A History of the Dye House at 22 Stour Street (5 Stour Street prior to 1874)

According to Cathedral records 22 Stour Street was in 1610 the house of John Estye a clothworker. He had been Mayor of Canterbury in 1585.

Estye took an apprentice Thomas Scrimshaw who became a Freeman in 1593, and the property seems to have passed to him as there are Freemen records of Thomas Scrimshaw Freeman dyer 1619 son of Thomas Scrimshaw dyer, and Thomas Scrimshaw Freeman clothworker 1646 son of Thomas Scrimshaw clothworker.

The Gray Family – Dyers from c1657 to c1710

Matthias Gray became a Freeman dyer by Paternity 1657, and there is a 17thC document where Mathias Gray dyer seeks lease of a tenement near 'Water Lock' in St Margarets CCA-CC-A/P/B/nd/88 (22 Stour Street was in St Margarets not St Mildreds).
Thomas Gray (eldest son) Freeman dyer by Paternity 1681 and Stephen Gray (4th son) Freeman dyer by Paternity 1692.
Cathedral records have a document concerning lease of house in St Margarets to Thomas Gray 1703.
Stephen Gray, dyer, astronomer, scientist and pioneer of electrical communication, who will soon be commemorated by a blue plaque on the building, leaves Canterbury permanently about 1710.

The Duree Family – Dyers from c1720 to c1743

Mark Duree purchased his Freedom in 1720.
16 Feb 1726 Kentish Post (KP) Last Night about Eight a Clock a Fire broke out in the back part of the House of Mr. Duree a Silk Dyer in Stour-street in this City, which burnt with great Fury for about half an Hour; when the Fire was brought under control. We do not hear how it began, nor what Damage Mr. Duree may have received.
KP 5 Mar 1737 ESTHER DUREE, Silk-Dyer, at the Dye-House in Stour-Street, near the Workhouse, Canterbury Dyes and Scours all sorts of Silks, half Silks, Sarcenet Stockings and Norwich Crapes. She cleans Tapestry Hangings, Mohair or wrought Beds, preserves the Colours...
KP 16 Apr 1737 MARK DUREE, Silk-Dyer, at the Dye-Housthe in Stour-Street, near the Workhouse, Canterbury Dyes and Scours all sorts of Silks, half Silks, Sarcenet Hoods, black Lustering Hoods and Scarves Stockings and Norwich Crapes. He cleans Tapestry Hangings, Mohair or wrought Beds, preserves the Colours tho' never so Difficult; likewise Paragan and China Hangings, and Waters and Prints the same. Also scours and dyes Velvets and raises the Pyle; cleans mens cloths wet or dry, and Camblet Hoods; takes Stains from Scarlet Cloth without dying or damaging the Colour; and Dyes Scarlet and Cherry Colour, Silk, Cloth, Camblet, Worsted, or Hose; and scours and glazes all sorts of Chints, Carpets, and Callicoes; And Dyes all sorts of Grain Colours in Silk or Worsted, after the new newest and best Manner, and at very reasonable Rates. N.B. He cleans all sorts of Womens Short Cloaks, Mens Scarlet Cloaks or Coats; and also scowers Blankets, Quilts, or Rugs, after the best Manner. Likewise Clergymens Gowns or Cassocks clean'd or dyed, whole or taken to Pieces ; and quilted Petticoats the same. All Customers may depend on having their Work done in due Time. There is a very good convenient brick dwelling house next Door to be Lett at Midsummer next. Enquire of Samuel Lepine near the Butter-Market.

