

## Thomas Seager Ironfounder

Around the year 1882, a millwright from Woolwich Arsenal came to Faversham to start his own business on the old site at the Brents. The largest casting made in those times was a large basin shaped container of about a ton in weight for the powder mills. To achieve this a large pit had to be dug and the bottom half bricked and covered with steel plates. This was to facilitate the moulding, with the pattern actually buried in the sand floor. This pit remained there until the foundry was moved in 1955, and had to be periodically pumped out due to water seeping through from the creek.

The original Thomas Seager was succeeded by one of his sons, also Thomas and the business now encompassed the production of agricultural machine parts, shipbuilding, local council requirements and engineering requirements. Among the customers regularly ordering supplies were:

Faversham Town Council, for lamp posts, gully gratings, pavement channels (still to be seen in the town,) Rammer heads for use in road repairs etc.

Henry S Jett & Co, for change wheels for seed drills, share points for ploughs, roller rings for field rolling and skidpans for house and steam vehicles. These ranged from about 2 inches wide tyre fitting to 8 inches wide.

Seamarks of West Street purchased both iron and brass castings for the engineering trade.

James Pollock and Sons were supplied with castings for their lighters, namely pumps, bollards, cleats, windlass bits and bulkhead steps. On the larger vessels their requirements including hawse pipe rings and hawse pipes.

The local brickfields were also supplied with a small amount of castings, barrow wheels and cleats and in the early days a few special brick moulds. All the above articles were produced by the foundry men, but Tom Seager came into his own with the production of items for the following: F & H Cremer's barge fleet who were supplied with windlasses, winches, capstans and pumps, as was the firm of F.J. Everard & Sons of Greenwich, who also bought steering gears for their fleet. All the barge fittings were produced entirely at the Brents, starting with the castings and finished with the machining by Tom Seager himself. In this respect the man was an absolute marvel as there was never a drawing to work to, for all measurements were kept in his memory bank and any spare parts supplied at a later date would be sure to fit. Getting back to the man himself, he was a gentle giant, able to use his 4lb hammer (which is still in my possession today) cutting keyways in very hard castings at one minute, and able to remove a speck of dust from a person's eye with a steel scribe afterwards with absolute confidence. By the way, his body weight was around the 20 stone mark and two of us were able to get into his waistcoat and still leave room for a quart loaf. All the equipment in the way of moulding boxes was 'home made' as were some of the patterns, one instance being the railings around Faversham Cemetery. Unfortunately these are no longer in existence as they were taken to aid the war effort but the special moulding boxes were in use long after the railings ceased to exist.

I joined the foundry on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 1930 (a Monday) and Tom was celebrating his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday on 1<sup>st</sup> March, one day after my 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. In the 1932 slump the foundry had to close for a weeks due to lack of work and there were tears in Tom's eyes as we were told of this. There were many ups and downs in the years that followed, until during the war we were taken over by J. Pollock & Sons mainly for the production of castings for their shipyard and under the manager Mr W. Topping. This state continued until the great freeze up in February 1947 when the business was sold to C. F Doyle Ltd and work was resumed on 10<sup>th</sup> March under the new manager Mr H. Bullock. From then on circumstances altered considerably, as gradually machinery was introduced to do a lot of production that was made by hand in the old conventional manner. Gradually the old drills and lathes were removed and moulding floor space increased as the production of castings for C.F. Doyle machinery increased (moulding machines.) Several years later we transferred to a building at the back of Weston Works, production still on the increase as was also the manpower. It was when we occupied this site that I was able to produce the signs one sees on entering the town, using a wooden moulding box instead of the usual metal one. Finally we moved to the Oare site in March 1964 when even greater space was available for even bigger production. By this time, Mr John Doyle was in command and was very energetic in getting the best available for the best production. More machinery was added in all departments and a second cupola which made for a much easier working condition. The foundry has since been sold again to a company of which I know nothing, so will close with all the best to the Faversham Society.

E.A. Harrison

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Footnote

As the size of the foundry increased and more machinery introduced, so also did the technology in all respects. For instance, where, in the old days scrap iron in the form of old stoves, gutters and saucepans together with a small amount of pig iron had to be carried by hand up some steps to the cupola loading platform in guessed quantities, there is now a system of weighing each consistent of the required mixture for a particular grade into a skip which is then raised mechanically and tipped into the cupola on to the coke bed. Thus having progressed from what some of the old machinists used to call 'Seager's glass and old saucepans iron' to different grades of metal produced today, i.e. grades 14 – 26 and now S.G. (Spherical Graphite.) All this for the better machining quality and pressure tight castings.

To add two more sayings of Tom Seager:

'I was never there but once' and 'Faversham is surrounded by 'C' (supposedly to sound like sea,) namely Cremer, Chambers, Cornfoot and Creek.'