



The “Diggings” or Australian Gold Rush – see “Rail to Ruin”

Number Thirty-Three

March 2026

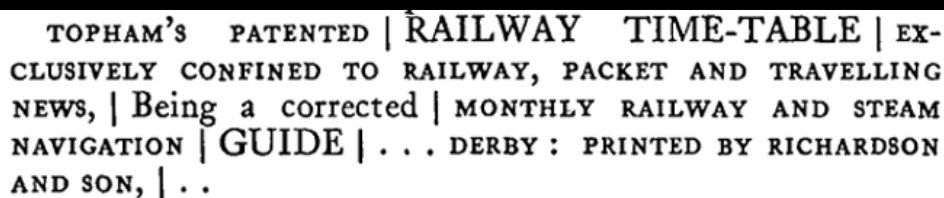
www.rdht.org.uk

Rail to Ruin

Thomas Topham, born in Ripley around 1799, first appears as a grocer and tallow chandler (or candle-maker) but by 1831 he was listed as a cotton manufacturer. By 1835, or possibly earlier, his factory occupied the site on Derby Road, eventually stretching down Crossley Street to Wellington Street. It must have been fairly small initially but continued to expand, producing candle wicks and also producing its own gas for lighting as well as enough to light some of the town's streets.

In 1845, he was presented with silver salver inscribed with the words: "Presented to Thomas Topham, Esq, by the inhabitants of Ripley, to express their sense of benefit he has conferred on them by lighting the town with gas. 1845"

In 1845 he tried a new venture: a new way of setting out railway timetables using red and black ink and listing "up" and "down" trains. He patented this layout in January 1848 and shortly afterwards published "Topham's Patented Railway Time-Table".

The image shows the title page of a book titled "TOPHAM'S PATENTED RAILWAY TIME-TABLE". The text is arranged in a formal, centered layout with vertical bars separating the title from the descriptive text. The title is in a large, bold, serif font. Below it, the text "EXCLUSIVELY CONFINED TO RAILWAY, PACKET AND TRAVELLING NEWS," is followed by "Being a corrected" in a smaller font, then "MONTHLY RAILWAY AND STEAM NAVIGATION | GUIDE | . . . DERBY : PRINTED BY RICHARDSON AND SON, | . .".

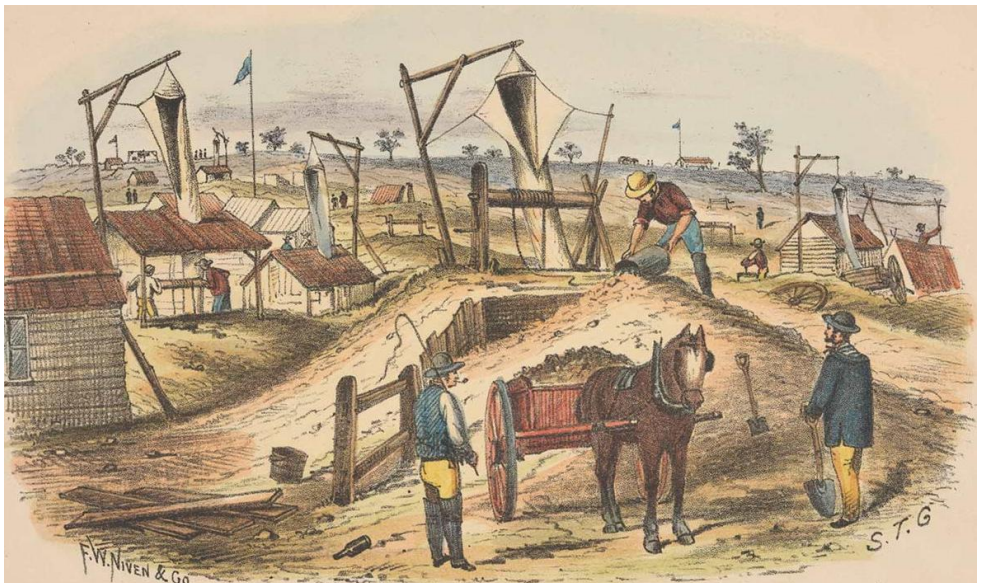
TOPHAM'S PATENTED | RAILWAY TIME-TABLE | EX-
CLUSIVELY CONFINED TO RAILWAY, PACKET AND TRAVELLING
NEWS, | Being a corrected | MONTHLY RAILWAY AND STEAM
NAVIGATION | GUIDE | . . . DERBY : PRINTED BY RICHARDSON
AND SON, | . .