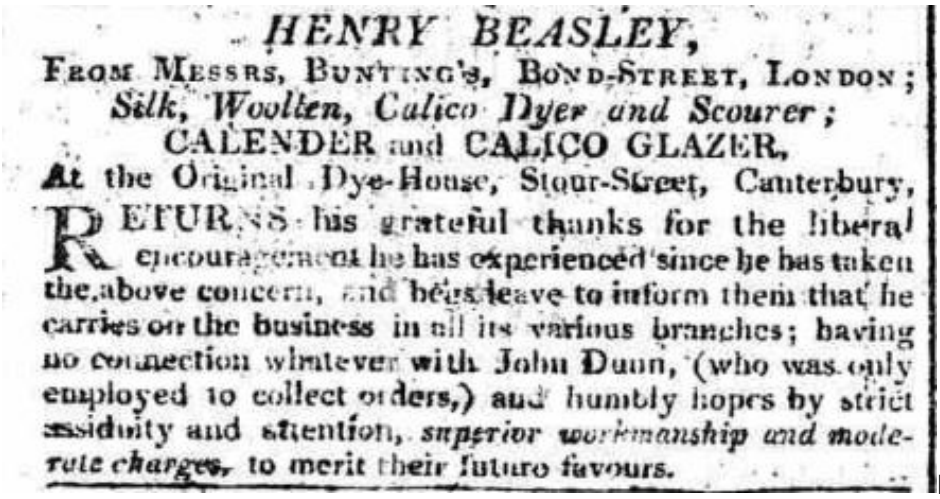
KP 20 May 1738 JAMES DUREE, Silk-Dyer, late from London, living in the Old Dye-House, near the Work-House, Canterbury, Dyes and Scours all sorts of Silks, ...
KP 20 Dec. 1740 JAMES DUREE, Silk-Dyer from London (contrary to what has been maliciously reported) at the Old Dye-House, near the Work-House, Canterbury, Dyes and Scours ...

The Cooper Family – Dyers from c1743 to c1796

Thomas Cooper of London Freeman silkdyer by Apprenticeship to Mark Duree of Canterbury 1741
THOMAS COOPER. Silk-Dyer, from London, living at the Sign of the Rainbow and Dove, in Best's Lane, Canterbury Dyes and scowers all sorts of Silks, Half Silks, Sarcenet Hoods, Black Lusterings, Hoods and Scarves, Silk Stockings, and Norwich Crapes; and cleans all sorts of Tapestry Hangings .....KP 25 June 1743
THOMAS COOPER, Silk-Dyer, from London, living at the Sign of the Rainbow and Dove, the Workhouse Canterbury, Dyes and Scowers all sorts ... KP 31 Oct 1753
Thomas Cooper the younger Freeman silkdyer by Paternity 1767
William Cooper Freeman saddler by Paternity 1771
CANTERBURY, Jan. 10. 1776: By the heavy rains which fell on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday last, the River Stour, which runs through this city, was swelled to such an amazing degree, that the oldest inhabitant does not remember such a sudden and surprising inundation, as happened on Monday morning, and continued rising till between five and six o'clock in the evening, which broke the banks in many places above the city, making free passage through houses and gardens, so that all the houses in the streets next the river were upwards of four feet deep in water. It came on so suddenly, that many of the cellars and low rooms were full before any of the moveables could be taken away. The inhabitants were obliged to betake themselves to their bedchambers for safety, and many families were under the necessity of leaving their habitations. Stour street, Lamb lane, Best lane, Beercart lane, Hawke's lane, St. Peter's street, St. Dunstan's and Cock lane, with part of the High street was one continued river of water; and the current rang so extremely strong through North lane, that it has done considerable damage to the pavement, as likewise to the foundations of several houses, particularly to that of Mr.Tilbe, grocer, at the corner, (whose goods are much damaged) and the two adjoining houses towards the gate. Mr. Slaughter, tanner, and Mr. Brown, currier, have likewise suffered much by the waters breaking in at their storehouses, and tearing down the buildings adjoining the river. Most of the outhouses in North lane were torn to pieces. Had this flood happened in the night, the consequences would have been of the most alarming nature. Happily, only one person's life is lost that has yet been heard of, who is one Henry Penn, a gardener; he insisted on going through the water from St. Dunstan's, notwithstanding the intreaties of many people to persuade him to the contrary: in the evening he stripped, and had got as far as Cock lane, when the strength of the current threw him down, and drove him through North lane into the river at Dean's Mill, and yesterday morning his body was taken up at Shoal Oak. Carts, waggons, and boats, were in the streets all the day, to convey the inhabitants to places of safety, as likewise to supply those with necessities that were confined to the upper parts of their houses. The arches of the bridge which leads from Prince of Orange Lane to St. Peter's Friars, have given way, and it is supposed it will fall in. **Mr. Cooper, dyer, in Stour street,** is a very great sufferer, by the waters breaking into his workshop, and damaging many articles. The publicans in general are much injured, their cellars being full of water. By yesterday noon the water had left the streets; but by the confusion which still prevails among the inhabitants is so great, that their losses cannot as yet be ascertained. Kentish Gazette (KG) 6 February, 1776

