

THE RAMSDENS AND THEIR ESTATE IN HUDDERSFIELD

Victoria
Jubilee
Tower
1899

THE TOWN THAT BOUGHT ITSELF

They were giants in their days

99 YEARS
a heck of a long time too long!

1920
FORESIGHT
ENTERPRISES
COURAGE

430 ACRES
lovely
ONE THIRD OF THE BOROUGH

1599
a landlord

SIR JOHN F. RAMSDENS
BART.
(HAT)

1300.0000
a bargain!

NET PROFIT 1972
£146.000
noan so bad

SAM W. COPLEY the barber
from Berry Brow - king pin financier
What a man
and hair cuts only 3d a time
Woo's bins & shaving 2d.

DEBT FREE 1972

Huddersfield Market Charter 1671
Charlie the two REX

Wilfrid Dawson
native of Berry Brow
a man of vision was the 'master mind'

THE RAMSDEN ESTATE
THE BRIGHTEST JEWEL IN HUDDERSFIELD'S CROWN
CLIFFORD STEPHENSON - delineavit

Pay to Sir John Frechville Ramsden
The sum of One million and three hundred thousand pounds
Signed for Huddersfield Corporation
Borough Treasurer

1250 ACRES OF WOODS
5/16 of a penny a yard

I MUST FILL THIS SPACE

THE COUNTY BOROUGH OF HUDDERSFIELD

This booklet was written and produced at the request of the

ESTATE AND PROPERTY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

MEMBERS 1972-73

The Mayor, Alderman W. E. Whittaker

Alderman Clifford Stephenson, Chairman (since 1956)

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B. F. Murphy

Estate and Property Manager: William R. Birks, A.R.I.C.S.
1953 — to date

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Ald. Wilfrid Dawson	1920-1932
Ald. Joe Barlow	1932-1949
Ald. John L. Dawson	1949-1950
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Ald. John L. Dawson	1951-1952
Clr. Harold Simpson	1952-1956

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Edw. A. Walshaw, F.A.I.	1920-1934
Harold T. Taylor, F.A.S.I.	1934-1953

THE RAMSDENS OF HUDDERSFIELD

	Born	Inherited	Died	
William	1513	1531	1580	From Greetland, married Joanna Wode, of Longley
John (Wm's brother)		1580	1591	
William (J's son)	1558	1591	1623	Bought the Manor of Huddersfield, 1599
John	1594	1623	1646	Bought the Manor of Almondbury, 1627, knighted 1619
William	1625	1646	1679	
John, 1st Baronet	1648	1679	1690	Granted right to hold Tuesday Markets, 1671
William, 2nd Bt.	1672	1690	1736	
John, 3rd Bt.	1698	1736	1769	Built Cloth Hall, 1766
John, 4th Bt.	1755	1769	1839	Constructed Sir John Ramsden (broad) Canal, 1780
John Charles	1788	—	1836	Died before his father, did not inherit
John William, 5th Bt.	1831	1839	1914	A minor when his father died, trustees until 1852.
John Frecheville, 6th Bt.	1877	1914	1958	Sold the Huddersfield Estate to the Corporation, 1920



THE RAMSDENS AND THEIR ESTATE IN HUDDERSFIELD

"The Town that bought itself"

The story of a 400 years' dynasty and of the purchase
of their lands and property by the People.

Told by
CLIFFORD STEPHENSON

Chairman of the Estate & Property Management Committee since 1956

The stories of the progress of the Ramsden Family and
the expansion of their Huddersfield Estate and of the
growth and advancement of the Town are so intertwined
that to tell one is to tell much of the other.

This is a concise account of the enterprise of the Rams-
dens on which much of the prosperity of Huddersfield is
based, of the dramatic circumstances surrounding the
purchase of their Estate by the Corporation and of the
Council's subsequent management of the Estate to the
considerable benefit of the Town and its citizens who
own it.



THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS, 1066. In the style of contemporary tapestries — the only pictures of the time

THE RAMSDENS AND THEIR ESTATE

PRE-HISTORIC HUDDERSFIELD

The series of archaeological excavations at Castle Hill, in Almondbury, recently completed by Dr. W. J. Varley, have established that Iron Age people lived in a settlement there 2,500 years ago, and that the site was again fortified and inhabited in the first century of the Christian era. But of these people we have no written evidence; that begins after the Norman invasion.

1066 AND ALL THAT

When William the Conqueror over-ran England he brought resistance to heel by slaughter of the recalcitrant population and by devastation of large parts of the country, including much of the West Riding.

The Domesday Book (1086) says of Odersfelt — as Huddersfield was then called — "it is waste."

Little is known about the repopulation and recovery which took place in succeeding centuries, but it must have occurred. Records of the time of the eighth Henry show that there was a considerable thriving population in the Pennine valleys, engaged as farmers and clothiers — the old name for makers of woollen cloth, when cloth making was still a cottage industry.

ENTER THE RAMSDENS

In one of the local valleys, that of the Black Brook, the stream which first feeds the Scammonden reservoir and later joins the Calder river at Elland, lived the Ramsden family of yeomen farmers and clothiers. They were enterprising and prosperous. One of them operated three fulling mills in the Colne Valley, another, Robert of Crawstone Hall in Greetland, had married, early in the sixteenth century a daughter of Beaumont of Newsome in Almondbury. It was their son who forged the first link between the Ramsdens and Huddersfield when he married Joanna, daughter of John Wode (Wood) of Longley in Almondbury, in 1531.

OLD LONGLEY HALL

Before restoration in 1885

The home of John Wood and later, of Ramsdens; it was excluded from their sale to the Corporation.

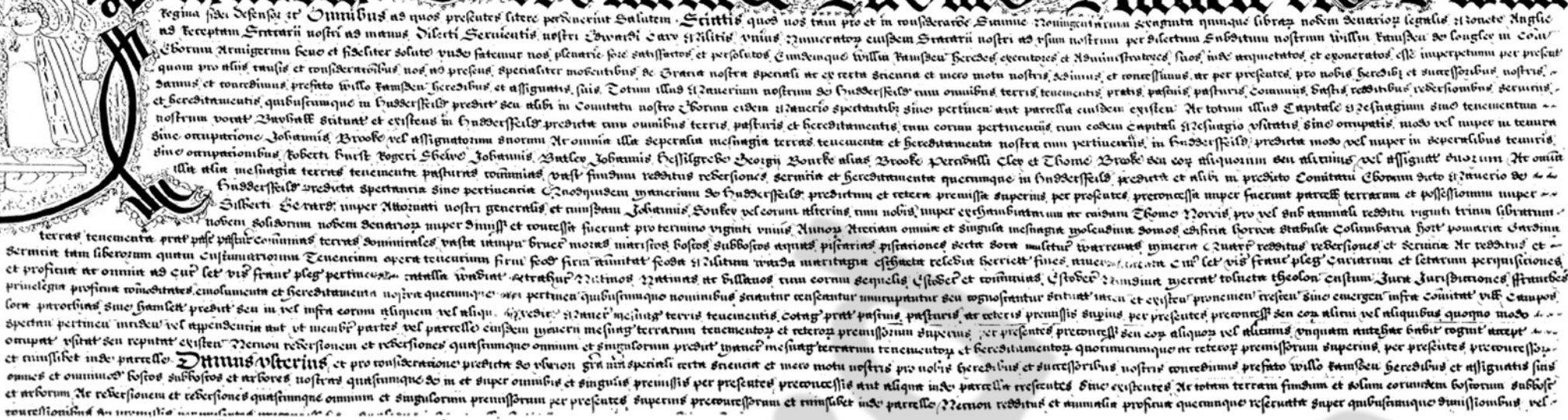


Joanna was one of three daughters, probably a widow aged 24, who was by the standards of those times when people matured early and died young, "on the shelf." As William Ramsden was then only eighteen it is a reasonable assumption that his was a marriage dictated by head rather than by heart. Perhaps his mother who came from nearby Newsome, and therefore would know that Wode of Longley was reputedly the richest man in the district, gave her son the old fashioned Yorkshire advice "don't marry for money but take care to love where money is." William's subsequent long absences from home and lack of offspring suggest that affection was not a significant part of Joanna's marriage portion.