It was not a success; although published several times over the years 1848-1849 (price 6d), it could not compete with the much more comprehensive and well-established Bradshaw's Guide. In August 1852, he was declared bankrupt owing his printers £936 (at least £75000 in today's money).

By October that year, the bankruptcy was proved in his absence, and he was declared outlaw, the penalty for not appearing being transportation to Australia for 7 years. Ironically, he had already taken his family and sailed for Australia, to the “Diggings”, or the Gold Rush, clearly hoping to make some fast cash.

It was at this point that James Crossley took over the factory, lasting until 1903.

Whether Topham made money in the Gold Rush seems unlikely, but what we do know is that he stayed in Australia, dying in 1875 in Burwood, New South Wales aged 76.



The “Diggings” – The Australian Gold Rush

BIT Update

A Meeting has been held between Lindsey Farnsworth MP, Claire Spencer on behalf of Claire Ward East Midlands mayor and leader of East Midlands Combined Authority (EMCCA), Heaton's, site agents for the site owners Aquarius, Amber Valley Planning and Regeneration Officers and Councillor Chris Emmas-Williams, leader of Amber Valley Borough Council.

The site agent presented a re-estimate of the cost of the work to restore the site which, not surprisingly, was significantly more than the cost quoted in the original planning application, which has now lapsed.

EMCCA needs to receive 'Established Status' before funding can be applied for under the 'Brownfield funding Scheme'. Established Status has been applied for and is expected to be received this by the summer.

Another Meeting is scheduled for March 2026

Heritage Fair

The third annual History Fair will be held on Saturday 27th June from 10am-3pm in the Riddings Community Centre, West Street, Riddings, DE55 4EW.

Entry is free and up to 15 local heritage groups will attend, including RDHT.

There will be short talks by some groups, books and products for sale and refreshments available.

Pentrich Revolution Group

The Pentrich Revolution Group are putting on an exhibition in Aqueduct Cottage, by the Cromford Canal for five days starting on 22nd May. The exhibition will be open from 10am to 3pm and entry is free.

FCC Donation

The archivist of the Friends of Cromford Canal, Hugh Potter, reports that a group member has recently been given a collection of 'stereo' cards of the locality, apparently taken by a Ripley photographer.

Hugh's suspicion about the Ripley location is that all the cards are labelled with stickers that originate from Melbourne Bros, Grocers & Wine Merchants, Greenwich, Ripley - see below. His theory is that the photographer had his shop nearby and acquired his labels from his neighbour.

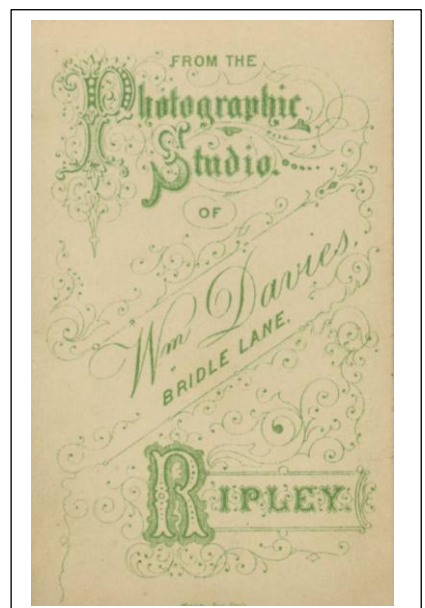
Does this ring any bells with any members? We have no idea of the name of the photographer unfortunately, but suspect there must be many other similar cards around.



We suspect that the photographer may have been William Davies, who at one time lived and worked from Bridle Lane.

Davies was a housing agent for the Butterley Company, but also seems to have been a photographer, specialising in cartes de visite, small photos that were very popular in the early days of photography.

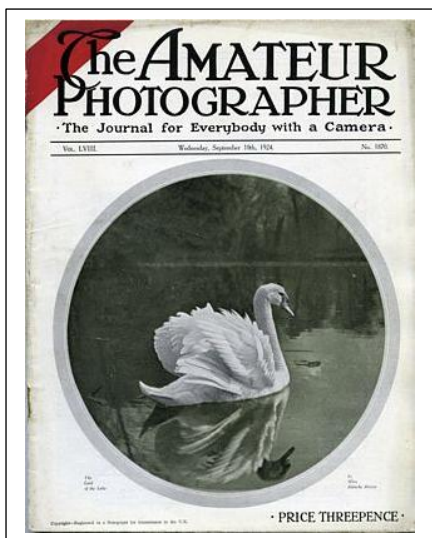
Much of his work seems to have been done by his daughter Bertha.



