

Rope-making in Gateshead

Many industries on Tyneside needed rope - coal mining and shipbuilding for example-- and a rope-making industry started in Gateshead to cater for the demand. As early as 1691 a ropery was set up in Hillgate followed in 1795 by a more famous establishment at the Saltmeadows which in due course became known as David Haggie and Son. David Haggie had three sons-David and Peter, who became well-known in the public life of Gateshead, and Robert, who left to form his own firm at Willington Quay. In 1854 the Liverpool and Manchester Railway Company ordered a rope three miles long, eight inches in circumference and weighing thirteen tons. When completed, eighteen horses were unable to move the rope which had to be taken up river to Redheugh to the railway line.

Wire rope had been made for some years in a converted sawmill but a fire destroyed these premises in 1873 and a new building was constructed. Another fire in 1884 burnt down the hemp rope works and production concentrated on wire ropes. The firm expanded and in 1900 converted to electrical power. Production rose, especially during the First World War, when women were employed. They were known as 'Haggie's Angels' and were noted for their bad language. In 1926 the firm joined the British Ropes combine.

The other main rope manufacturer was Dixon, Corbitt and R. S. Newall and Co. Ltd. These were originally two separate firms with premises on either side of the river Team, Newall's was on the west bank. Both were established at the Teams in 1840 and worked together for many years before amalgamation in 1887. One of their famous exploits concerned Cleopatra's Needle, Newall's supplied the wire rope and Dixon, Corbitt the steel caisson which were used to tow the obelisk to London from Egypt by sea. Newall's were also famous for the underwater cables which they manufactured and later laid. Examples were the Dover to Calais cable in 1850-51 and, more important, from Suez to Karachi in 1859. The amalgamated concern was taken over by the Willington Haggie firm and in 1959 became part of the British Ropes Group.



Interior of Blackfell rope haulage (before conversion), Bowes Railway

From *A Short History of Gateshead* by I C Carlton