

Jewish Impact on the Development of the Team Valley Industrial Estate

Author: Ethan Shanks* Student Number: 220670919 Programme of Study: History BA Email: E.shanks2@ncl.ac.uk
Connect with me: [Ethan Shanks](#) | [LinkedIn](#) Supervisor: Julie Ballands

Introduction/Aims:

The North East relied on traditional heavy industries, which had been in decline since before World War One. By the interwar years, this decline caused mass unemployment. This dependence on a few industries to uphold employment meant the efforts the North would need to undertake to reverse the most depressed areas, required central government help.

The Team Valley Trading Estate, Gateshead, built in 1936, was a product of the British governments' Special Areas Act (1934), which aimed to develop jobs and light industry in deprived regions. The estate was the first and largest government-financed industrial estate and many companies enticed to move and/or set up factories there.

Some Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution, who had their livelihoods and businesses disenfranchised came to the UK and set up new companies on these estates. These refugee industrialists form an important part of this project, many of whom found themselves setting up businesses focused on their expertise in light industry on the Team Valley.

This study aims to highlight the relatively unknown impact of these Jewish-owned businesses in contributing to the effort to bring the North East out of the deprivation of the interwar years and how these businesses' growth postwar continued to provide local employment.

This will be achieved by analysing a selection of Jewish-owned businesses that initially set up on the Team Valley Industrial Estate, with primary sources gathered at Tyne & Wear Archives at North East Museums, who have been key to aiding this project.

Tevaclo Ltd. (Team Valley Clothing Company Ltd.)

Founded by Albert Maier, who previously owned a clothing manufacturing company in Berlin, Germany, Tevaclo Ltd. was set up on the Team Valley in 1938 after he left Nazi Germany.

Tevaclo, like Albert's previous business, concentrated on clothing manufacturing and tailoring. The business initially suffered due to Albert and his brother and co-manager, Martin, being interned by the British government at the start of World War Two due to being German. Both were released in late 1940 and to keep the business and its 41 workers afloat, it changed its production to manufacturing military uniforms to aid the war effort, but after the war it switched back to civilian clothing manufacturing, in particular, boys' wear.

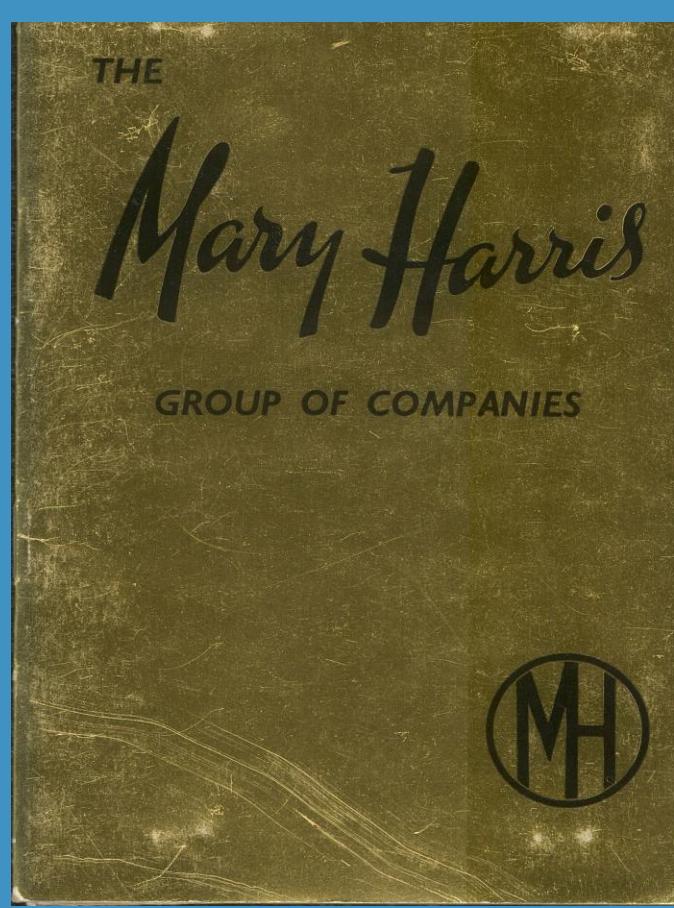
After the war, the company moved from the Team Valley to Tower House, Tower Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne (near todays Manors Station). There, the company continued to grow and by the 1960s it was employing 100 workers. Albert retired and sold the company in the early 1960s.

Distinctive Clothing Ltd.

