

A Roundhay Ironfounder, Frederick Dyson (1847-1912) and his work.

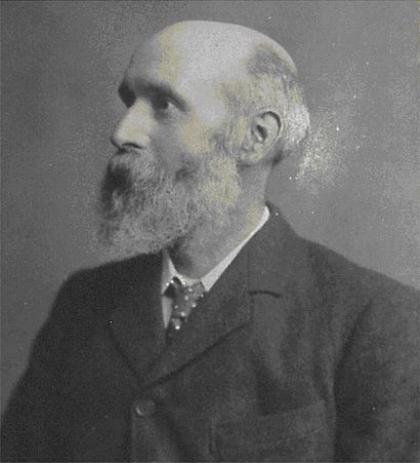
© By Tony Dyson and Graham Hills

Observant residents of the Roundhay-Moortown district will have noticed a number of park-type benches, many located on busy street pavements. With their bright red and green paint and ironwork topped by extravagant backwards curlicues they are hard to overlook. Several bear the embossed name of the manufacturer: 'Fred^k Dyson & Sons Ltd/East Street, Leeds'.

Examples are to be seen at Gledhow Primary School, Lidgett Lane; Chapeltown Park Bowling Green; Chapel Allerton Primary School; Stonegate and Harrogate Roads roundabout, Moortown; Street Lane (Sir Thomas Osborne pub); 'Moortown Corner', Harrogate Road; and (further west) outside Lawnswood cemetery. Numerous others can be seen further afield, in variable condition, at least one of them with its curlicues broken off. Sometimes a single seat combines a Dyson bench end with one produced by another of the other ironfounders who supplied them, Barber Brothers of Leeds and Barker of Harrogate being the commonest. All three firms conformed to a pattern laid down by the town council, each of them having presumably competed for the design.

Members of Frederick's close family were once prominent Leeds cornmillers and flour dealers of Tenter Lane, Swinegate, and Water Lane across the river, who had first arrived in the Leeds area in the 1810s. By his teens, however, his father John's once-thriving business was failing, and it became clear that the days of small-scale milling in a rapidly growing city were coming to an end. Equipped with a commercial grounding at the technical section of Leeds Grammar School, Frederick had an extraordinary stroke of good luck around the age of twenty. His mother's brother in law, the ironfounder James Wilkinson, left Swinegate and Leeds in 1868 to run a hotel near Southport on the Lancashire coast, opening the way for the young Frederick to take over the firm.

Frederick began operations at Peel Foundry with a couple of partnerships, eventually emerging under his own colours at Crown Point Foundry, East Street in 1882. A final move took him to Steander Foundry, further along the street, in 1886-87, while still retaining



**Frederick Dyson
(1847-1912)**



**Queen's Square, Leeds
(photograph Graham Hills)**



**Bench, Gledhow Primary
School, Lidgett Lane
(photograph Graham Hills)**



**Coal Shute Cover at Gledhow
House, Gledhow Lane
(photograph Graham Hills)**

offices and showroom in Swinegate. The business flourished, and in the late 1880s Frederick and his large family moved from Bramley, to Knowsthorpe House, an imposing Georgian mansion in Knostrop Lane.

He received highly favourable coverage in *The Century's Progress: Yorkshire* (1893), in effect a sizeable collection of prospectuses for the county's industrial and commercial concerns. The firm is known,' declared *The Century's Progress*, 'for the superior castings turned out for millwrights and engineers, and leading lines are made of pillars, girders, stable fittings, ranges, register stoves, shams and mantel shams, rainwater goods, set-pots and pans, gates and railings, &c.' A few years ago a handsome example of one of his kitchen ranges featured briefly in a BBC film about the nineteenth-century development of Leeds.

The Century's Progress, however, failed to mention his work for Leeds town council. This must have represented a sizeable part of the business, and began with the supply of lamp posts. The town's Lamps & Lighting Committee accepted his tender for the provision of standards for a three-year period in March 1889. Embossed simply 'Fred^k Dyson Leeds,' these survive locally at St Edmund's churchyard, Roundhay; St Matthew's churchyard, Chapel Allerton (three examples); and Nunroyd Avenue/Harrogate Road, so heavily painted in green that the lettering is almost obscured. Numerous more survive as garden ornaments, as in Harrogate Road, Moor Allerton, and were presumably acquired after gas street lighting was replaced by electricity in the 1950s.

But by far the best examples are to be seen in Queen's Square, central Leeds, where two of five surviving posts bear Frederick's trademark and, remarkably, are still lit by gas. Eight or nine others can be seen in the car park of the Leeds Parkway Hotel near Golden Acre Park, some closest to the road retaining their lighting cases and trademarked 'Fred^k Dyson & Sons East Street Leeds.' These must be of a later vintage than 1889 since the three sons in question, John, Arthur and Frederick, were only formally associated with the business from 1903. Lamp posts with '& Sons' will therefore be of later date, and so will the bench ends we started out with. Also of post-1903 date, another of his lines for domestic customers was coal shute

covers, three of which can be seen in the boundary wall of Gledhow House, Gledhow Lane, and another, of slightly different design, behind Leeds Town Hall at the Victoria Hotel.

In the late 1890s Frederick left Knowsthorpe for a newly built house, 5 Wedgewood Drive, Roundhay. The house still stands, and its subsequent owners have kept the house name, 'Esholt', though they must often have wondered about its origin. Esholt Hall was the ancestral home of the Stansfields, lords of the manors of Esholt and Yeadon, and a family with which Frederick's mother in law, who shared the same maiden name, fondly and quite unjustifiably identified herself. The Dysons of the day (and later) showed no interest at all in their own history but battered on to this illustrious but delusory connection, evidently seeing in it some mitigation of their background in trade; a splendid example of the late Victorian *nouveau-riche* mindset.

In the first decade of the last century, several of Frederick's sons, and daughters, came to live in the same area as their father, at Street Lane, St Matthew's Walk, Sandhill Lane, Halcyon Hill and Chapeltown Road. So did some of his grandchildren, up to at least the 1950s.

His obituaries testify to Frederick's popularity and emphasise his choral interests. A brief entry for him in *Yorkshire in the twentieth century: contemporary biographies*, dating from c.1902, notes that he was one of the founders of the Leeds Choral Union and a member of the choir of St John's, Roundhay, as well as at St Peter's, Bramley (where he was buried). He was listed among almost 100 basses by the programme for a performance of *The Messiah* given on 28 December 1898 at the Town Hall.

Widowed in 1903 and suffering a severe stroke in 1910, Frederick sold 'Esholt' the following year and moved to his son Frederick's home at Malvern Villas, Shadwell. He died in May 1912.

The firm passed to his three sons and then to their sons, and survived until 1970 when John Earle Dyson, Frederick's great grandson, finally closed it down.