John Marshall's Silent Witness

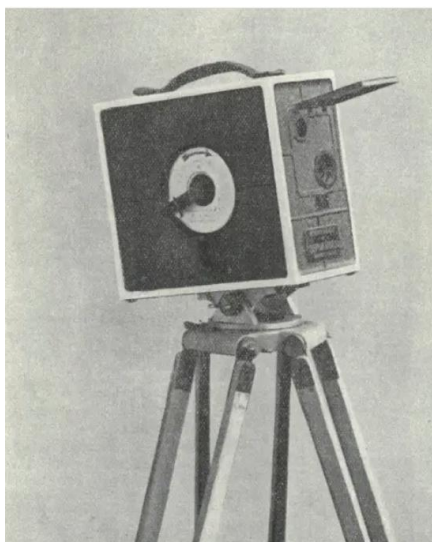
If you had visited the Hippodrome cinema a hundred or so years ago, you might have seen not just Charlie Chaplin or Jackie Coogan, but also a short silent film about Ripley, showing places and people you knew well.

They were John Marshall's own films, more proof if it were needed of his entrepreneurial spirit, which had already led him to build the Hippodrome, open a working mens' hostel and, of course, a zoo.



But movie film-making equipment was another level: it was expensive and tricky to handle, a hand-cranked camera using highly inflammable nitrate film. To be useful in the cinema, the film had to be processed quickly and shown whilst its subject was still in recent memory, usually withing a week or so. In 2011, some of the films were found, stored in biscuit tins, in the home of Marshall's grand-daughter Valerie.

It can't have been easy: he probably knew the basics of photography from his father Richard who had had, among other businesses, produced cartes de visite, small cheap photographs, in Clay Cross. There were also magazines like Amateur Photographer, which John might well have studied. He produced his own photographs, many of which still survive.



Many were too decomposed to be recoverable, but a few were passed to MACE, the Media Archive for Central England, and a couple can be found on their website.

There are flickering black-and-white images of children in Crossley Park, Sunday Schools parading through the streets, the opening of the War Memorial in 1923 and the factory fire that destroyed Ripley Manufacturing Company the same year.

They bear witness to a different world and beg the question: what more might we have seen of the town a hundred years ago if other films had survived?

HIPPODROME, RIPLEY.



*The Hippodrome programme for
August 1923*

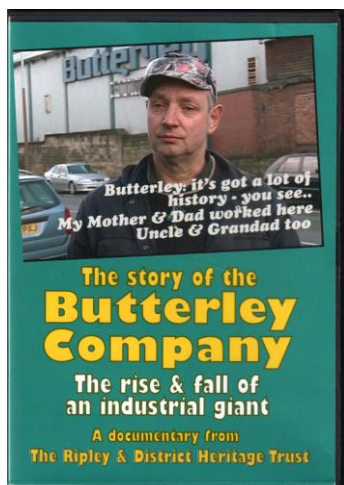
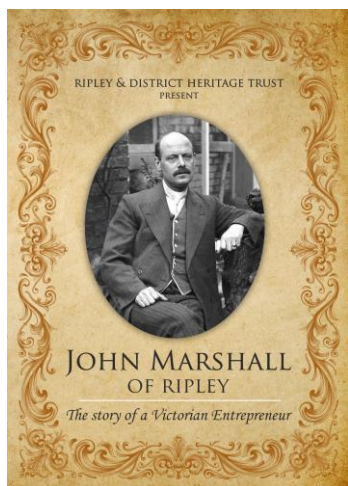
*A still from
one of the
films*



Youtube

Both our DVDs, *The Story of the Butterley Company : The Rise and fall of an Industrial Giant* and *John Marshall of Ripley : The Story of a Victorian Entrepreneur* are now on Youtube. It's just a matter of searching for them, using the full title.

There are links to the Youtube versions on our website, and we also have a few physical DVDs for sale.



Down Your Way

We recently revisited the recording of BBC's *Down Your Way* programme, which visited Ripley on April 23rd 1963. Franklin Engleman interviewed nine people (8 men and 1 woman) and played the music of their choice.

Those interviewed were: Harold Cope, miner and world champion nail breaker, Ron Statham, tennis coach, Albert Hawkins, maker of Tommy Dod rock Mr Partridge, Chief Chemist, Stephenson's Dye Works, Ambergate, Ian Lees, Manager, Butterley, Arthur "Degge" Bates, pig and mink farmer, Maureen Blant, Gold D of E Award holder and Michael White, go-kart champion.

It was striking how brisk (not to say blunt) the interviewing style was, and how little was said about the people themselves.