Distinctive Clothing Ltd. was founded by Martin Maier in 1942. He previously worked alongside his brother, Albert, in Tevaclo Ltd., before splitting to form his own company on the Team Valley. Both brothers' companies did remain in close contact under their ownerships. The company started off with forty second-hand sewing machines and ninety employees, producing boys schoolwear, initially supplying thirty schools, including the Royal Grammar School. After the war, Distinctive Clothing moved from the Team Valley to Tower House, Tower Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Martin handed the company over to his son, Werner, in the late 1960s.

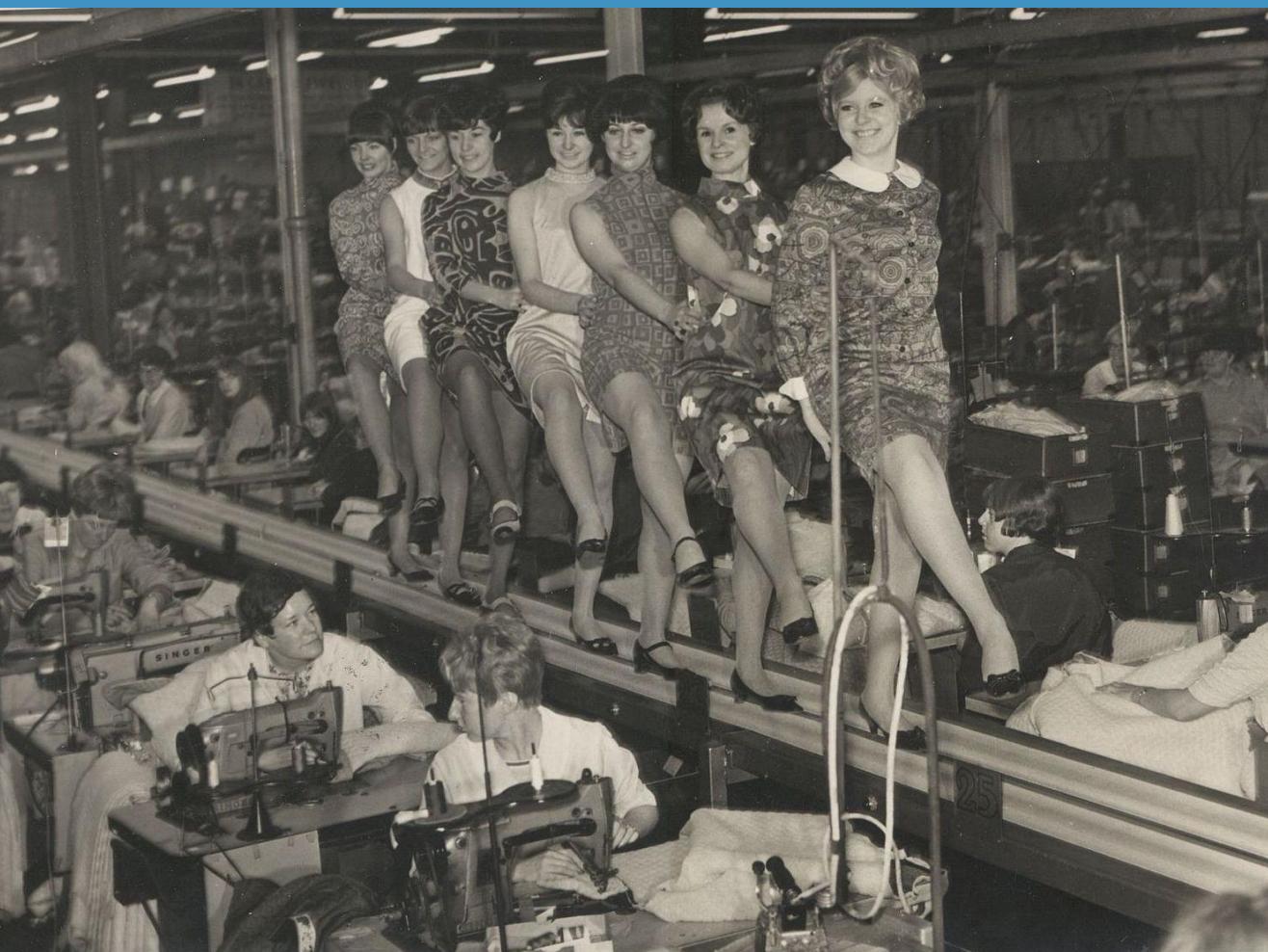
Under Werner, the company experienced more growth, regularly employing between 115 and 120 people and becoming well-known for its high-quality boys schoolwear and formalwear, especially under the Marmair brand. The factory moved to Industry Road, Newcastle in 1978 to have further space for expansion. This expansion came in 1985 in the form of diversification of its products, using its expertise in high-quality formalwear to producing casualwear at the same quality.