Within ten years of his marriage William not only owned his wife's dowry of land and property in Almondbury and land, shops and workshops in Huddersfield, but also the inheritances of her two sisters. The Ramsden Estate had been founded.

This was a period of great activity in land transactions. Monastery land acquired by the Crown on the dissolution of the monasteries was being sold to private buyers: speculation and investment were rife and offered great opportunities to those with courage and knowledge of the procedures. William had one and soon learnt the other which he used as an agent for men with more money but less "know how." Unfortunately for him his ambition exceeded his judgement and financial resources and he found himself in the "Fleet" debtors' prison on more than one occasion. This wasn't the strict place of discipline such institutions are today and William's incarceration probably passed not too tediously. His diary records that he followed such diverse hobbies as learning to play the virginal and the lute, and later and probably more to his liking, cockfighting. For a period he held the profitable office of Woodward General for Yorkshire, but he was not over conscientious in accounting for his stewardship, a characteristic "slackness" which also got him into trouble in connection with his tax returns. Fortunately a timely King's pardon made an "honest man" of him so that when he died in London in 1580 he was able to leave his next of kin — his brother John — a very substantial estate.

Generations later the last Ramsden Lord of the Manor in Huddersfield wrote the first William's epitaph:- "a man the family should revere as undoubtedly the founder of our fortunes."



Latin text reads: Elizabeth by the Grace of God of England, France and Ireland...in consideration of the sum of nine hundred and sixty five pounds and nine pence...grant to William Ramsden his heirs and assigns all that our Manor of Huddersfield

HUDDERSFIELD MARKET CHARTER

THE CLOTH HALL

For the next hundred years the clothiers of the district brought their homespun handwoven cloth pieces to the Tuesday Market around the Church, often displaying their wares on the tombstones in the Churchyard. This somewhat scandalous use and not very convenient facility cried out for a remedy which the Ramsden of the day provided by building a large and imposing though architecturally unattractive Cloth Hall in 1766. This new building confirmed Huddersfield as a cloth merchanting centre and gave birth to firms which later developed into businesses with world-wide export connections.

SIR JOHN RAMSDEN'S CANAL

Huddersfield still lacked one requirement to rank as a first class centre for trade; its communications with the outside world were poor as it hadn't a navigable river. Transport by the hundreds of pack donkeys, mules and ponies

- 4

CANAL BASIN - ASPLEY

A hive of activity until the railway came. It ceased to handle barge traffic twenty years ago. Now with a new lease of life it provides pleasure and recreation as a MARINA.

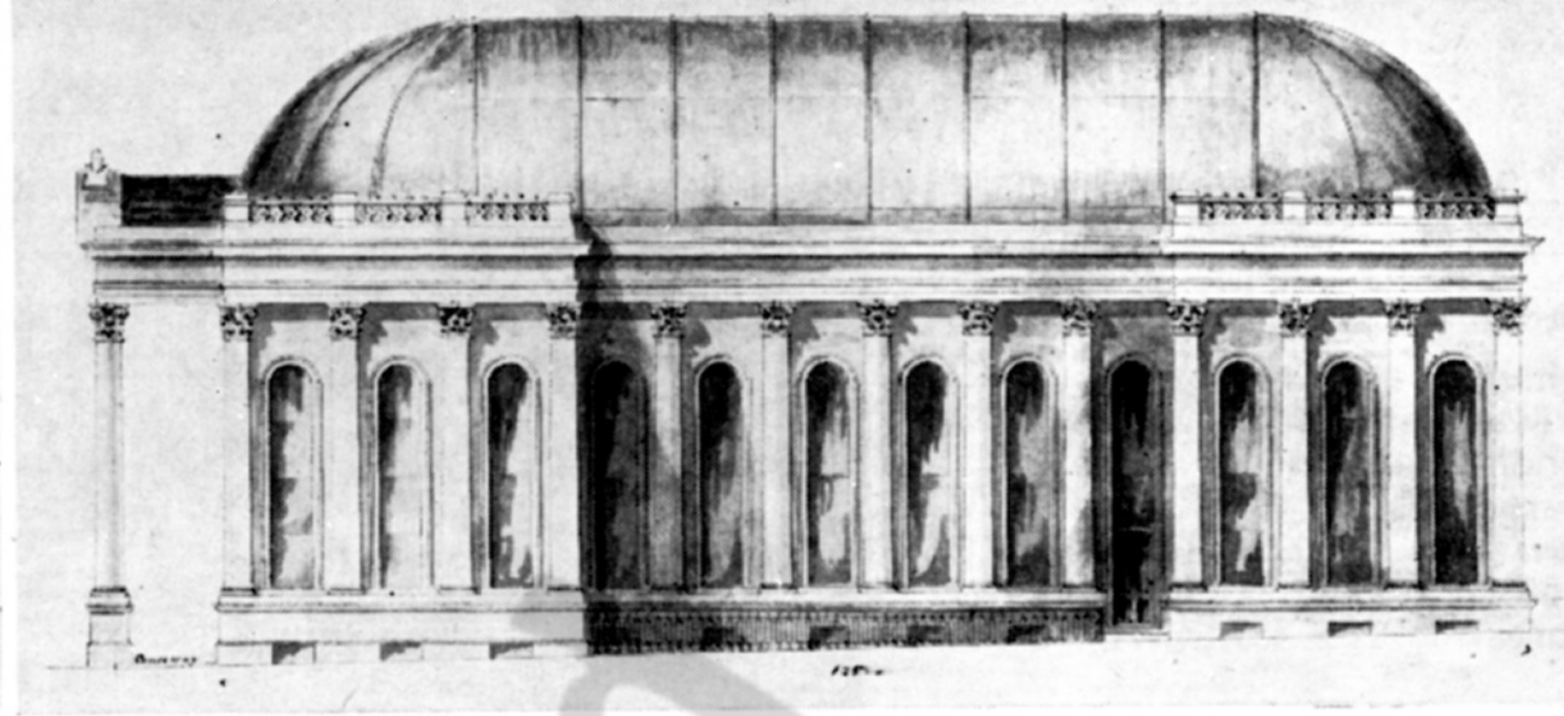
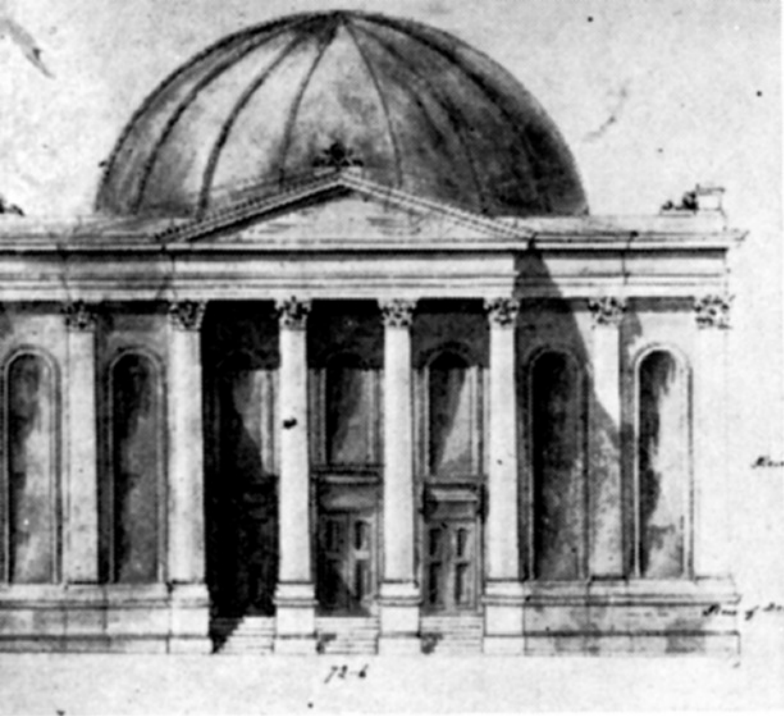


which traversed the bleak Pennine slopes was slow and expensive, but again a Ramsden saw and met the need of the time. John the 4th Baronet, at his own expense and a cost of £12,000, in six years had the famous James Brindley construct the canal which connected up in 1780, to the Calder at Cooper Bridge. The Huddersfield Narrow Canal, (a remarkable engineering feat which involved driving the first Standedge Tunnel) linked Aspley Basin with Lancashire in 1811. Huddersfield was "truly on the map," ready poised to exploit and profit from the Industrial Revolution just beginning.

