

Flatters & Garnett

Flatters & Garnett was a nationally important firm that supplied microscopical equipment and preparations for educational use. The Museum's collections include a selection of microscopical apparatus made by the company.

Abraham Flatters, one of the joint founders of the company, was born in 1848 near Gainsborough in Lincolnshire. He came to Manchester and found employment at a dye works and, later, as a railway lamplighter for many years. Charles Garnett was born in 1843, near Warrington. He became apprenticed to a grocer there but, at the age of 21, emigrated to New Zealand. There, he became interested in natural history and made a collection of the ferns found on South Island. In 1873, he returned to Manchester and opened a restaurant in Cateaton Street.



Flatters developed an interest in natural history and, in 1886, attended a course of lectures on zoology given by Professor Milnes Marshall of Owens College. He also joined the Manchester Microscopical Society. Flatters set up a small business making lantern and

microscope slides and microscopic preparations at his home at 16, Church Road, Longsight in 1895. Soon after, he became a lecturer in microscopy at the Municipal School of Technology, a post he held for 32 years. In 1897, Charles Garnett joined the Manchester Microscopical Society and met Flatters. By 1901, Flatters was having financial problems in his business and Garnett went into partnership with him. Garnett's son, John B. Garnett, a pharmaceutical chemist, also joined the firm. Flatters & Garnett Ltd opened a chemists shop at 46, Deansgate, displaying the microscope and lantern slides made by Flatters at Church Road.

Flatters was elected a Fellow of the Royal Microscopical Society and wrote several books for students, including *Methods In Microscopical Research And Vegetable Histology*. This was the first work of its kind to include coloured photomicrographs to illustrate research methods. By 1906, Flatters and Garnett Ltd employed a staff of 12. The company sold the chemists on Deansgate and moved to 32 Dover Street, near the University and opposite the Manchester High School for Girls. The firm hired and sold large numbers of lantern slides on all aspects of natural history. Teachers in many parts of the world increasingly used Flatters & Garnett for supplies of microscope slides and accessories for collecting and preparing specimens.

In 1909, however, a serious rift developed between Flatters and the other directors. The Garnetts agreed to buy out his share and Flatters set up a business with some other premises on Church Road. Flatters continued to specialise in the microscopical and

members of the staff under the name of Flatters, Milbourne and McKechnie at the lantern slide making in which he was so skilled. He also began to publish *The Micrologist*, a quarterly journal which continued until 1916.

Flatters and Garnett Ltd moved in 1913 to larger premises at 309 Oxford Road, opposite the University. About a year later, the company developed Mersol, an immersion oil for use with high power microscope objectives which became very popular and sold well for many years. In around 1919, the company began to manufacture and sell the mounting medium Euparal under license from the inventor, Professor Wilson, of Louvain University in Belgium. It sold very well and was still popular in the 1950s despite competition from synthetic mountants. The company also developed Murrayite, a sealing compound invented by Dr Hay Murray of the Liverpool Museum. This became very popular for sealing museum jars and as a ringing cement for slides.

The firm also began work on instruments, although by default rather than by design. Their contract instrument maker asked for help in starting a workshop in Basil Street, Rusholme. Flatters & Garnett bought some machines and paid the rent for the small room. However, the instrument maker disappeared and the company later learnt that he had been convicted and sent to prison. The Garnetts then hired two instrument makers of their own to produce specimen collecting apparatus and repair microscopes.

Flatters, Milbourne and McKechnie continued at the Church Road premises, although records do not show how successful the firm was. Flatters was elected vice-president of the Manchester Microscopical Society in 1923. He died in 1929, aged 81. The company continued as scientific photographers until the late 1930s, although records do not show who was involved after Flatters' death.

Flatters & Garnett Ltd expanded its business steadily during the 1920s. The company increased the range of instruments it produced, including dissecting microscopes and the Precision microprojector. The company won a reputation for producing well-designed, reliable instruments and sold its products all over the world. In 1932, the firm acquired a large Victorian house on Wynnstay Grove in Fallowfield where it moved the microslide, specimen, photographic and chemical departments. Here the staff could have more space and less disturbance from noise and dirt than on Oxford Road. In 1950, the company introduced the Mikrops industrial projector. This replaced the microscope for routine examination in many laboratories.

By the firm's fiftieth anniversary in 1951, it employed 66 people. A boom in education spending in the 1950s resulted in increased orders. A quarter of the specimens were being exported, particularly to emergent countries where museums and schools were building collections. The large increase in business put a lot of strain on the company as it could not expand Wynnstay House, so it moved to new, purpose-built premises at Mikrops House, Wythenshawe, in December 1965. However, the firm had serious financial problems in the next few years and Wilfred Garnett, then managing director, was seriously ill. The company went into liquidation in 1967. Wilfred Garnett died in 1988.

For more information:

Read Wetton, J. 'Scientific Instrument Making in Manchester, 1870-1940'. *Scientific Instrument Society Bulletin*, 53, June 1997.

Visit Manchester Microscopical & Natural History Society web site:

www.biomed2.man.ac.uk/ns/mm/mms/