

# MALTON & NORTON HERITAGE

## Fitch & Co – Drapers, House Furnishers etc



### Introduction

Fitch & Co dominated the lower side of the Market place. James Fitch, the founder, died on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1896. He had built a large and successful business. The growing extent of this can be seen in the 1871, 1881 and 1891 censuses where we see numerous apprentices and assistants employed in the business. The following is based on an article which appeared in the Yorkshire Gazette, 18 November 1911 which also gives information on the succession of businesses on the lower side of the Market place:

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The gradual development of the firm of Messrs. Fitch and Co. makes an interesting story. Everybody in this district is acquainted with the headquarters of the firm at Nos. 16-24, Market-place, Malton, where a reputation has been gained for millinery, dresses, linen, silks, and all that can be included in the term general drapery, as well as carpets, linoleum, and all kinds of household furniture. The business, as it now exists, is an amalgamation of what were originally three separate establishments.

One of these was founded by the late Mr. James Fitch at 16 and 18, Market-place, which premises had been rebuilt by the late Mr. Jefferson, chemist, who had the business now carried on by Mr. James Buckle. A Mr. Foster had previously occupied those shops as a hatter and mercer, but he, with his

family, emigrated to the United States, and Mr. Fitch took over his business. The need of increased accommodation was soon recognised by Mr. Fitch, and he had to extend the shop. As the business still continued to grow rapidly, enlargements had repeatedly to be made, and large showrooms were added.

What is now the carpet and linoleum shop was originally used in the old-fashioned way as a combined drapery and grocery establishment, the occupier being Mr. Clegg. At that time one half of the shop was utilised for groceries and the other half for drapery goods. Later on, a very successful drapery business was carried on here by the late Mr. Paul Hicks, after he had resigned an important position which he held under the late Mr. Peter

Robinson, Oxford st., London. Mr. Hicks, it will be remembered, died at West Park, York-rd., a few years ago. He was succeeded in the business by Mr. Goldthorpe, and he in turn by Mr. Barker, after which the shop and business were added to the already large establishment of Messrs. Fitch and Co., as the firm was now called.

The premises now used as the furniture shop were occupied for many years by the late Mr. Andrew Taylor, J.P., who carried on a very prosperous drapery business. On retiring, Mr. Taylor was succeeded by Mr. Newby, who, however, did not long retain the shop and it also was merged in the firm of Fitch and Co.

It is interesting to recall the fact that these premises were rebuilt by Mr. Andrew Taylor's grandfather in 1783, and after being occupied by him for some years passed to his son, and ultimately to Mr. Andrew Taylor. Thus for a great many years the name of Taylor was associated with the Market-place.

In the "good old days" nearly all tradesmen lived over their shops, and, consequently, in the rebuilding schemes already mentioned provision was made accordingly. Many of the rooms which are now stocked with furniture, were then occupied by the tradesman and his household. After Mr. Taylor's shop was acquired by Fitch and Co. extensive workshops were built in the rear, and

here cabinet making, joinery, upholstering, and polishing were carried on.

After the death of Mr. Fitch the business passed into the hands of Messrs. Hedley, Swan, and Co., who have a large establishment at Sunderland, but about twelve years ago Messrs. Marwood Brothers took the business and under their capable management it has further developed. In the season, between 50 and 60 workers are employed. Of late year the furniture removing part of the business has been enlarged, and the firm's pantehnicon vans have been practically all over the country.

Few, if any, towns of the size of Malton possess a business which has grown and extended on such a large scale, and it is quite unusual to find in a country district such a large and well-chosen variety of up-to-date general drapery, carpets, linoleum, and furniture as is to be seen in the shops and windows of Messrs. Fitch and Co. Messrs. Marwood Brothers have the advantage of being natives of the district, and are consequently fully conversant with the tastes and requirements of this customers. Proof of their successful methods in this direction is shown by the increasing number of clients who visit this establishment as each season comes round. Ladies who inspect the shops and showrooms cannot fail to be pleased with the excellent quality and variety of the goods exhibited.

Messrs. Fitch and Co. have a branch establishment in Burgate, Pickering.