Market Rights; the Cloth Hall merchanting centre; Canal transport facilities; all were due to the foresight, energy and enterprise of the Ramsden family. More truthfully than applies to many similar statements it can be said that "the Ramsdens 'made' Huddersfield."

THE STEAM AGE

Development in the following years was dictated by the pace and change of the Industrial Revolution. Steam replaced water power, cloth manufacture became a factory process instead of a cottage industry; family firms, later to become household names, were founded and prospered; the self sufficient and satisfying if arduous life of industry based on the family and home was supplanted by factory life of long hours under harsh conditions and the inhuman exploitation of child labour. But by the 1840's a dramatic change was in prospect, railways laid at feverish speed over the face of the land promised expanded horizons, a new way of life, a new mobility and with it a knowledge of, and a demand for, a better standard of living. Though the Ramsdens of 1845 were not the prime movers in bringing the railway to Huddersfield they readily made available the necessary land, and at the same time seized the opportunity for fine development of the new north end of the town. This was layed out with good streets on which were built many splendid buildings in fine stone. In half a century the Ramsdens invested more than half a million pounds (say, £10 million at today's value) on development in Kirkgate, Westgate and northwards, the culmination of eleven generations of Ramsden enterprise which had already earned in 1844 from Frederick Engels, the social reformer friend of Karl Marx, the comment "Huddersfield the handsomest by far of all the factory towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire." This was the splendid and valuable Estate extending to 4,300 acres which in 1920 the citizens of Huddersfield, no less farsighted than the Ramsdens themselves, bought from Sir John Frecheville Ramsden, 6th Baronet, and the eleventh generation of the Ramsdens of Huddersfield.



FRONT TO JOHN WILLIAM STREET

SIDE ELEVATION TO ST. GEORGE'S SQUARE

A design by J. P. Pritchett, commissioned by Sir John William Ramsden in 1853 for
THE TOWN HALL THAT WAS NOT BUILT

RAMSDEN THE BUILDER

Sir John William the 5th Baronet had ambitious ideas for the development of the new part of the Town opened up by the station, where he wanted to site the Town's public buildings. In 1853 he had plans prepared by the firm of J. P. Pritchett of York and Huddersfield¹ for a Town Hall in St. George's Square on the site now occupied by Huddersfield Building Society, but this failed to find favour with the Municipal Authority. He then proposed that the General Post Office should be built there but the Government architect did not approve and so in 1876 Sir John William built it at a cost of £11,000 in Northumberland Street opposite to the present G.P.O. This stands on another proposed but rejected Town Hall site, a site which Ramsden kept open for many years in the hope that it would be used for municipal purposes.

The splendid new George Hotel built in St. George's Square by Ramsden in 1850 replaced the George Inn which stood overlooking the Market Place from the north side. The inn stood across what was to become John William Street and to make way for that street it was taken down. The inn building was re-erected where it still stands, though no longer an inn, on the south-west corner at the junction of St. Peter's Street and Byram Street. A consequence of the George Hotel being built by a Ramsden was that as part of their Estate it came into Corporation ownership in 1920 and so the Council members might be said, though by remote proxy, to be publicans.

TENANTS' RIGHTS

One of the outstanding events in the Ramsden story was the Tenants' Rights Agitation and Campaign of the 1850's and its successful outcome.

The first recorded Ramsden lease was granted in 1780 to John Hirst, a cordwainer (a leather worker - shoe maker) for 261 square yards of land in New Street at £2 per year for 60 years. Other 60 year leases, mostly for commercial and industrial developments, were granted, but tenants of land for dwelling houses did not usually have the security of a lease, they were "tenants at will," in other words tenants for as long as it was the will of the landlord to allow their occupancy. Though there is no evidence to suggest that any Ramsden abused his advantageous position, tenants became increasingly uneasy about their legal insecurity and petitioned for legal leases.

1. Pritchett was architect for Ramsden Street Chapel in 1825, for rebuilding the Parish Church in 1835, and for the Station in 1847.

THE CLOTH HALL

Built by Sir John Ramsden in 1766.
Enlarged 1848 & 1864, it later
became the Exchange.
Demolished in 1930, the site is now
occupied by the A.B.C. Cinema.



Their agitation was a major local issue and numerous public meetings were held and the local press devoted much space to the question. In 1859 a Parliamentary Act required the Ramsden family to grant leases for 99 years. Many of such leases "fell in" in 1958, some were re-negotiated. Even this did not satisfy prospective leaseholders for long and in 1869 the landlord was persuaded to change to leases for 999 years — the system so familiar to Huddersfield people. The weakness of it from the landlord's point of view is the rent fixed at an invariable amount for the whole 999 year period with no provision for revision to cover inflation.¹

In spite of the Tenants' Rights agitation the evidence is that the Ramsdens were "good landlords" as Wilfrid Dawson described them; Rippon Bros. describing Ramsden, went even further in their comment² "the most generous landlord in our experience."

Many examples of Ramsden generosity can be quoted from 'Isaac Hordern's Notes.'

ISAAC HORDERN

In the last great period of the Ramsden saga, that of Sir John William covering the second half of the nineteenth century, Isaac Hordern was a prominent and colourful character. Said to have a blood relationship with the Ramsdens, he entered the Huddersfield Estate Office as a boy of seventeen in 1846, "having come by train to Cooper Bridge and thence by bus to the White Swan Inn in Kirkgate." Only three years later he was promoted to Chief Assistant to the resident Agent. Subsequently he was designated Cashier. His position must have been of well rewarded importance as he was able to build Oxley Woodhouse at Fartown as his residence. He was closely involved in the major Estate developments of his period and the instigator of many of them.

For sixty-one-years Isaac conscientiously entered in his volume of "Notes" events of importance concerning the Estate and happenings in the Town. Amusing and sometimes acid comments on local personalities appeared from time to time. Conscientious to the end, his last entry reads "the offices in the yard have yet to be repaired." He had just let a shop in New Street for £200 p.a. and that was 65 years ago.

1. The Corporation policy now is to grant 99 year leases for commercial and industrial developments incorporating a clause for rent review at 10 year intervals. The 1967 Freehold Reform act gives right of purchase of the freehold to dwelling house leaseholders.

2. Reported in the "Daily Examiner," 28th October, 1919.



WEAVER'S COTTAGE
Lumb Lane, Almondbury

One of many Ramsden 99 year lease properties. The same family have lived in it for 200 years. The multi windowed "loom chamber" had looms in it within living memory.

ISAAC HORDERN'S NOTES

His volume of "Notes" and the six albums of photographs of Huddersfield and Almondbury buildings, many of them taken a hundred years ago, which he produced, are great treasures, invaluable to local historians.

Amongst many projects he inspired the building of the Castle Hill Tower. Because his employer did not favour the scheme Isaac worked behind scenes with G. W. Tomlinson to achieve his objective.

In 1868 he became the first Ramsden 999 year leaseholder under the new Act, for property in Fitzwilliam Street.

RAMSDEN GENEROSITY

In 1857 the 5th Baronet gave St. John's Church to the parish, it cost £10,000. He also contributed to the living.