Thomas Cooper snr dies in 1781: All persons indebted to the estate of the late Thomas Cooper of the City of Canterbury Dyer are desired forthwith to pay their debts to Mr Peter Godier or Mr John Harrison of the City of Canterbury executors of the said Thomas Cooper KG 7/3/1781
Thomas Cooper Jnr successor to his father advertises business in Stour Street in KG 26/6/1784
Mrs (Frances) Cooper relict of Thomas Cooper many years silkdyer of this city dead KG8/9/1786
Mrs (Sophia) Cooper wife of Thomas Cooper silkdyer of this city dead KG 10/8/1787
Thomas Cooper silkdyer of Stour Street dead KG 12/9/1788.
1790 Universal Directory William Cooper Silk Dyer
1791 Council Land Charter has: A messuage, the corner of Stour-street, by the waterlock to the heirs of Thomas Cooper.
William Cooper died in Stour Street as per KG in October 1796.
Then James and Herbert Cooper. (Thomas Jnr, William, James and Herbert all brothers)
KG 4/9/1805 To be lett or sold the Original Dye-House with two properties adjoining situated in Stour Street, in the parish of St Margaret Canterbury with all the coppers and conveniences of leaden pipe for carrying water to the several coppers, a newly erected hot-press for pressing all kinds of broad-cloths, bed furniture etc, an exceedingly good frame, with copper pans for the finishing silks when dyed, with stoves for drying off in the Winter season. The premises, being very extensive, are well calculated for a wool manufactory or any other business requiring much room. NB The above premises are held on lease from the Corporation of Canterbury.

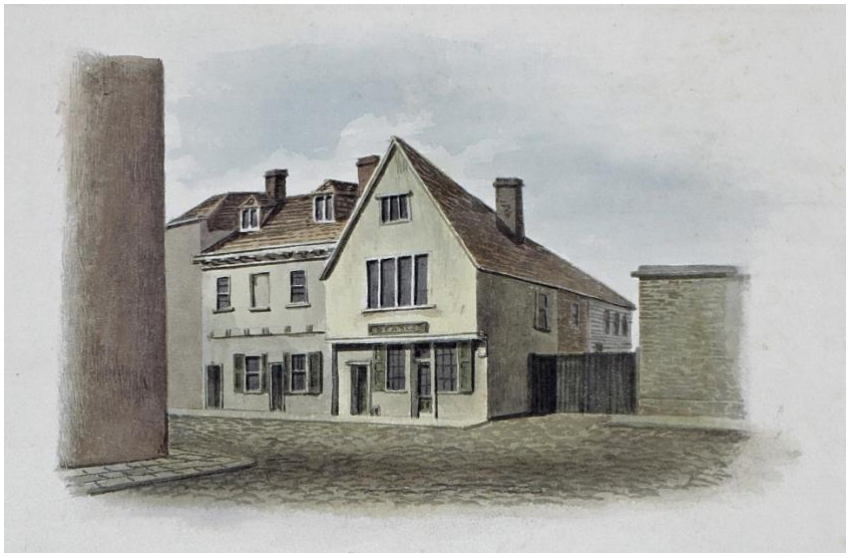
The Beasley Family – Dyers and Dry Cleaners from c1806 to c1974



HENRY BEASLEY,
FROM MESSRS, BUNTING'S, BOND-STREET, LONDON;
Silk, Woollen, Calico Dyer and Scourer;
CALENDER and CALICO GLAZER,
At the Original Dye-House, Stour-Street, Canterbury,
RETURNS his grateful thanks for the liberal encouragement he has experienced since he has taken the above concern, and begs leave to inform them that he carries on the business in all its various branches; having no connection whatever with John Dunn, (who was only employed to collect orders,) and humbly hopes by strict assiduity and attention, *superior workmanship and moderate charges*, to merit their future favours.

KG 23 Dec 1809

NB John Bunting, Silk Dyer of 41 New Bond Street (1808 Directory) advertised in The Morning Post and Fashionable World 21 Sept 1795 as *Silk dyer, Calenderer and Glazer to Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales*.