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The Yorkshire Gazette ran a series of articles under the banner of Maltonians of Bygone Days which gave mini-biographies of various Maltonians. The following was published in the Yorkshire Gazette, 8th April 1911:

I knew Mr. Fitch when I was so small that my head barely reached to the top of the counter in his draper's shop. As if it were yesterday, I remember him coming forward to place a chair for my mother, and the low pitch of his voice inquiring what she would like to see. He was very deferential to customers, and had a genius for ascertaining quickly what they required. In this he was well backed by Mrs. Fitch and many of his assistants - especially Mr. Porry, whose sudden death I have never ceased to regret. Mrs Fitch's department was upstairs, and surely there never was a stronger combination of forces in a country establishment than those Fitch & Co

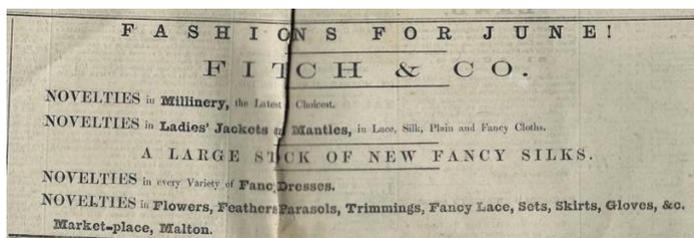
existing in the days when Mr. and Mrs Fitch and the latter's sister attended to the requirements of those multitudinous customers who patronised the shop in the Market-place. I was particularly impressed by Mr. Fitch's resourcefulness when "Mother's Meeting" goods were being bought every year; and at the annual sale he was prince of shop keepers. Indeed I have never quite understood why he did not blossom out into a North-country Whiteley or Selfridge. Whilst Mr. Fitch was not a public man in the ordinary sense, he was the most prominent lay member of the Congregational Church in Malton - he was treasurer and deacon for about 30 years -

and his name still draws attention to the popular single-day excursions into regions far removed from our own town. Mr. Fitch and his family continued their support of the Saville-st. congregation through the days when successively, Messrs. Clarke, Milner, Hartley, Scurrah, and Fox administered there. Mr. Young had just entered upon his pastorate when Mr. Fitch's death occurred. It is rarely that every good point is found existing in one personality. Mr. Fitch's connection with Congregationalism would have been even more fruitful than it was if he had felt able to come forward as helpfully on the spiritual as on the social side, but on this matter none of us wishes or is qualified to occupy the position of judge. Mr. Fitch's open, pleasant ways and executive ability were best shown in the day

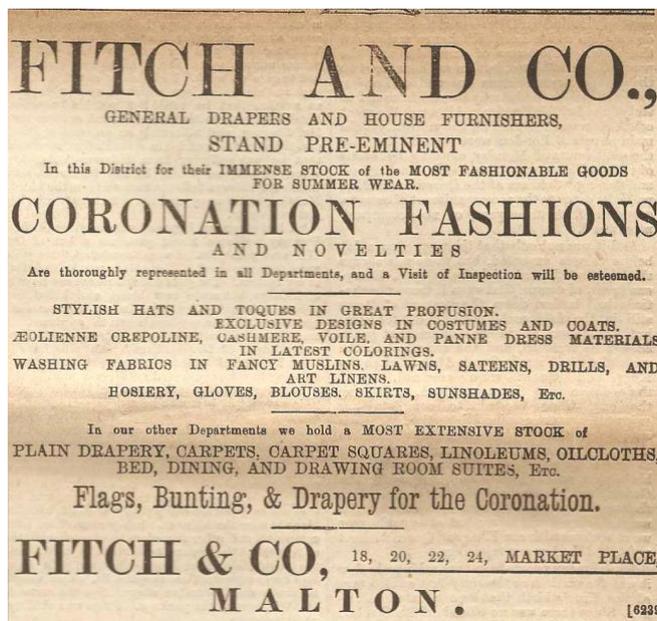
excursion scheme I have referred to. I myself once visited North Wales for a day, and still remember the long journey there and back; I regret to say that I have forgotten the glories of Conway Vale and of Bettwys-y-Coed, as seen on that special occasion! My idea of how best to enjoy myself has changed since then, but I cannot deny that a day trip, well carried out, as Mr. Fitch's always were, is an excellent arrangement, and many prove of distinct educational value to many people. Mr. Fitch died in the last hours of 1895, aged 52 years, his wife having passed away nine months previously. He left two sons, one of whom still resides in the neighbourhood. His business was eventually purchased by Messrs. Marwood, but still bears the magic name of Fitch.

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### Advertisements



*Malton Messenger, 4 June 1870*



*Yorkshire Gazette, 1901*