He offered £3,000 towards purchasing the Springwood Estate as a public park. When this project lapsed he contributed £5,000 towards the cost of Greenhead Park. Towards the Technical College he gave £1,000 and a similar sum to the new Somerset Bridge. He was a life patron of the Huddersfield Infirmary and a donor of £1,200 to it.

Sir John William was especially generous to churches. Isaac Hordern records many beneficiaries, including Non-conformist bodies as well as the Established Church.

The scale of his generosity is more obvious when it is remembered that the amounts given are equivalent to about twenty times as much today.

For almost 400 years the progress of Huddersfield was bound up with the fortunes and enterprise of the Ramsden family; it was largely due to their foresight and energy that Huddersfield developed from being a small, mean, moorside village of the sixteenth century into the thriving industrial town of the twentieth. "Self interest" may have been the Ramsden inspiration but undeniably it was "enlightened" and beneficial to the town and its citizens.

The patient amassing of land and property through nearly four centuries of Ramsden endeavour had involved many long and difficult negotiations and no doubt anxious times, a great deal of courage, and in relation to current values, large amounts of money. The first William Ramsden at one time owed £800 (say £80,000 today) and for want of paying it was cast into the Fleet Prison.

KIRKGATE BUILDINGS AND BYRAM STREET

Offices and shops built by Sir John W. Ramsden as part of his development of the new north end of the Town late last century.



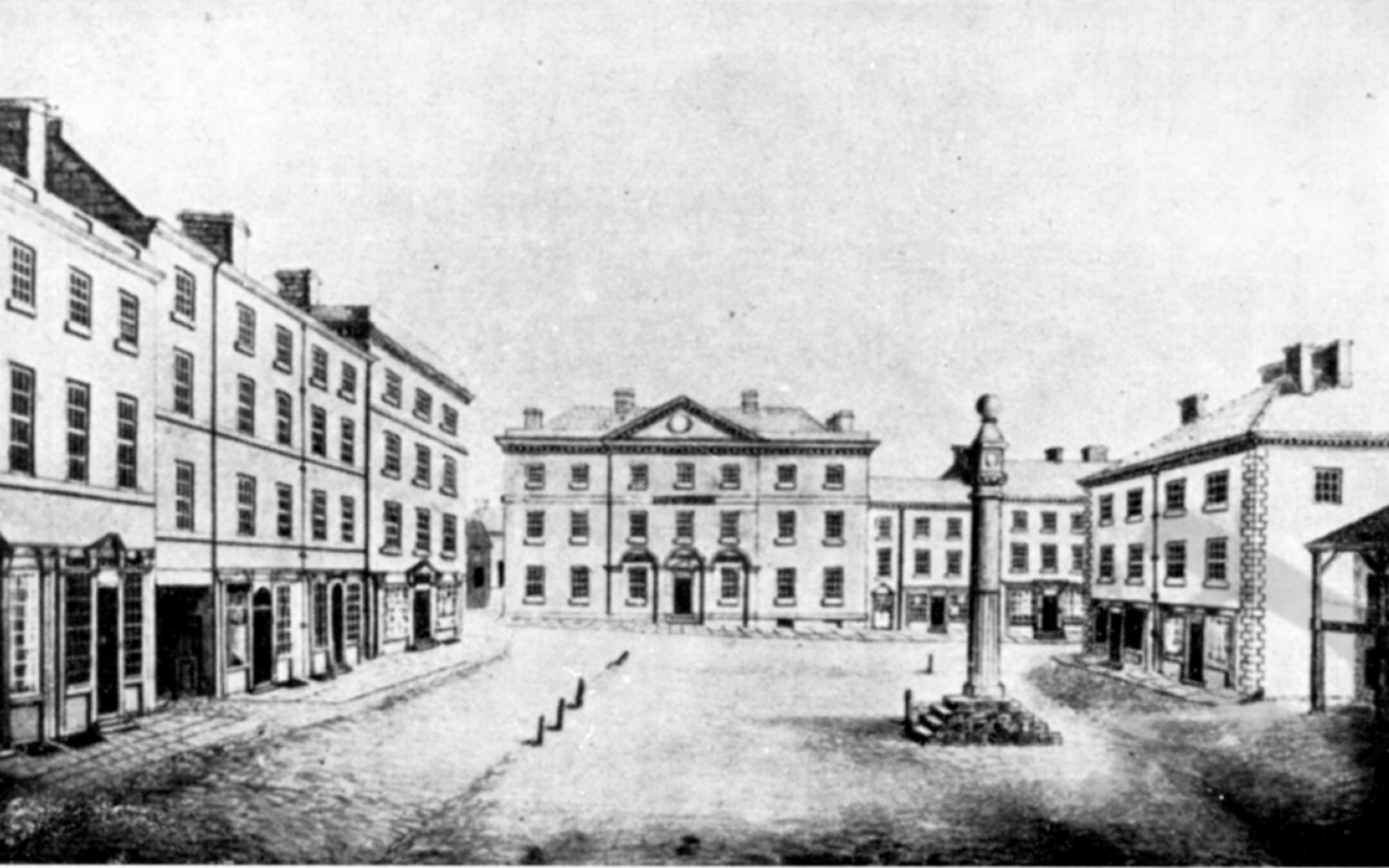
THE TOWN THAT BOUGHT ITSELF

Nothing the Ramsdens did exceeded in complexity, difficulty and drama the secret negotiations which attended the purchase of the Huddersfield Ramsden Estate from John Frecheville Ramsden, the 6th Baronet. The story of that purchase first became known in accurate detail as recently as 1970 when the private papers of Wilfrid Dawson, who masterminded the purchase, came to light. The papers reveal drama and coincidence which a writer of fiction would scarce dare to invent for fear of overstretching the credulity of his readers, but in the "Dawson File"¹ may be read the documentary proof of the chain of scarcely credible fortuitous chances which culminated in the purchase of the Ramsden Estate by the Corporation.

THE DAWSON FILE

Even the uncovering of the "Dawson File" itself had an element of luck about it, as only one man and he due to retire from the Estate Department a few months later, was dimly aware of its existence. A bundle of 175 yellowing old papers, copy letters, telegrams and manuscript notes in a dirty manilla folder, it had lain at the back of an old document safe in the Estate Offices forgotten for decades. No one now knows how this private file of Wilfrid Dawson came into the keeping of the Corporation Estate Department but a reasonable surmise is either that Dawson, who became the first chairman of the Estate Committee, deposited it, or, alternatively, when on his death in 1936 his private papers were sorted, the file was recognised to concern the Estate Department upstairs in the same building and was passed over. As at that time many of the personalities involved were still alive the file was treated as a secret; it would no doubt still be mouldering away at the back of a safe if the writer, Chairman of the Estate Committee, seeking data for his speech at the 1970 Dinner celebrating the Jubilee of the purchase, hadn't asked the "Oldest Inhabitant" of the Department if he knew of any information relative to the purchase. The memory of the Oldest Inhabitant was triggered; he, the only person aware of the existence of the papers produced them, and so, fifty years after the event enabled the true story of the happenings leading up to the purchase to be told.

1. The "Dawson File" edited, indexed and assembled in book form is available to be borrowed from the Huddersfield Public Library.



THE MARKET PLACE IN 1780
(from an old drawing)

To make way for John William Street, the George Inn (in centre) was taken down and re-erected in St. Peter's Street.

Over the years many stories of varying accuracy and inaccuracy concerning the purchase and those involved in it have been told — the true facts are now revealed by the "File" and establish beyond any doubt that Wilfrid Dawson (later Alderman and Freeman of the Borough) was the initiator, prime mover and negotiator of the great transaction.

