

The Developing business

Every year an exhibition of students' work was held at the workshops and items were sold to friends, family and neighbours.

Then in 1908 a number of embroidery items were entered into the Franco-British exhibition and 5 bronze medals were won (*The Bedford Guardian, 1909*).

The Gobelins Tapestry Workshop, (a world famous tapestry company) also exhibited at the Franco-British exhibition in 1908 and sometime between 1911 and the outbreak of World War 1 the Witter's were visited by Monsieur Gonnet, head of the Gobelins tapestry workshop in France. He came with his wife and two daughters and, as a result, two of Gobelins' most experienced weavers were sent over from France for six months to teach the Ickleford girls the art of hand-loom weaving and restoration. This provided another avenue for the weavers in Ickleford. The earliest tapestries coming for repair were first washed in the nearby river Hiz. The repairs became the most skilled of all the work done by the girls at Ickleford and these were carried out to a very high standard. Local gentry frequently came to visit The Industries, which soon became widely known.



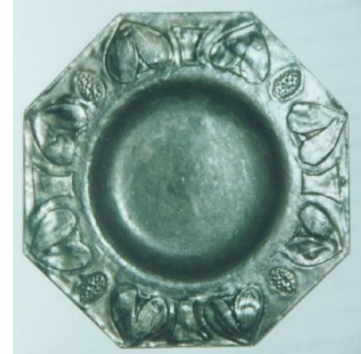
Walter Witter left his teaching post in Hitchin sometime between 1904 and 1908 to concentrate on the business full time. Some of his first students included Francis Olney and Tom Newbury, aged 13. They were employed in 1906, to learn forging skills and the business known as "The Ickleford Industries of Applied Art" was inaugurated.

In 1911 Arthur Witter went to live in Hitchin and joined his brother in the growing business making Art & Crafts copperware, pewter ware and wrought iron work. With the outbreak of the First World War,

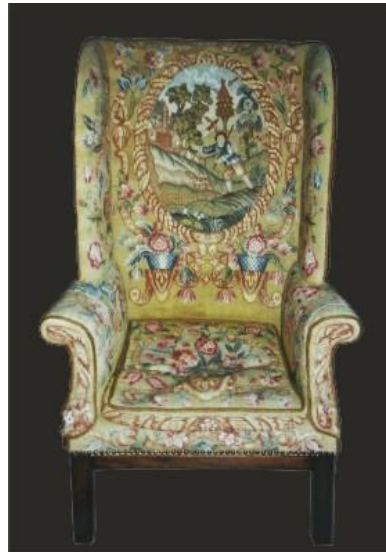
however, the company dwindled as the young men went away to fight in the war. During this time, Walter Witter made aeroplane propellers in Ipswich alongside Frederick Tibbenham (manufacturer of reproduction furniture).

Alongside the development of the Arts & Crafts metal work, demand also increased for the embroidery and needlework undertaken by Marie Witter and the girls of Ickleford. By 1915 there had been a significant increase in demand in Ickleford, but female labour was in short supply and so was large loom space so in 1916 Frederick Tibbenham helped the Witters to launch The Cambridge Tapestry Company Ltd. The company was founded, with four directors, and they bought the big house in Thompson's Lane, Cambridge, (No.30) which had very adequate outbuildings at the back for tapestry workrooms. As there was little work for girls in Cambridge at that time this was a great boon for the economy. Supervisors were brought from Ickleford to ensure their high standards were maintained. The company ceased trading in the early 1940s.

Items of Arts and Crafts metalware



The Cambridge Tapestry Company premises



Examples of tapestry