Beasley's shop c1828
Image courtesy of Canterbury Cathedral Archives ref CCA-CC/P/B/2/59.

The Beasleys renewed the lease for 30 years in 1827. Henry Beasley died about 1830 and the business was continued by his widow Jemima and their sons Henry and Edward (died aged 27 in 1837). Jemima in turn handed it on to their son Henry in 1837, who in 1828 had married Jane Linom daughter of Mead Linom, Cabinet-maker of Cock Lane Westgate. In 1838 Jemima bought the properties for £340. In 1845 Henry died aged only 38 and at 1851 census it was being managed by Jane Beasley with 4 men and 1 woman and her son Edward.

The Canterbury newspapers report alarming fires in 1814 and 1849 on Beasley's premises.

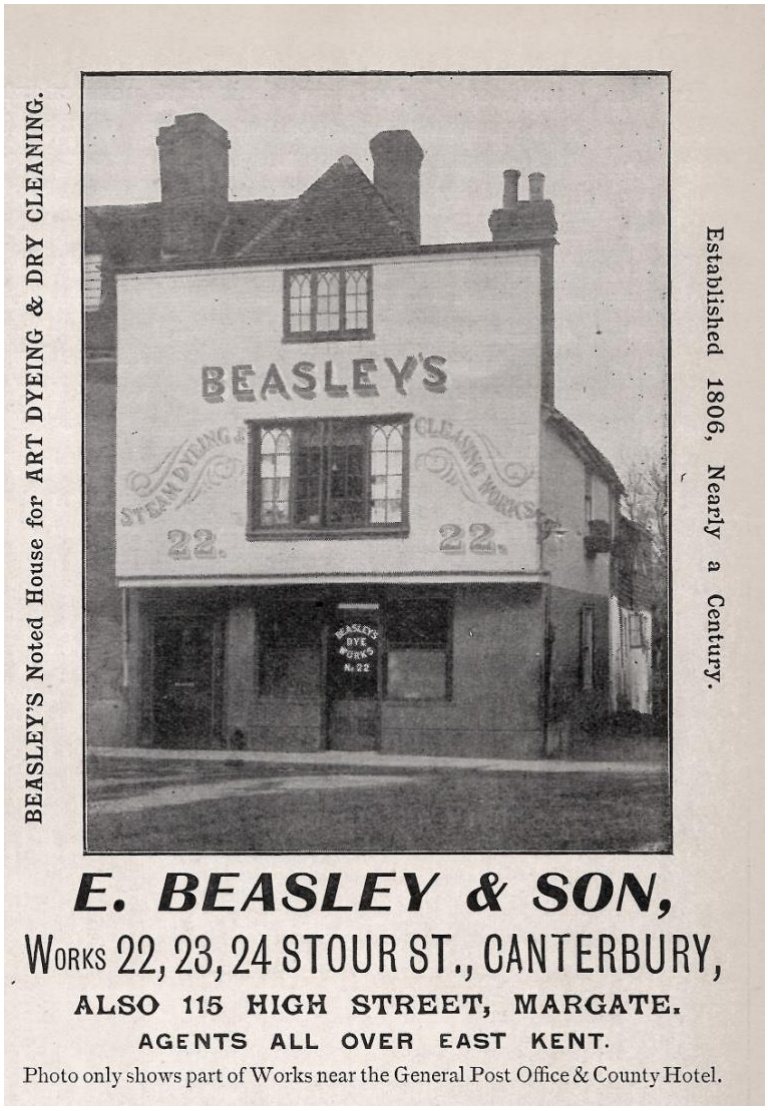
BEASLEY & SON'S DYEING WORKS.
Photo by H. B. Collis. *Canterbury.* c1900

Edward Beasley married Caroline Saunders in Ramsgate in 1851. Perhaps drawn by the Gold Rush they sailed from London on the Maitland 648 tons to Australia on 20th November 1851, arriving Sydney 20th February 1852. Their son Henry was born in Australia in 1853. They did not stay long. Henry's brother Hillson was born in 1855 in Canterbury. Hillson in turn emigrated and became a greatly respected Australian Architect see https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/beasley-hillson-12789 .
NB Edward's brother John emigrated to Lyttleton NZ in late 1850s, and his daughter Jemima married Alexander Kennedy who in 1865 founded the well-known shoe shop in Sun Street.
If you have more information about Beasley family please contact CHAS.