AN 1894 PROPOSAL

Though it does not appear to be commonly known, there was a previous proposal 26 years earlier that the Corporation should buy the Estate and there is a Council minute to confirm it. The instigator was Councillor (later Alderman) E. A. Beaumont who recounted in an "Examiner" interview¹ the circumstances leading to his proposal. He told how on a Trade Commission to Austria he met Baron Rothschild who shewed a surprising knowledge of Huddersfield and the Ramsden Estate, which he suggested should be bought by the Corporation. Asked how the money could be found the Baron said "when you are ready send to our London office and refer them to me."

Councillor Beaumont's motion in Council on the 17th January, 1894 "that the Corporation consider the desirability and practicability of purchasing the freehold land within the Borough" was discussed but later withdrawn. One Alderman said that Councillor Beaumont was "a hundred years too soon". Events proved that he was only a quarter of a century early.

DAWSON BECOMES COUNCILLOR

A chance meeting on the London train between Wilfrid Dawson and Sir William Raynor was the first of a series of remarkably fortuitous meetings which culminated in the Ramsden Estate purchase. At this meeting Wilfrid was invited to stand for the Town Council, which he did successfully in the 1917 by-election for the Newsome Ward. He was then strategically placed to promote his great ambition, confided to and quoted in a letter by Sir William as "to see the Corporation own the Ramsden Estate."²

Wilfrid Dawson was a local stockbroker and financier with wide-spread interests which so often took him to London that he found it convenient to rent a flat there. This he lent to friends when not expecting to need it for himself. On one such occasion when the flat was on loan, Wilfrid had unexpected business in London but nowhere to stay. He mentioned his dilemma

1. Huddersfield "Daily Examiner," 28th October, 1919.

2. See the "Dawson File" Item 77.

WESTGATE IN 1869

The Estate buildings in the background were being built. Byram Buildings and Arcade replaced the old shops shewn.



to a group of friends amongst whom was a stranger; the stranger, introduced as Captain Leslie Melville, offered Wilfrid the hospitality of a room in his flat, a generosity which Wilfrid was glad to accept. Later as they chatted and it transpired that Dawson came from Huddersfield the Captain surprised him by the question "do you know anyone likely to be interested in buying a large estate there?" Wilfrid pricked up his ears as this could only mean the Ramsden Estate, and replied that if he could have particulars he thought he could find a buyer. By this chance meeting, springing from the wartime difficulty of finding hotel accommodation in London, Lady Luck forged the second link in the Estate purchase chain of events.

THE MYSTERY MAN

Captain Melville is the mystery man of this story. How he came to be in the position to offer the property and initiate negotiations and more, to demand a commission fee for that service, originally of £40,000 but eventually settled at £20,000, is the only unexplained part in the whole Estate transaction. He must have been in a position of strength as that tough bargainer Wilfrid Dawson agreed the enormous commission (worth £150,000 today) with him in less than a month. Within days the promised information was in Dawson's hands. The Captain having fulfilled his contract disappeared from the scene with his commission note endorsed £20,000 due on completion of the sale. Seldom surely, was such a large sum promised for such small effort. Before Wilfrid could clinch terms with Captain Melville he had a very large difficulty to overcome arising from the limitation of the statutory powers of Town Councils, which at that time did not allow dealing in land. To do this a Council had to promote a special lands bill in Parliament; a time consuming process with no guarantee of success.

THE THIRD MAN

The way round this difficulty was to find a third party to act as middleman, who would purchase the Estate and resell it to the Corporation if and when the Corporation obtained the necessary Act of Parliament.

The specification of such a third party was a tough one; it required someone interested enough and with the very large financial resources needed to buy a 4,300 acre estate, who would be willing to resell to the Corporation at little or no profit if the Council succeeded in obtaining Parliamentary powers, but



LOWERHEAD ROW (Old Leeds Road)
1880

Half timbered buildings in the old part of the Town. Site now part of Southgate opposite Beastmarket.

if the Corporation failed to do so, would be content to hold his purchase. The chances against such a man with access to the equivalent of £10 million today being available, were astronomical, yet just such a man was already a client of Wilfrid Dawson. Dame Fortune had smiled a third time. By further coincidence he was, like Dawson, a native of Berry Brow. His name was Samuel William Copley, a man whose career was a romance in itself.

SAM COPLEY

Sam Copley; born 1859 the son of a Berry Brow barber, he learnt his father's craft. When only 17 and with only a pound in his pocket he sought his fortune in various towns, and, when living near Pontypridd, ventured into dealing in furniture, carpets and boots. Six years later, having £100, he emigrated to Australia. After various business ventures, only surviving in times of failure by exercise of his never lost skill with scissors and razor, he entered into speculations which left him with only £5 capital. But he kept his barber's ear tuned to the gossip amongst his business-men clients and cultivated contacts with men of affairs who sat in his chair, to such good purpose that his own financial enterprises prospered. Though early speculation in land brought disaster he weathered that storm and eventually made a great fortune out of property. He returned to England, settled in Elstree and took part in the cotton boom of the post 1914 war period. It was probably his dealings in cotton shares which provided the contact with stockbroker Dawson.

Copley, having agreed to be the "third man" the middleman, king-pin of the operation, the negotiations for the Estate purchase were now between him and Ramsden, with Dawson in his private capacity acting as his agent, and with a Mr. Acland Hood of London (introduced by the mysterious Captain Melville), as his Solicitor. The solicitors who acted on behalf of Sir John Frecheville Ramsden were the Bloomsbury Square firm of Capel, Cure & Ball.

HUSH HUSH

Meantime Wilfrid had been clearing his lines at the Town Hall. If his cherished dream were to come true the Council must eventually decide to buy the Estate for the Town. This requirement presented its difficulty as it was considered to be vitally important that it should not be known at this stage that the Corporation had any interest in the Estate. There was fear that Ramsden might at worst be unsympathetic towards public ownership of land which

FINTHORPE BARN, Almondbury

An Estate property.

End gable shewing early "cruck" frame construction used in buildings when the first Ramsden came to Huddersfield 440 years ago.



a Corporation purchase would mean, and refuse to sell, or at best that he would drive a harder bargain with a public body.

Not daring to risk the publicity of Council debate, Dawson nevertheless needed to feel on safe ground in going forward with his scheme, so he, in great secrecy, sounded the opinion of a few of the most influential members of the Town Council. As a result an unofficial very select committee was formed comprising the Mayor (Alderman Carmi Smith), Alderman Ernest Woodhead (of the "Examiner"), Chairman of Finance; Councillors Rowland Mitchell and Thomas Canby and of course Councillor Wilfrid Dawson. One can imagine that many were the secret meetings to discuss the latest developments in the progress of Dawson's negotiations, and frequent the whispered conversations which took place in the cloak and dagger atmosphere. Though it has been claimed that the secret was well kept up to near the end of seven months of negotiation, it is known that Col. Beadon, Ramsden's Agent — who as it happened, occupied an office just above the private one of Wilfrid Dawson — knew of the Corporation's interest quite early on, and there were rumours abroad in other quarters.

HARD BARGAINING

The bargaining started with Ramsden asking £1½m. countered by an offer by Dawson of £1m. Over the ensuing months the haggle continued; letters passed between Hood acting for Copley, and Capel, Cure & Ball for Ramsden, Dawson consulted Copley and instructed Hood, the seller reduced his price the buyer increased his bid, the gap narrowed, but just when a deal looked likely both sides dug in. Holding to his reduced price of £1.3m Ramsden wrote (24. 8. 1919) to Dawson "if your side are really anxious to buy, they ought to come up to my price," and despite personal letters from and personal interviews sought by Wilfrid, there Sir John stuck. Meantime there were 'phone calls, letters and telegrams flying around the Dawson-Copley-Hood triangle, Hood arguing "I've got them to within £50,000 — you ought to close" but Dawson still adamant, writing to Hood (16th October, 1919) "time is running out, my last word has been said" — "his last word" being £1¼m. The immovable object had come face to face with the irresistible force — it was stalemate. But fate, in the guise of a newspaper leak, concerning the Corporation's interest, intervened, Dawson decided that the time for bargaining had



THE GEORGE HOTEL

An Estate property.