Its clothing was nationally and internationally recognised, supplying to major department stores such as John Lewis, House of Fraser and Selfridges. By 1993, the schoolwear it produced, included 100 different styles of blazers, overcoats and raincoats grew to supply over 600 schools, including private schools like Dulwich College, London. Internationally, Distinctive made appearances at exhibitions in Paris, America and Dubai selling 100,000 waistcoats a year across Europe and the Middle East. It was also well-known in the Republic of Ireland for its formalwear that was in demand for children's communions, which were supplied via their partnership with Roches department stores. By 1993, the company made an annual turnover of £3 million and employed 115 people. In 1992, Werner sold the company to his assisting managing director, who was also Jewish, to keep the company independent and preserve its family-run business model. He would remain in a consultation role after the sale for at least three years.



Photograph inside a Mary Harris Gowns Ltd. factory in the 1960s. Front and centre are models parading on a conveyor belt in the 60s fashion of the Mary Harris brand. A clear bit of fun and revelry in performing an impromptu fashion show for the employees. DT.MHG/2

A handbook made for employees of Mary Harris Gowns Ltd. From the 1960s. DT.MHG/2



Mary Harris Gowns Ltd.

Founded by Mary Harris in 1939, born Mirium Levine, she and her family left their home in Eastern Europe in 1905 and came to Newcastle, where they lived in poverty. She was skilled in sewing and dressmaking since starting at the age of ten, which she used to help support the family. In 1939, with her husband, Lionel, they acquired a 10,000 square foot factory on the Team Valley around the start of World War Two, starting with a capital of £75.

However, because of the war, the factory was quickly put under pressure by the British government to transfer into wartime production, and with Lionel away fighting in the RAF, this left Mary to resist the pressure by herself. In this, she succeeded in keeping 20% of the factory to civilian dressmaking production, with the other 80% producing serviceman's kit, webbing equipment, parachute harnesses and flags for D-day. The factory was flourishing at this time, employing 100 workers.

In 1946, she started to align herself as a manufacturer for Marks & Spencer's. The company's growth went alongside Marks and Spencer's rise, becoming one of their major suppliers and expanding to three factories on Tyneside employing 1,600 people, producing 12,000 to 15,000 garments a week. The Team Valley factory and the company's headquarters based there also expanded, which would improve the services departments that would help both production and customer requirements. By the 1960s, alongside its domestic success, it had gained traction abroad being a major exporter to Europe and Scandinavia. Its popularity in Scandinavia was so high that the company held two fashion shows there a year. The company, by 1969 was making an annual turnover of £1.5 million. Mary Harris was taken over by Vanonta Vivella in 1970 as Mary became increasingly ill.

Mary herself, was exceptionally skilled in understanding and predicting fashion trends and consumer demand, allowing the company to stay a head of the competition. Since her early days, she was an innovator adapting new technologies in presses and electric cutters to women's dressmaking and introducing health facilities for her workers, which was forward thinking for the time. Despite being a female business owner in a male dominated field, she was as successful and ruthless as her peers.



Image of inside the Distinctive Clothing Ltd. factory on the Team Valley, either taken during the war or late 40s/early 50s. DF.MAI/4/14

Conclusion

The government-funded special areas, such as Team Valley, were key to the revival of North East industry and employment and the importance of Jewish businesses and refugee industrialists to this revival cannot be ignored. This research demonstrates the often-overlooked diversity of North East business stories.

For these people, these government-financed industrial estates were opportunities to restart their lives and businesses, while also uplifting locals out of deprivation, being a mutually beneficial system for the government, locals and refugee industrialists.

The Team Valley was for some a more permanent residence for their businesses like Mary Harris Gowns Ltd., for others like Distinctive and Tevaclo it was a stepping stone to restarting their lives before expanding their businesses offsite in other areas of the region. Ultimately, these refugee industrialists found themselves connected to the North East. Thereby, their businesses became a recognised part of the region, providing jobs to the region on the Team Valley and wider North East area, while becoming known internationally.

The impact of Jewish refugee industries on the North East demonstrates the mutual benefits a region and community can gain from inward migration that provides vital skills.