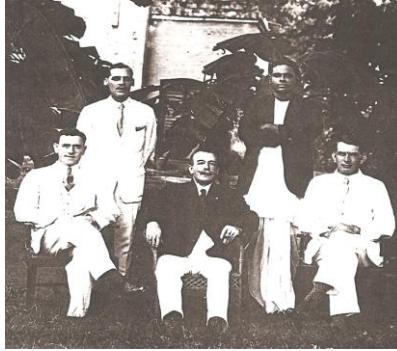


*Senior Managers of the East Indian Railway,  
with my grandfather seated in the middle  
and Lal Tata standing on his left*



Just as locomotives and guns from Gorton travelled the world so did its people. My grandfather became a steel inspector and moved on to India to become the Chief Engineer of the East Indian Railways. In a faded print of him, which my father – who was also born in Gorton but grew up in India – gave me, he is seated surrounded by his staff, one of whom, standing at his side, was a languid youth, whom my father remembered as Lal Tata, an apprentice who had come to learn about steel working and engineering.

This young man was from the family of Jamsetji Tata, the founder of the famous Tata dynasty. His ambition was to build India's own industries and steel works. To do this he scoured Europe and America for the latest technologies and finest engineers and his sons were trained to take forward his ambition.

Tata is now not only India's biggest and most respected manufacturer but also Britain's largest manufacturer, and the world's largest family business. Tata rescued our steel industry and automotive industry employing over 60,000 people in the UK. Now the future of Britain's steel industry hangs in the balance once again. But the original skills which made Tata great came, at least partly, from Gorton and via my grandfather who had learnt his skills there.

What Tata and Beyer have in common is their concern for their ordinary workers. Beyer-Peacock closed in 1966. The university which Beyer helped to fund still flourishes and he too was noted not only for his locomotives but for what his friend and principle of Owen's College, Professor Greenwood, called the "warm personal interest which he always showed in the growth and prosperity of the College."

Both men were philanthropists and both realized that business flourishes if ordinary people flourish; **that the world becomes a better place when it is better for everyone.** The ordinary people of Gorton have helped to shape the world we know, even if we don't always remember it. *You too can make a difference to make Gorton a better place and help to shape a better world.*

## HIDDEN CONNECTIONS FROM GORTON'S PAST

### *How Gorton shaped my family.... and the Modern World.*

*By Paul Kirkham*

History is about people, individual people. Some prefer to think history is shaped by ideas or economics or grand politics. But, ultimately, it is shaped by individuals – ordinary people and families.

We are all part of history and help to make it, often in unexpected ways and with unexpected consequences. In however modest a way everyone matters in history and what they help to create shapes the future. This can so easily be forgotten, overlooked or just ignored. I believe this often to be true of the people of Gorton.

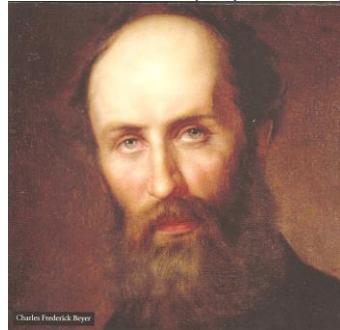
Gorton helped to shape our modern world and also my family history. In seeking to understand my family's past I find it is inextricably linked to the people of Gorton and what they made possible.

In 1866 a cattle plague swept through Cheshire which not only killed animals in their tens of thousands but it ruined my great-grandfather. So he did what numerous people before and after him have done – moved to the nearest big city, Manchester, with the dream of a better life. From country squire to city squatter, he settled in the then booming suburb of the industrial work shop of the world, Gorton.

*A naval field gun from Armstrong-Whitworth Admiralty Gunnery,  
Bessemer St. Gorton used during the Boer War.*



*Charles Frederick Beyer (1813-1876)*



From being flat featureless farmland Gorton had rapidly become a manufacturer's paradise of cheap, flat open spaces and low rates - ideal for engineering workshops that sprung up by the dozen in the nineteenth century. Here manufacturers could dream up and create world changing machines – like locomotive engines. Gorton's reputation attracted people from far and wide such as Charles Frederick Beyer, a talented mechanical draughtsman from Dresden. In 1853 he entered into partnership with local engineer, Richard Peacock, to create one of the most innovative locomotive workshops in the country – Beyer-Peacock.

One thing that was special about the Beyer-Peacock workshop was the way it was designed. The continuous production line meant that the raw materials were assembled at one end and by the time they reached the other end they had been transformed into locomotives of breath-taking proportions. This was amongst the first use of what would become the standard conveyor belt form of production that is used in factories across the world.

But Frederick Beyer did something else. The money he made from making locomotives he wanted to use for the benefit of the people which made the locomotives. He became heavily involved in the economic and educational development of the city, including the Mechanics' Institute which was the forerunner of UMIST (University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology). In the 1860's he became a governor of Owen's College which was the forerunner of Manchester University. Not only did he lead the public fundraising campaign to extend the college but gave significant funds of his own and when he died in 1876 he left the rest of his estate to the college which is the equivalent of almost £10 million in today's money.

What should not be forgotten in all of this is that it was the ordinary working people of Gorton whose skills built the locomotives (nearly 8,000 in total) that made the profits that made the wealth of Frederick Beyer.

My family has reason to be grateful to both Beyer and the people of Gorton because my maternal great-grandfather was attracted to Manchester's new college and became one of its first students of chemistry. This enabled him to pursue a successful career as a chemist, providing medicines for local people. He also supplied medicines to the army for troops in the Boer War.

By coincidence a contemporary student of my great-grandfather was Thomas Beecham who also went on to set up a business in St.Helens producing similar medicines, but on a much larger scale. Beecham's pills, which cured all ills, became famous across the country and also across the world. For, after a number of amalgamations, it paved the way for Galxo, Smith-Klein, Beecham, one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world. But it can all be traced back to the people of Gorton whose hard work created the wealth that enabled the new college and science facilities to happen.

And it doesn't stop there. For it was at Owen's College, which Beyer's funds had enabled to be reconstituted and expanded into the Victoria University of Manchester, that in 1917 Ernest Rutherford split the atom, heralding the atomic age.

Scientists now tell us that we are living in a new era of history, which they call the Anthropocene Age, the age shaped by humans. For the first time in the geological history of the earth one species, we humans, have acquired the ability to actually change the earth by nuclear power. And it was Gorton people who also, indirectly, played a role in making this happen.

But Gorton also helped my family in another way. My paternal grandfather was born and grew up in Gorton where he became an engineer. He did not work at Beyer-Peacock's but at the factory just on the other side of Bessemer Street which was Armstrong-Whitworth's engineering works. This famous company made guns for the Royal Navy and my grandfather became a master metal turner supervising the production of gun barrels, particularly a new kind of breach loading gun.

These guns were like the one on the front page which was used in the relief of Ladysmith. They were used in the Boer War by naval gun crews who could dismantle, move and reassemble these formidable guns with relative ease – a practice which gave rise to the famous 'gun run' which is still a highlight of military tattoos. So, by coincidence, my great-grandfather's pills and my grandfather's guns ended up in the same place! And all from Gorton.