Built by the Ramsdens in 1850, it is Huddersfield's premier hotel. Now owned by the Corporation on lease to Trust Houses Ltd.

passed and that after all his last word had not been said; he sent a telegram to Copley reporting that he had instructed Hood to close at £1,300,000 "or if possible do better." Wilfrid never gave up trying.

THE DEAL CLINCHED

On the 24th October, 1919, Copley sent by hand from his London office his acceptance of Ramsden's offer to sell for £1,300,000.

Although Sam Copley had originally stipulated that he should have a small (relatively) commission of £20,000 for his services, on the 28th October, 1919, he wrote to Wilfrid Dawson saying that he would sell the Estate to the Corporation without any fee or commission with only one condition; that the Corporation should place all its insurance business for the next twenty-one years with the Western Australia Insurance Co. of which Copley was a director.

Who won? Though Dawson lost the last "round" of bargaining with Ramsden he certainly won the "match." He'd struck a fine bargain for Huddersfield. Though various people have in the past been given much credit for the transaction, without a shadow of doubt the purchase of the Ramsden Estate was masterminded and brought to a triumphant conclusion almost entirely by the efforts of this one man — Wilfrid Dawson of Berry Brow; though this was only made possible through the public spirited intervention of the king-pin middle-man — Sam Copley the barber, also from Berry Brow.

There was another winner too, the "mystery man" who, in the only letter received from him, written on the 26th October, 1919, when he was sure he would receive his £20,000, wrote "I am so pleased to see the deal has come off." He had good reason to be. Never was so much earned so easily.

Wilfrid was now able to tell the Council all about the transaction and the advantages that would accrue to the Town if they bought the Estate. In a telling speech he said "If we buy the Estate it will for ever stamp Huddersfield as a pioneer in Municipal enterprise.....it is likely to meet strong opposition in Government Departments (it had the 'smell' of nationalisation).....it will do away with the necessity of going cap in hand to a landlord.....it is a particularly good financial bargain.....the undeveloped land stands at 5/16 penny per yard — can calico be bought at the price?.....it will facilitate modern layout of the town and the housing of its people." He did not overstate the case. The Council resolved to introduce a Lands Bill in Parliament.

FLETCHER HOUSE FARM, Almondbury

Owned by Isaac Wormald in 1634, it is reputed the oldest building in the Borough. Timber framed, masonry clad later.

One of 41 Estate farms and small holdings.



THE TOWN HAD BOUGHT ITSELF

When the Bill to purchase was presented to Parliament, there was opposition — especially from the Bishops because the Estate had the advowsons of several churches, — but in the end it passed both Houses and so, on the 29th September, 1920, by a tripartite deed between Sir John F. Ramsden, Samuel William Copley and The Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of Huddersfield, the Estate passed into the ownership of the citizens of the Borough. "The town had bought itself" — or at least a major part of itself, including the whole Town Centre.

FINDING THE MONEY

The money to pay for the purchase was borrowed at rates varying from $6\frac{1}{4}\%$ to $6\frac{5}{8}\%$, £1m., surprisingly from Cardiff Corporation, £100,000 from the Yorkshire Penny Bank, and the remainder from the National Provincial Union Bank; all for a short period only, as Wilfrid believed and forecast that interest rates would be down to 4% within two years. He proved a good prophet.

THE MILLION POUND WAISTCOAT

There was an interesting episode connected with the actual payment of the purchase money in London, which is vouched for by the person involved, Ernest Dyson, Borough Treasurer at the time; in a letter to his successor.¹ The money had to be paid by open drafts (which anyone in possession could cash) to be collected at a London bank. To be sure that they would be handed over to the right person the bank sent a man from London to Huddersfield to identify Dyson in his office, and give him the drafts.

This satisfied the bank but did not solve Dyson's worry, for he would be sole custodian of, and responsible for, over a million pounds, until paying it over in London next day but one. At first he demurred, but then having had two pockets made inside his waistcoat into which the drafts were sewn he accepted charge of them and unbeknown to the rest of the party, "so equipped went up to London with a somewhat increased waistband and a more than usual stress of responsibility." His anxiety wasn't lessened when the others insisted on attending a performance at the St. James's Theatre — "but I daren't refuse to go." When next morning he told Wilfrid Dawson how he had carried the drafts with him, Wilfrid said "Good God! it would have turned my hair grey to have gone through that." But all was well — the money paid over, Huddersfield entered into possession of its acres.

1. Dyson's letter appears in the "Dawson File," item 169A.



THE OLD CHERRY TREE, Westgate
Demolished in 1867 to make way
for the Estate Buildings on the
same site. This looks like a farewell
party.

Why did Ramsden sell such an obviously valuable asset at a price equivalent to only 20 years purchase of the then existing £65,000 p.a. ground rents? The answer, given to the writer by a member of the family, was cryptically explicit: "because we owed eight-hundred-thousand pounds to the bank."

UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

The purchase of the Estate signed and sealed, the Corporation found itself with a new role, new duties, new responsibilities; those of landlord and estate management as trustees for the new owners — the Huddersfield Ratepayers. There was no municipal precedent to act as guide, for public ownership of a large estate was unique amongst municipalities, as indeed on the Huddersfield scale it still is. But there was a foundation on which to build, the Ramsden Estate Office with its staff of ten with their professional expertise; this was taken over. Edward Walshaw who had entered the Office as a junior in 1884, was appointed manager.

THE ESTATE DEPARTMENT

To administer the department an Estate Committee was established under the guidance of, as Chairman, Wilfrid Dawson, whose ability had been so amply proved by his negotiation of the Estate purchase. He correctly forecast that the purchase would not for long be a charge on the rates. Within four years, the Estate was paying its way with income meeting annual costs of management, interest charges and debt redemption; the latter based on an unusually long 80 years loan sanction period.

Initially the Estate Department carried only the responsibilities of its Ramsden predecessor, that of administering and managing the Ramsden Estate; but having within its staff professional skills in property valuation, management and survey it could obviously provide a service to all other Corporation departments needing these professional services.

Over the years, the scope of the Department's activities has widened enormously; in 1953 it was given responsibility for maintenance of schools and the Technical College, the Town Hall, all public buildings, and the buildings of all other Departments, together with all Corporation built houses in addition to over a thousand domestic properties which came with the Estate; a present total of over 13,000 dwellings.

ESTATE BUILDINGS

Railway Street - Westgate
(From an early engraving)

A splendid period building erected by Sir John W. Ramsden in 1871, on the site of the Old Cherry Tree Inn (photograph on opposite page).



ESTATE DEPARTMENT FUNCTIONS

The Department functions in six principal capacities:

As a Landlord; leasing, letting, buying, selling and managing Estate lands.

As an Agent; leasing and letting properties controlled by other Departments.

As a Servant; providing the professional skills of property and land valuers and surveyors, and as negotiators for sale or purchase of property and land.

As a Provider of accommodation, other than purpose built, for any departmental need, and as the provider of off-street car parking facilities.