In 1856 Jane Beasley installed a steam engine to heat the water in the dye-house 'coppers'.

By 1864 Beasleys were using the slogan 'We dye to live while others live to die'.

Edward took over the business from his mother Jane about 1868. He died in 1901, and Henry, who had married Eliza Bingham in Canterbury in 1900, then took it over. Henry and Eliza do not appear to have had any children.



c1905

In 1921 Henry Beasley took into partnership Thomas McCallum, a dyer from Hove, who had been born in Scotland. Henry died in 1935 and Thomas in 1939, but the business was continued by Thomas's son Thomas McCallum jnr.

Beasleys first advertised the dye-works 750th anniversary in 1935 and then regularly from 1939. It certainly has had a long history but 750 years seems a stretch too far. Dr Urry's researches showed that Adam the Mercer lived on the site in those distant times, and that Arnold the Dyer lived at the Eastbridge. This article from the Whitstable Gazette 27th April 1940 provides some background to the longevity claim.

"An Englishman's Home"
Now that Beasleys, the well-known Canterbury Dyers and Cleaners, have established themselves at 54 High Street, Whitstable some notes of interest regarding the site of their headquarters may appeal to our readers. The oldest road in England is Watling Street and for many miles north and south of London the straightest, yet it bears a very modest name taken from the original Waeclinga or Waetlinga Street, it was first called. Many centuries have passed since the series of horse-drawn vehicles rumbled over Watling Street, and Roman soldiers, pilgrims - even Henry VII when he met Charles V used this highway. Modern days see sleek and shiny motor cars using it, as this is still the best route between London and Canterbury. Using this road from London, we find it swerves at Harbledown, the old track still keeping the line to the Stour. This river it crosses in two places the island of Binnewith, and the city where the Roman ford was; this precise spot has a tablet claiming it as Mother England – the name Canterbury proudly calls herself. Close by Beasley and Son, the dyers, who state quite boldly but not so poetically, that they and their predecessors have continuously been subdued to what they have worked in since the year 1189. After accepting Messrs Beasley and Son's invitation to wander over their premises we were amazed to see the king-pin or roof tree still standing, and in perfect condition. The proximity to the Stour was the determinant factor in the site of the original dye-house, and the little island of Binnewith was apparently a convenient "washing place". The founder of this dyeing industry could not have bettered the position, and foresight with business acumen is shown by his successors in remaining by the Stour, where the only local dye-works now stands, holding a fame which is unique and unparallelled in commercial history.

The buildings were badly damaged by the bombing in June 1942, and no architectural survey seems to have been done. However as can be seen in photo the blast opened up the roof exposing the Crown post within. This confirms that the main corner range extending back from Stour Street was ancient, at least 15th Century (info and pictures courtesy of C. Bowley). As is often the case, the building had been re-fronted in the 18th Century but in this case the refronting was fairly superficial, with the jetty retained and the ancient steeply pitched roof only superficially masked by the 2nd floor façade. As was the custom of the day, both buildings were entirely demolished and cleared away and redeveloped after the war with similar buildings but with the corner left as an open parking forecourt. A subsequent owner of the buildings, Colin Tomlin decided to re-establish some of the former appearance and rebuilt the missing corner part of the building as a pastiche version of what had stood there before, with a pitched roof and traditional fenestration, and he also re-windowed the adjacent property in a more traditional manner. So today the buildings don't look so bad and are a bit of a reminder of what was there before.

After the bombing the business was quickly re-established on the rebuilt premises. Thomas McCallum continued to manage it. From 1959-61 he was Mayor of Canterbury. He was joined for a time by his son John McCallum, a prominent member of the Canterbury Film Club, who went on to become a leading cinematographist. His credits include Tarka the Otter! Whilst a pupil at St Edmunds, John made a short film of shop which can be found here https://blogs.canterbury.ac.uk/cafa/beasleys/ .

Beasleys continued trading at 22/24 Stour St until at least 1974.

Subsequently the buildings have been used by various retail outlets including a cycle shop. Currently (2026) 22 is divided into two units with Rock Paper Scissors occupying the side facing the street and The Moorings Café and Bar behind it backing onto the Stour.