that knowledge accessible to the public into the future.

2014 Ken W Hawley died suddenly at his home on 15th August

If you would like more information about the Hawley Collection, please contact us:

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