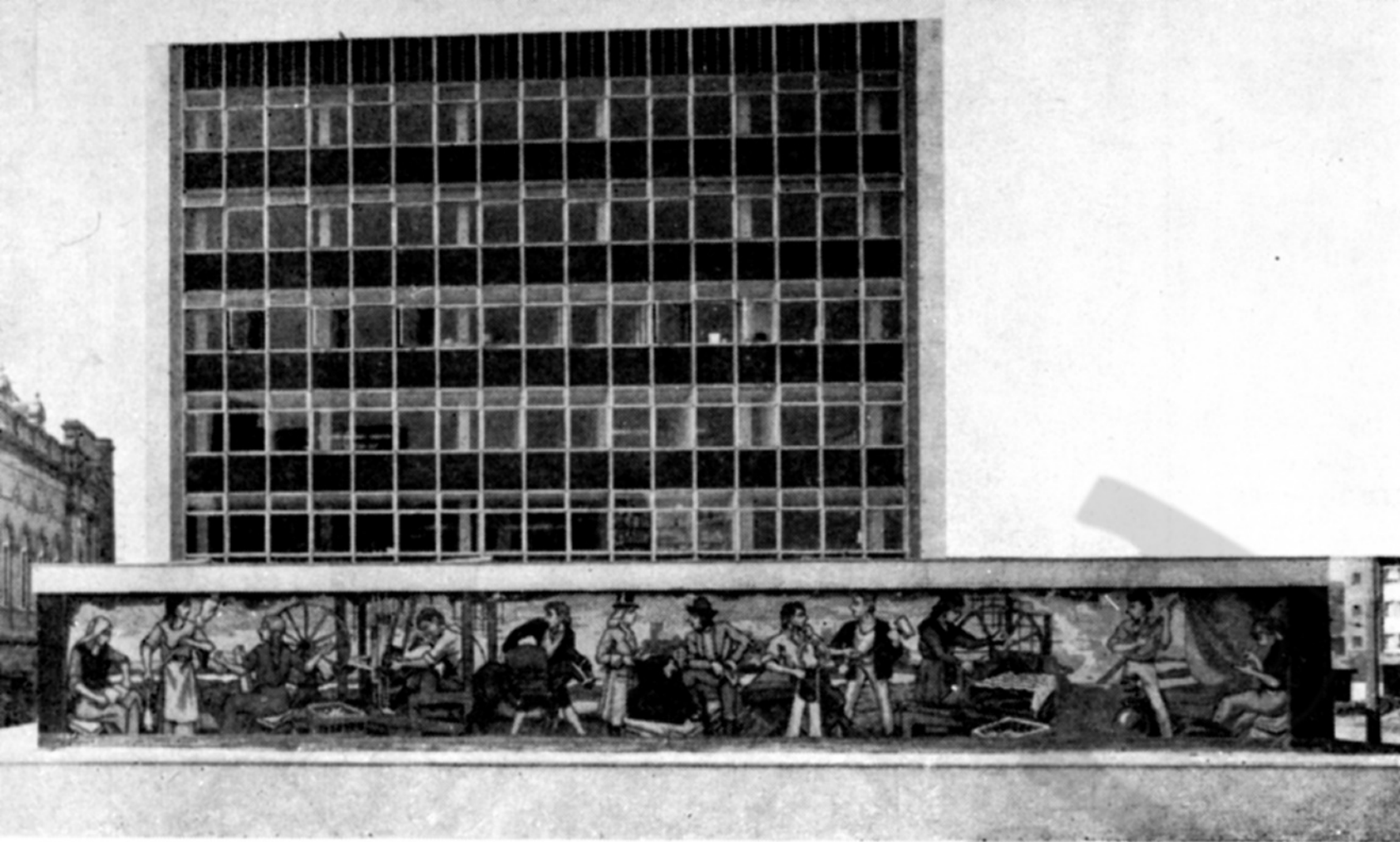
As Maintainers of all Corporation property including houses, schools, public buildings, either by the Department's own direct labour force, or by tendered contract.

As Developers themselves, or by the encouragement of and participation through ground rents in, projects carried out by private developers.

The scale of operation in these fields is considerable. In recent times on behalf of the Waterworks Committee, the Department purchased land for the great Scammonden Reservoir with its unique motorway embankment, requiring 450 acres. 19 purchase transactions, and 98 negotiations for way-leaves and pipelines were carried out. The new Inner Ring Road, under construction by the Highways Committee, involved an even greater number of separate negotiations for the hundreds of properties and pieces of land required. Many of these transactions were of considerable complexity and because it is Huddersfield Corporation policy to carry out such schemes with minimum hardship to those involved, much time was spent and patience exercised in trying to help people affected, by finding them alternative accommodation when possible.

Before a peg can be driven or a pick swung in such a road widening scheme, the Estate Department has to come to terms with literally hundreds of people who live or trade on the route.

A recent example of a service provided by the Department has been the very large task of assessing "Fair Rents" as required by the controversial, but legally obligatory new Rent Act, for 12,000 individual houses.



CENTRAL AREA DEVELOPMENT

The Ramsden Street end of the Phase I. block shewing mosaic mural which depicts cloth making prior to the Industrial Revolution. The design is by a local artist, Harold Blackburn.

CENTRAL AREA RE-DEVELOPMENT

Possibly the biggest ever of all Huddersfield projects is the Central Area Shopping Precinct Redevelopment by Ravensoft; originally and still best known as the Murrayfield Scheme.

After nine years this great project is now in its fourth and final phase. The scheme involves the block of property on New Street, backing on the Town Hall as phase I; the new Market Hall, with shops facing the Library and the piazza between them as phase II; the new shop block on the Old Market site phase III; and the rebuilding of the west side of Queen Street as phase IV, now under construction. This development, plus the concurrent Hammerson Development between New Street and Albion Street, covers sixteen acres. It is interesting to note that it all started as an Estate Committee project for the redevelopment of property they controlled in phase I. In the interest of historical accuracy and to ensure that credit is given where it is rightly due, it must be recorded that the original limited project, to rebuild the block between Ramsden Street and Princess Street, was expanded into the ten times bigger comprehensive redevelopment, largely due to the vision of the Estate Manager, William R. Birks, who first suggested the big redevelopment and later played a major part in bringing it to a successful conclusion. His imaginative outlook would have earned the approbation of that other William — the first Ramsden. One of the happiest aspects of this very considerable transaction is that it demonstrated that Local Government can operate outside the constriction of Party lines. The Council entrusted the complex confidential negotiations with the Development Company to three members belonging to the three different Parties of which they are now the leaders (Aldermen Graham, Hartley and the writer). It was a team effort in which each played an important part, with the one common objective of the good of the Town.

RATEPAYERS BENEFIT

The financial benefit to the Corporation results largely from the profitable leasing of Estate lands so wisely bought fifty two years ago, a benefit estimated to be of the order of £50,000 per year initially and considerably more in later years.

ELECTRICITY SHOWROOMS Market Street.

Designed and built by the Estate Department for the Corporation, it was "taken over" by the Y.E.B. on nationalisation. Bought back in 1972, it is again an Estate property.



THE HEDGE AGAINST INFLATION

The Murrayfield Agreement introduced a new principle into local leasing practice, a major break-through which for the first time overcame the defect in the traditional long lease system referred to on page seven. Into the lease was introduced a new clause, providing for review at intervals during the currency of the lease, of the ground rent payable, thus giving to the Corporation what everyone seeks but does not always find, a cover against inflation. This provision, now not uncommon, which is embodied in all Corporation granted leases of land for commercial and industrial development was then novel; we knew of none similar at the time. Not for the first time, Huddersfield was in the van of progress.

A GRAND FINALE ?

Perhaps the last big transaction, (of more than a quarter million pounds) the present Estate management will undertake is, very appropriately, a land deal. Taking over and completing what the short-lived Land Commission had only just begun, the Estate staff successfully carried out the difficult exercise of bringing together a number of adjoining land owners in Netherton, with their separate and different interests, and persuading them to agree to a joint sale of their lands to the Corporation. Together these lands can be planned to make a good housing development, separately they could not be.

In the disposal of the 53 acres so obtained, at a low price by taking a minimum profit, the Corporation is making a deliberate and specific contribution towards steadying new house prices. The Corporation's procedure has since been advocated by the Government as a desirable local authority function.

It is intended that the several building firms who will individually develop parts of the area shall reflect the reasonable price of the land in lower prices of the houses they build than would be possible without the good offices of the Corporation to keep prices down.



HUDDERSFIELD STATION

Considered by some to be the most handsome station of its period. It was bought by the Corporation in Centenary Year, 1968, to ensure its preservation. Now part of Huddersfield's Estate.

