

## PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES

### Mr Kirtley, Woodturner.

Among the local photographic collection at the Bowes Museum is a particularly fine working portrait of one of the last turners working in the town. The portrait, shown below, was taken in the Kirtley workshop in June 1907 and its quality was such that it won photographic prizes five years later in Glasgow and Stirling.



**Fig. 1 J. Kirtley, woodturner, of Barnard Castle by Fred Nevison, 1907**  
Photograph courtesy of The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle (Nevison Collection)

The sitter is identified as Mr. J. Kirtley (figure 1). The Kirtleys had been turners in Barnard Castle since the 1820s when the first Stephen Kirtley (a native of Scotland, born in 1813) came south. This southerly migration was common in the weaving

trade. In 1824, Stephen Kirtley was engaged for 7 years as a turner in a local sawmill business (see *Regional Furniture Vol. V, P.31*), turning out furniture parts, and bobbins and other equipment for the weaving trades. The sawmill went into liquidation but Stephen Kirtley flourished. By 1841 he was established on the Bank at Barnard Castle. His son Thomas (b. 1845) followed him into the trade according to the census of 1861 and the J. Kirtley of the photograph was presumably another

son, as was the Stephen Kirtley who, in 1918, gave a "bench candlestick" to The Bowes Museum.

The 1861 census also tells us that Stephen Kirtley had moved to Thorngate. His stock was going up in the world. In 1864 he was seeking nomination to the Local Board of Health and by 1871 the census is recording him as master of a workshop employing 4 men, and the local newspaper "The Teesdale Mercury" is recording him as "the master responsible for new woodwork and fittings in one of the carpet mills". By 1879 he was buying more land in Thorngate and advertising in the same paper for a "steady joiner and cabinet maker" ("constant work and liberal wages"), indicating that his business was expanding. An advertisement of 1880 list his wares: cornice poles, rings, bedroom and kitchen chairs, and the semi industrial production of hay rakes for his rural neighbours, but also manufactured goods such as iron bedsteads, mattresses, and easy or

invalid chairs. The seeds of decline are evident here and the man of the portrait is presiding over a dying trade, despite the bobbins in the foreground which still tell of industrial products for local trades.

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