THE VERDICT

In April 1974 another chapter in the history of the Ramsden Estate will close. Once again it will come "under new management." The trusteeship held by Huddersfield Corporation for 54 years will pass to the new larger local Authority, Metropolitan District 6D, the name of which is still undecided as this is written. What will posterity say of the stewardship of Huddersfield Council ? — what would the first William Ramsden say ? The writer is too near and too much identified with the Estate to venture an opinion, but hopes that the verdict will be as Wilfrid Dawson said of their Ramsden predecessors, "they were good landlords."

WHAT OF THE FUTURE ?

The saying that "things are not as good as they used to be" can be appropriately juxtaposed with "there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it," and though it is a common characteristic in man to assume that others may be less well motivated and less likely to do a job as well as they, history doesn't support that smug assumption. Undoubtedly District 6D will inherit from Huddersfield a very valuable asset in the Ramsden Estate and a corresponding great responsibility, but there is no well founded reason to fear that the members representing the electors of 6D will fail to cherish, nurture and use well that asset, providing they are aware of it.

Huddersfield elected members will no doubt ensure that they are.

Since the first printing of this booklet it has been proposed that District 6D should be named 'Kirklees'.

ESTATE FACTS AND FIGURES

Properties and 4,300 acres bought for £1,300,000 in 1920

Total cost with expenses £1,330,459

Estate Income Under Ramsden		Corporation Estate Income	
In 1769	£3,654	In 1920 —	£65,000
1869	£42,331	1948 —	£107,000
1919	£63,810	1958 —	£142,000
		1965 —	£238,000
		1972 —	£312,000
		1973 —	£350,000 (Estimate)
Corporation Yearly Profit or Loss on Estate		The remarkable progress in recent years owes much to the change in leasing policy adopted in the past fifteen years	
In 1921	deficit £30,000		
1924	account balanced		
1926	surplus £6,400		
1937	surplus £13,800		
1972	surplus £146,245		

IN 1972, AFTER 52 YEARS, THE ESTATE IS DEBT FREE

During this period the revenue from the Estate has:—

1. **Paid all interest charges on the outstanding debt**
2. **Repaid the loan principal of £1,300,000**
3. **Made contributions to the Rate Fund of over £1,000,000**
4. **Financed capital expenditure approaching £500,000**

In brief it has "bought itself" and made a profit of £1,500,000

LEASING STATISTICS

Long Term				Short Term Lettings	
999 year leases granted	9700			Shops	201
2000 " " "	70			Factories	74
99 " " "	253			Farms	41
				Others	2046
New leases per year average	102			Garage sites	2121

THE ESTATE & PROPERTY MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

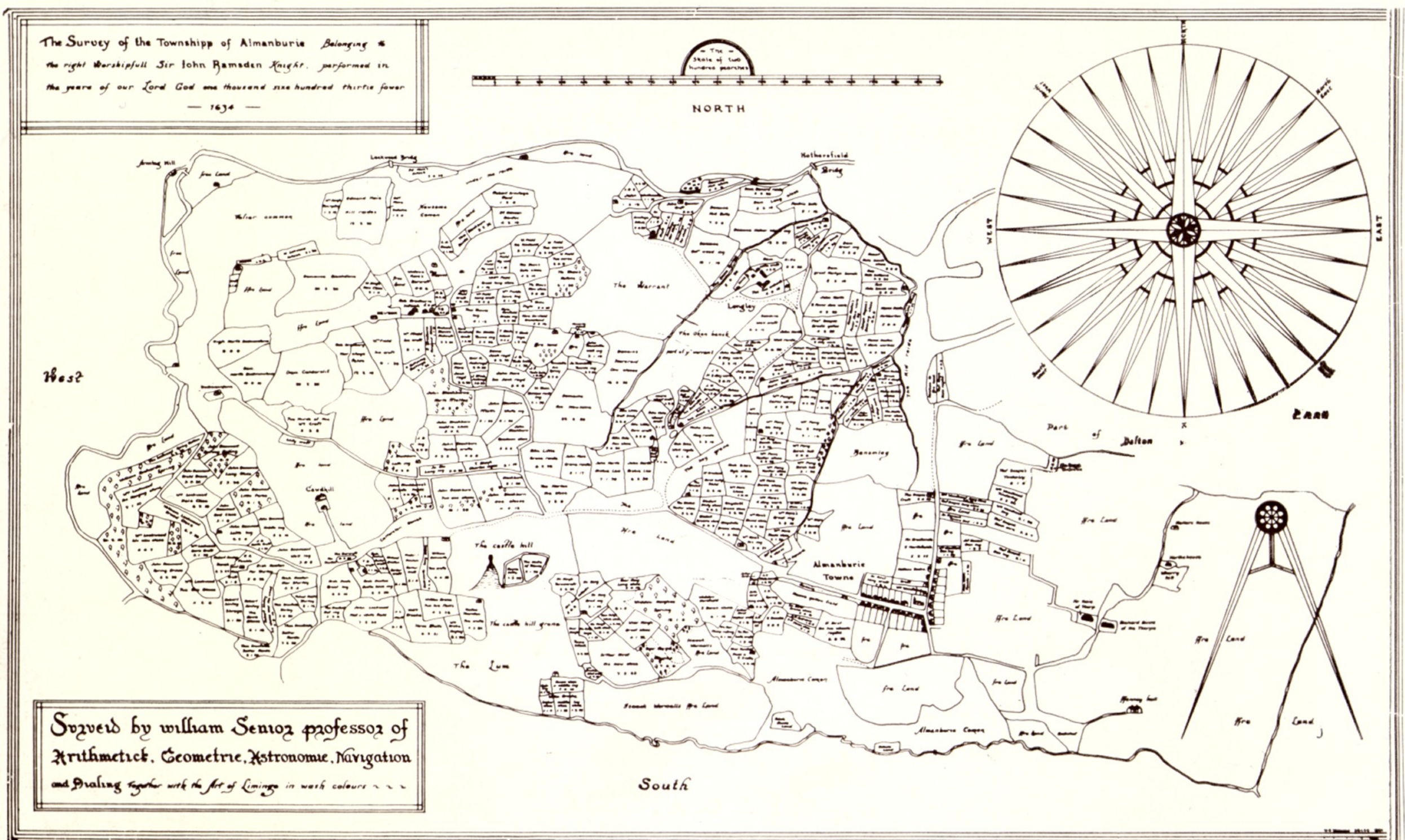
The great increase in the scope, responsibility and work undertaken by the Department, which started with a staff of ten in 1920, is indicated by these 1972 figures.

Professional, administrative and clerical staff employees, 94. Caretakers, etc., 164.

Direct labour employees, craftsmen, drivers, storekeepers etc., approaching 200.

The annual expenditure on the repair, maintenance and improvement of 13,500 dwellings, 41 farms, 64 schools, College of Technology, Polytechnic, Town Hall, Market Hall, Civic Centre, Welfare Homes, etc., a total of 123 public buildings is now about £1,000,000.

The value of the property serviced by the Department is now not less than £50,000,000.



SURVEY OF THE TOWNSHIP OF ALMANBURIE IN 1634 by William Senior

The earliest known map of any part of the Borough of Huddersfield. Produced for Sir John Ramsden, Kt., to shew the occupancy of his Manor lands in Almondbury, which he had purchased from the Crown in 1627 for £467-11-1 $\frac{3}{4}$

The original of this Estate plan disappeared from the Estate Office at the time of the Corporation purchase in 1920.

The reproduction of the plan is due to the research of Mr. Harold Taylor, Estate Manager and the draughtsmanship of the Building Surveyor, Mr. W. B. Woodhead, in 1951.

This is a faithful reconstruction from a photograph of the old plan, in one of the Estate albums of photographs, taken about 1880, and a tracing of the plan which exists in Almondbury Church.

The information concerning the names of tenants and field areas is confirmed by a book of records which fortunately survives.

Though it is reasonable to surmise that Ramsden would have at the same time, a similar plan of his Huddersfield Manor, none is known until 1716.